



2026-2029 VISIT GOLDEN DESTINATION STRATEGIC PLAN

Authorized by the Golden Community Marketing Board





Purpose of this plan

Golden is both a community and a destination, and this plan is built to keep those two roles in balance. Millions of people visit each year, visitors rate their experience 4.7 out of 5, and locals are deeply proud of their town. That pride and appeal come from the same place: people want to visit Golden for the reasons residents choose to live here, and many residents were visitors first before the town won them over. The work ahead is designed to strengthen both roles at once, so that neither comes at the cost of the other. Managed well, tourism can make Golden better for the people who live here.

Tourism can make Golden better for the people who live here.

Visit Golden and the Community Marketing Board engaged Mission2Market, a Colorado-based destination consulting firm, to build a three-year strategic plan grounded in this idea. A survey conducted for this plan measured resident sentiment toward tourism at 2.6 out of 5, below the neutral midpoint. The community was clear about what it takes to move that number: visitation spread more evenly throughout the year; visitors who treat Clear Creek, the trails, and the town with more care and respect; and a clearer view of what tourism contributes to the City. This plan is built to deliver exactly that.

ABOUT VISIT GOLDEN

Visit Golden, Golden's destination marketing organization, is governed by the Community Marketing Board and funded by vendor fee: 2.5% of the 3% collected by the City of Golden goes to the Community Marketing Fund. That structure ties Visit Golden to the success of every Golden business.

Visit Golden Leadership:

- Derek Schimmel**
Community Marketing
Field Manager

Meredith Ritchie
Community Engagement &
Communications Director

Camille Edgar
Tourism & Communications
Coordinator

Carly Lorentz
Deputy City Manager

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COMMUNITY MARKETING BOARD

- Jen Thoemke - Board Chair**
Connects Workspace; Café 13; Gold Mine Cupcakes

Nola Krajewski - Vice Board Chair
Greater Golden Chamber of Commerce

Sarah Adler
Resident

Erin Heinrich
Resident

Melissa Lutz
Humble House Cafe

John Payne
Table Mountain Inn

Mara Prendergast
Unite Fitness; Pivotal Marketing Partners

Lisa Vitry
Mayor Pro Tem · City Council Representative

Nadine Wilson
Moxie Consulting

01 — HOW THE PLAN WAS BUILT

The Golden Community Set the Direction

This plan started with listening, not writing. Over a six-month period, we surveyed residents, visitors and businesses, interviewed Golden's major employers and organizations, and evaluated what we heard with City staff and the Community Marketing Board.

2026 TIMELINE

● Getting up to speed

Our first step was to better understand Golden's current position as a destination. We looked at what Visit Golden was already doing, from its marketing and campaigns to its brand. We read the plans and projects already in motion, including the Heart of Golden, the 2021 Visit Golden Tourism Strategic Plan, Clear Creek Management Plan, and the 2022 Economic Impact of Tourism report, and we analyzed visitation, spending and lodging data to anchor the plan in verifiable economic impact. Read our discovery summary in the [Strategic Baseline Summary & Marketing Framework](#), also in the appendix.

● Asking Golden what it thinks

The next step was to hear directly from the community. The data described what was happening in Golden. It could not describe how residents and visitors experienced it. We conducted an online survey for residents, visitors and tourism stakeholders from April 9 to April 30, 2026. It was distributed through the Visit Golden website and email lists, City resident email, Chamber of Commerce and partner channels, local Facebook groups, the Golden Transcript and Golden Today, QR codes at lodging front desks, retail counters and the Welcome Center, and a paid social campaign. The full questionnaire and results are in the appendix ([read survey results here](#)). We also sat down with Golden's hotels, and with Visit Golden and City of Golden staff. We held conversations with Coors, the Mayor, the Golden Welcome Center, School of Mines, Clayworks, the Chamber of Commerce, and Fossil Trace, and conducted interviews in Spanish along the Clear Creek Corridor. [Read interview summaries here](#) and in the appendix.

● Setting the direction

We reviewed and analyzed the surveys and interviews, documenting where stakeholders aligned and differed. The Community Marketing Board and Visit Golden reviewed those findings together at a board retreat and agreed on three things: that Visit Golden would start managing tourism, not only marketing it; how to describe what makes Golden golden; and what matters most over the next three years. The [board retreat summary is available here](#) and in the appendix.

● Turning it into a plan

With the priorities set, the work turned to specific actions and timelines. We built four strategies with a multi-year portfolio of activations. We identified who handles what and how success is measured, so the plan can be held to account. A [Year One Business Plan](#) accompanies this plan and details the first year of that work.

“Golden is the only place in Colorado with a real small-town feel and real mountain access without the cost, the drive, or the polish of a resort.”

“WHAT MAKES GOLDEN GOLDEN” STATEMENT FROM COMMUNITY MARKETING BOARD



WHAT THE SURVEYS TOLD US

900+

Residents, visitors & stakeholders responded to the survey.

4.7/5

Golden ranked extremely high by visitors as a destination for the overall experience*.

4.1/5

Residents' love of Golden is strong. This plan works to continue and improve this through tourism management.

2.6/5

Resident sentiment toward tourism scored below the neutral midpoint of 3. This plan works to improve that sentiment through enhanced tourism management.

68%

Golden tourism stakeholders say off-season visitation, outside the peak summer months, is the top priority for Visit Golden to pursue.

#1

Residents ranked educating visitors on responsible recreation, starting with the Clear Creek Corridor, as their #1 ask of Visit Golden.

46%

Residents say overuse of natural resources is a top concern.

**Includes experience of lodging and dining options, outdoor activities, accessibility, safety and traffic.*

The Shift: Tourism Marketing & Management

Community input established a clear direction. Asked to rank four approaches to tourism, respondents placed two above the others: educating visitors on responsible recreation, and prioritizing visitor impact over visitor volume. Additional year-round marketing ranked last. The board is shifting tactics accordingly.

For most of its history, Visit Golden has had one primary marketing job: tell people Golden is a great place to spend their time and money. This plan does something different, based on the analysis and stakeholder engagement behind it. Over the next three years, the work of Visit Golden shifts from almost entirely marketing to a more equal balance of marketing and management. Marketing remains central to this work. It is Visit Golden's greatest strength, and the plan directs it toward the priorities residents identified. The same tools that invite visitors here can shape when they come, where they go, and how they behave once they arrive. The work ahead is not about bringing more people to Golden during busy times; it's about distributing visitation across different times and places, and teaching visitors to care for those places, starting with the Clear Creek Corridor.

MARKETING ALONE	MARKETING PLUS MANAGEMENT
More visitors	More visitors in times and places that need them
Success is busy peaks and slow periods	Success is steady revenue for local businesses across all twelve months
We count how many people saw our ads	We count off-season spending, how long visitors stay, and how residents feel about tourism
We tell visitors what's here	We look for visitors that are willing and able to come during slower months
Everyone downtown on a Saturday afternoon	Visitors spread across the week and across town

Welcome to all, guided to their best experience

Understanding who visits Golden helps us determine who we need to make aware of the City, and who we can guide to their best experience. Most of Golden's visitors come from within 60 miles. [Visitation data](#) shows nearby visitors tend to decide that morning to drive over for the day, and usually come on our busiest days. Broad awareness campaigns aimed at nearby visitors add cars and crowds to an already full town rather than new spending. For nearby visitors, marketing is a management tool. The message to nearby visitors is timing and behavior, not persuasion: come Tuesday, come in February, park here, take the shuttle, stay for dinner after tubing, explore beyond downtown, care for the creek.

Farther out, we still want to invite people who may not be aware of Golden. In addition to the visitors who already come, return, and love it here, our goal is to reach potential visitors who will book a room, visit during a quieter season, and spend more while they're here, so Golden earns more without hosting more. See the appendix for detailed 2025 visitation data.



A Community-First Foundation

This framework turns what we heard from the community into action. It rests on a foundation that puts residents first: track how residents feel about tourism and act on those results, make the benefits of tourism visible to them, and shape visitors who care for Golden the way residents do. Every strategy in this plan is built on that foundation and measured by tracking resident sentiment toward tourism.

● Measure resident sentiment

Tourism scores 2.6/5 with residents. Meaningful action on what residents said to raise that score is the goal of the plan.

● Demonstrate the benefits

Show residents what visitors help fund: local businesses, amenities, and the city revenue that supports them.

● Steward respectful visitation

Teach visitors to care for the creek, trails, and town character. This is residents' #1 ask of Visit Golden.



THE FOUR STRATEGIES

Every activation serves one of four strategies, and every strategy stands on the foundation above: each page lists initiatives, activations, timing (2026–2029), Visit Golden's role, and the desired outcome.

1

Drive Off-Peak Demand to Better Support Local Businesses

p. 6-7

The goal is a steadier year, with more visitors in spring, fall, and winter, including groups and meetings, who stay longer and spend more in Golden's businesses year-round.

2

Make Tourism's Benefit to Golden Visible

p. 8

Help residents see and feel how the visitor economy makes their town better.

3

Build the Golden Brand Story

p. 9

Give people a clear reason to choose Golden, told in a voice residents recognize as their own, through the channels travelers use.

4

Enhance the Visitor Experience

p. 10

Give visitors what they need to have a positive experience and be respectful guests: a visitor-facing workforce that knows and understands Golden, from its history to its newest restaurant, better digital information, a robust events calendar, and Spanish-language wayfinding.

1 Drive Off-Peak Demand to Better Support Local Businesses

VISIT GOLDEN'S ROLE

LEAD - Visit Golden leads this initiative

PARTNER - Visit Golden Partners on this initiative

LEAD / PARTNER - Visit Golden will lead in partnership on this initiative

PRIORITY INITIATIVE

Grow overnight & out-of-region visitation

Activations

- 2026 · LEAD** Using visitation data, identify the largest and fastest growing markets 60+ miles from Golden. Direct agency to target these markets.
DESIRED OUTCOME *More overnight stays; more off-season visitor spend*
- 2027 · LEAD / PARTNER** Convert visitors to Greater Golden attractions such as Red Rocks, Coors Brewery, Fossil Trace, Colorado School of Mines, the Colorado Railroad Museum, and Golden Gate Canyon State Park and Denver-based attractions such as Coors Field, Empower Field, and McGregor Square into visitors who spend time and money in Golden. Reach these travelers throughout the entire visitor journey: before, during, and after their trip.
DESIRED OUTCOME *Growth in cross-visitation from area attractions to Golden, measured by Datafy before and after campaigns*
- 2028 · LEAD** Increase overnight visitation by creating multi-day itineraries, recommended accommodations coupled with activities, new blog content about accommodations near Denver and including later-night activities such as events, music, and dinner to encourage overnight stays.
DESIRED OUTCOME *Itinerary views and AI visibility*
- 2029 · LEAD / PARTNER** Building on learnings from past marketing programs, research incentive programs from comparable destinations anchored by major attractions that convert attraction visitors into local business customers (examples: passport programs, show-your-ticket offers, attraction-to-downtown partnerships).
DESIRED OUTCOME *Program launch and participation*
- 2029 · LEAD** Explore Spanish-language marketing and messaging to overnight drive-market audiences.
DESIRED OUTCOME *Marketing engagement and utilization of Spanish language content*

PRIORITY INITIATIVE

Build winter shoulder-season demand

Activations

- 2028 · LEAD** Package existing winter draws into marketable shoulder-season campaign(s) with new photo/video shoot and dedicated winter campaign budget.
DESIRED OUTCOME *More overnight visitation, lodging and sales tax collections Jan–Mar vs. prior year*

GOLDEN'S SEASONS

Off-season: January–March
 Shoulder season: spring/fall
 Peak season: June–September

PRIORITY INITIATIVE

Develop co-operative marketing programs

Activations

- 2027 · LEAD / PARTNER** Pursue co-op marketing opportunities with regional partners such as the Colorado Tourism Office and Visit Denver, including their email and social media programs, to extend Golden's reach through established DMO channels.
DESIRED OUTCOME *Number of active co-op partnerships and shared-budget dollars*
- 2029 · LEAD / PARTNER** Launch a co-op marketing program: local partners invest alongside Visit Golden in campaigns that stretch the budget and align messaging.
DESIRED OUTCOME *Expanded marketing reach*

PRIORITY INITIATIVE

Build a longer-term international strategy

Activations

- **2028 · LEAD / PARTNER** Explore Colorado Tourism Office (CTO) familiarization (fam) trips; pursue the CTO Tourism Marketing Matching Grant and international co-ops with Visit Denver and other partners.
DESIRED OUTCOME *International visitation share; co-ops joined and grant dollars secured (directional)*
- **2028 · LEAD** Target longer-staying, midweek and winter international travelers, including ski visitors stopping in Golden on their way to or from the mountains.
DESIRED OUTCOME *Length of stay grows according to Datafy*
- **2028 · LEAD / PARTNER** Plan ahead for IPW, the U.S. travel industry's largest international marketplace, coming to Denver in 2029: earmark budget and combine forces with Visit Denver and partners for a shared booth presence.
DESIRED OUTCOME *Participation and engagements at IPW*

PRIORITY INITIATIVE

Lay the group sales foundation

Activations

- **2027 · LEAD / PARTNER** Create a quarterly lodging-partners meeting to align hotels on group opportunities and group-booking language.
DESIRED OUTCOME *A real, tracked list of group sales leads and bookings*
- **2027 · LEAD** Build upon information already live at visitgolden.com/meetings: update the group sales page and venue list and align the content with group sales goals.
DESIRED OUTCOME *Views of /meetings pages and group sales leads*
- **2027 · LEAD / PARTNER** Establish and maintain relationships with Golden's largest employers to help capture their larger meetings to be hosted in Golden.
DESIRED OUTCOME *Group sales leads from local business partners*
- **2027 · LEAD** Evaluate hiring a part-time group sales contractor to build out the marketing for the group side of the visitor economy in Golden, maintain relationships with partners and meeting planners, and actively recruit city-wide group events to Golden.
DESIRED OUTCOME *Onboarding of group sales contractor; group sales leads; partner satisfaction*
- **2027 · LEAD** Pull lodging / occupancy data (lodging partners, CoStar, Datafy) to pinpoint the weakest weeks and weekdays to drive visitation. Recommend local event organizers move or add events to slower weekends in exchange for marketing support.
DESIRED OUTCOME *Events more evenly distributed throughout the year*
- **2028 · LEAD** Develop group-focused itineraries and content as dedicated sales tools, including pre- and during-visit content for groups already coming that encourages attendees to add a day, bring family, and spend time downtown.
DESIRED OUTCOME *Views of /meetings pages and group sales leads*
- **2028 · LEAD** Develop a local hero campaign that highlights locals and businesses that bring group meetings to Golden, inspiring others to bring their meetings to Golden.
DESIRED OUTCOME *Group sales leads and community feedback*

PRIORITY INITIATIVE

Develop Golden's industry-focused sports niche

Activations

- **2028 · LEAD / PARTNER** Evaluate partnerships with local sports teams and organizations to promote and package sporting events hosted in Golden that build resident turnout. Drive visitation on game-day weekends, expanding into more evening activity and overnight stays.
DESIRED OUTCOME *Sports-driven event attendance and visitation; industry partnerships established (directional)*
- **2028 · LEAD / PARTNER** Tell the entrepreneurial outdoor-sports story: Golden's mountain bikes (e.g., Revel Bikes, featured in 5280) and Icelantic Skis, positioning Golden as a center for the outdoor-sports industry.
DESIRED OUTCOME *Increased industry events hosted in Golden*

2 Make Tourism's Benefit to Golden Visible

PRIORITY INITIATIVE

Help residents feel like VIPs in their own town

Activations

- **2026 • PARTNER** Support after-hours events (Golden Hour MashUp First-Friday-style events): business "mashups" that pair businesses for an open-house evening targeted toward residents (Community Marketing Board-led; Visit Golden supports).
DESIRED OUTCOME *Resident participation; positive movement in resident sentiment*
- **2027 • PARTNER** Partner with local businesses to build locals-only perks and off-peak invitations so residents feel like insiders across town.
DESIRED OUTCOME *Local business participation and resident utilization*
- **2027, then every other year • LEAD** Use the biennial resident survey to check whether sentiment toward tourism is moving in the right direction. Adjust plan based on resident feedback.
DESIRED OUTCOME *Resident sentiment improves toward tourism*

PRIORITY INITIATIVE

Tell residents how tourism supports Golden

Activations

- **2026 • LEAD** Lead the charge to champion tourism with town pride, not just a tourism economy. Tell the stories of the business owners, front-line workers and interest groups visiting Golden. Tell these stories consistently through owned and earned channels that reach locals multiple times per year.
DESIRED OUTCOME *Resident sentiment toward tourism trending up*
- **2027 • PARTNER** Highlight the river-safety and responsible-recreation campaigns around Clear Creek so residents see Visit Golden protecting the places they love, which answers the responsible recreation concern directly (include outreach in Spanish).
DESIRED OUTCOME *Resident sentiment toward tourism improves with regard to visitor stewardship*
- **2028 • PARTNER** Run resident-facing stories about the town's community, history, and the creek, featuring real residents rather than visitor-economy statistics.
DESIRED OUTCOME *Resident sentiment toward tourism improves in regards to visitor stewardship*

PRIORITY INITIATIVE

Launch a stewardship program

Activations

- **2027 • LEAD** Launch a named, budgeted program (in English and Spanish) with a friendly "leave it better than you found it" message, not just a list of rules.
DESIRED OUTCOME *Resident familiarity with the program; cleaner creek and trails; volunteer hours*

WHY THIS MATTERS

In the 2026 survey, respondents named two top priorities: educating visitors on responsible recreation (38% ranked it first) and focusing on visitor impact over volume (36%). Only 8% ranked more year-round visitor marketing first. This strategy responds directly to both priorities.

3 Build the Golden Brand Story

PRIORITY INITIATIVE

Define the brand story

Activations

- **2027 • LEAD** Refresh the Visit Golden brand with inspiration from recurring themes across discovery findings, laying the foundation for full brand guidelines, then bring tagline options to the board for review and selection.
DESIRED OUTCOME *A Board-approved brand platform; a validated hook the board and hotel GMs agree on; message-level engagement data*
- **2027 • PARTNER** Commission a brand video and a year-long photo/video shoot to build an on-brand asset library capturing each season and local events. Collaborate with partners on the video, and bring the story to life across the website and social.
DESIRED OUTCOME *Hero video and refreshed asset library live*

PRIORITY INITIATIVE

Modernize owned channels and collateral

Activations

- **2026-2027 • LEAD** Complete the move from the current vendor to an open-source WordPress site in 2026, then build an all-new website in 2027 designed for the AI-search era.
DESIRED OUTCOME *WordPress migration complete; new website live in 2027; refreshed guide and maps in market; tourism CRM segment active*
- **2027 • LEAD** Replace the ad-sales-driven visitor guide with a shorter, more inspirational publication (biannual), exploring smaller resident-specific editions or dovetailed resident/visitor content.
DESIRED OUTCOME *Publication of a new visitor guide*
- **2027 • LEAD** Finish the redesigned downtown map and continue the QR-code, digital-first approach for downtown and trail maps; consider a folded, brochure-style trail piece.
DESIRED OUTCOME *Publication of a new map*
- **2028 • LEAD** Develop authentic AI-curated itineraries, launch a text assist program powered by AI, and customize website content based on a visitor's proximity to Golden (day-tripper vs. overnight audiences).
DESIRED OUTCOME *Golden visibility in AI improves*

HEARD IN DISCOVERY

"I don't think anybody can clearly say why you'd come to Golden. There's no hook other than we're close to the mountains, close to Denver." — Hotel general manager, discovery interviews



4 Enhance the Visitor Experience

PRIORITY INITIATIVE

Expand visitor touchpoints

Activations

- **2027 · LEAD / PARTNER** Expand visitor touchpoints through front-line workforce destination training program and digital delivery methods (e.g., Visit Widget style location-based content, digital kiosks, rotating ads) that complement existing in-person services.

DESIRED OUTCOME *Digital touchpoint engagement (kiosk interactions, mobile guidance sessions, location-based content views); frontline workers trained; visitor satisfaction ratings across in-person and digital services*

PRIORITY INITIATIVE

Connect and market Golden's city-wide events

Activations

- **2026 · LEAD / PARTNER** Build on visitgolden.com/events calendar as the single go-to source for the community and visitors to know what's happening in Golden. Grow outreach to event hosts so they submit their own listings, expanding coverage to kids' day camps, adult classes, all live music, and more that serves residents and visitors.

DESIRED OUTCOME *New events launched; event-driven overnight stays*

- **2028 · PARTNER** Partner with the City's event strategy team and event organizers to market Golden's full events landscape, acting as the marketer rather than the planner. Support partners in landing new opportunities (e.g., Sundance-related events), focusing marketing on events that drive off-peak and need times.

DESIRED OUTCOME *Events more evenly distributed throughout the year*

PRIORITY INITIATIVE

Expand Spanish-language wayfinding and communication

Activations

- **2026 · PARTNER** Support bilingual visitor services by encouraging intentional recruitment of bilingual ambassadors and extending Spanish-language versions of core visitor content across Visit Golden's digital touchpoints.

DESIRED OUTCOME *Number and share of bilingual ambassadors; core visitor content pieces available in Spanish*

- **2027 · PARTNER** Partner with the City to translate key wayfinding and visitor signage into Spanish, starting with high-visibility, low-effort wins such as the digital scrolling signage on Washington and Highway 58, so Spanish-speaking visitors and their families can navigate Golden with confidence.

DESIRED OUTCOME *Spanish-language signs installed at priority locations; city partnership commitments secured; survey feedback from Spanish-speaking visitors on navigation and feeling welcome*

THE PRINCIPLE

Visit Golden acts as the destination's marketer, not its event planner: it expands the touchpoints it can own and amplifies the partners who create the events, so every visitor finds a warm welcome, in English and in Spanish.

From Foundation to Full Activation

Activations phase across the plan's July 2026 to July 2029 horizon in order for each year to build on the last: foundations and quick wins first, the heavy build in 2027, scale in 2028, and proven programs extended in 2029.

2026

LAY THE FOUNDATION

Datify market targeting · Golden Hour MashUp support · share how tourism supports Golden · events-calendar growth · bilingual ambassadors & Spanish content · WordPress migration

2027

BUILD & LAUNCH

Attraction-visitor journey marketing · CTO & Visit Denver co-ops · group sales build-out & contractor evaluation · gather occupancy data to guide event timing · brand refresh, brand video & asset library · new AI-era website, guide & maps · stewardship program · locals-only perks · Spanish signage partnership · visitor touchpoints (training + digital)

2028

SCALE THE STORY

Winter shoulder-season campaign · multi-day itineraries & AI visibility · international strategy & IPW prep · outdoor-sports niche · group itineraries · locals & business owners spotlights · city events partnership

2029

EXTEND WHAT WORKS

Research attraction visitor incentive programs · explore Spanish-language drive-market campaigns · local co-op investment program · IPW Denver shared presence

DESIRED OUTCOMES

Residents feeling better about tourism, measured by the survey we run every two years

More lodging and sales tax collected in January through March, the months that need it most

More partners sharing the cost, so Golden's dollars go further

Golden showing up accurately when people ask AI tools and search engines where to go

More visitors who stay the night, and more spending in slower months

More meetings, retreats and group trips booked on weekdays and in the off-season

More visitors reached with responsible visitation messaging, and more front-line staff trained to share it

Events spread more evenly through the year instead of stacked into summer



APPENDICES

[Survey Results](#)

[2025 Visitation Data \(visitors from 7-60 miles\)](#)

[2025 Visitation Data \(visitors from 60+ miles\)](#)

[Stakeholder Interviews Summary](#)

[Strategic Baseline & Marketing Framework](#)

[Board Retreat Summary](#)

[Year One Business Plan](#)

