

DISCOVER

# Lehigh Valley<sup>®</sup>

3-Year Strategic Plan

*July 2024 - June 2027*

# Dear Tourism Stakeholders,

Tourism stands as a cornerstone of Lehigh Valley's economic vitality, contributing significantly to job creation and generating essential tax revenue for our region and state. Annually, over 16 million individuals make the conscious choice to spend their time and resources in the region. Our attractions, events, and festivals have not only shaped our local identity but have also elevated Lehigh Valley's standing as a premier destination for leisure visitors, meetings, conferences, and sporting events. Discover Lehigh Valley proudly assumes the responsibility of promoting every facet of our diverse and vibrant tourism economy. The past three years were a momentous chapter in our tourism journey, and the path forward requires a strategic vision.

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This three-year strategic plan is a roadmap that articulates a purposeful course for the future. The plan has been developed to leverage our unique strengths, address challenges proactively, and enhance the overall visitor experience. Through targeted initiatives, innovative marketing strategies, and collaborative efforts, we aim to ensure that Lehigh Valley remains a sought-after destination for generations to come. Thank you for trusting Discover Lehigh Valley to strengthen Lehigh Valley's economy through visitation.



**Alex Michaels**  
President/CEO

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# Strategic Plan

*July 2024 – June 2027*

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# Vision: *Inspire Experiences*

## Our Mission

Strengthening Lehigh Valley's economy through tourism, while enhancing quality of life and regional pride.

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## Our Values

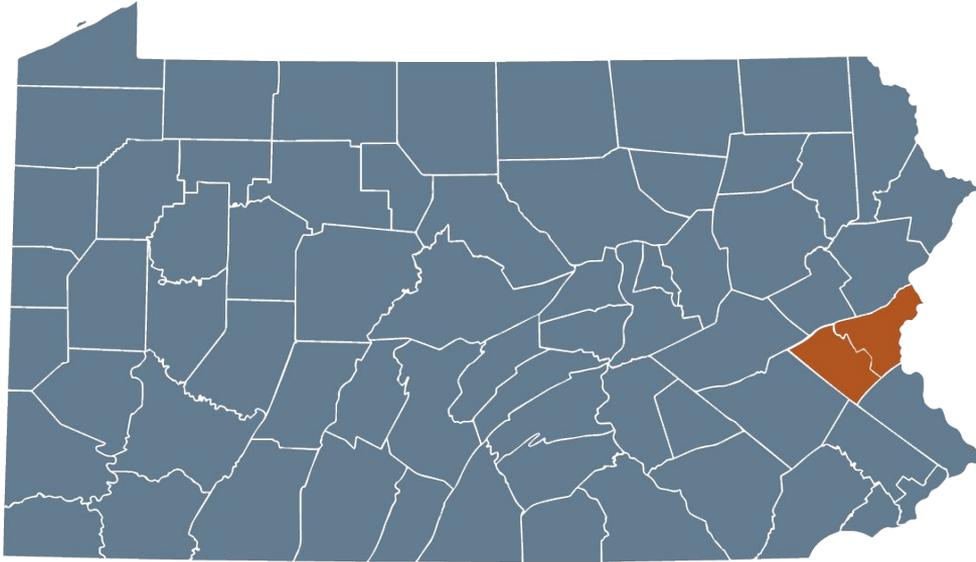
- **Authentic:** Being true to our roots
- **Collaborative:** Bringing the community together; encouraging partnership
- **Curious:** Open to new perspectives; exploring and discovering new experiences
- **Responsible:** Do everything with integrity and transparency



# Destination Overview



## Lehigh County and Northampton County



DLV builds the region's economy and image through destination marketing that increases the number of leisure and business visitors, the number of nights they stay, and the number of things they do in the **two-county area of Lehigh and Northampton Counties**. These marketing efforts also enhance the quality of life and sense of hometown pride for Lehigh Valley, PA residents.

The region has a population nearly 700,000 and Lehigh Valley is one of the fastest growing regions in Pennsylvania for the 18-34 age group. (LVEDC).



# Destination Research

## DOLLARS

**\$1.3 Billion**

Travelers to Lehigh Valley spent about \$1.3 Billion

**\$195 Million**

Day & Overnight Visitors spent about \$195 million on **recreation & entertainment** in Lehigh Valley

*2022 Longwoods International*

## BY THE NUMBERS

**16.6 Million**

16.6 Million **Total trips** to Lehigh Valley.  
11.6M day visitors and 5M overnight visitors  
*2022 Longwoods International*

**7,450**

Currently there are 7,450 total **hotel rooms nightly** in Lehigh Valley *STR January, 2024*

**15,725**

The 15,725 **jobs** supported by visitor spending in the Lehigh Valley region represented 1 out of every 12.6 jobs in the region  
*2022, PA Economic Impact Study*



## VISITOR INSIGHTS

**80%**

80% of overnight visitors are **repeat visitors**

**48%**

48% of visitors are **visiting friends and relatives**

*2022 Longwoods International*

## Destination Research

# 7,450

## total hotel rooms

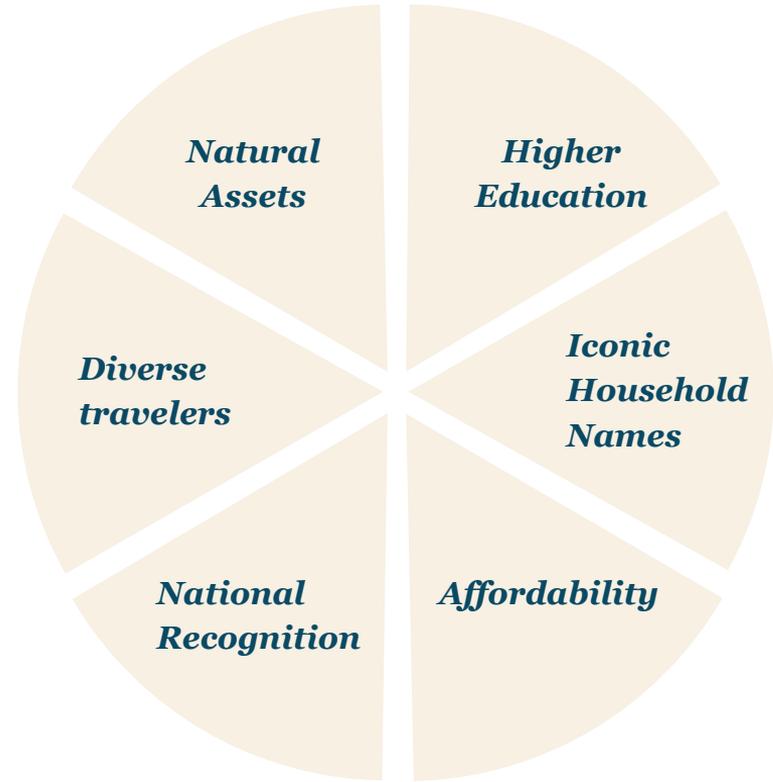
Currently there are 7,450 total hotel rooms nightly in Lehigh Valley with anticipated hotel inventory growth over the next three years.

*STR January, 2024*

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# Lehigh Valley's Strengths



## Strengths: Natural Assets

### Trails, Rivers/Blueways, Farmland/Agriculture

The Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Corridor provides a rich tapestry of historical and cultural experiences, offering visitors a glimpse into the region's industrial past and natural beauty. Rivers and blueways enhance the recreational appeal, allowing visitors to engage in activities such as kayaking, fishing, and scenic boat tours, creating a dynamic and immersive exploration of the landscape. Integration of farmland and agriculture contributes to visual charm and fosters a farm-to-table experience, offering visitors fresh, locally sourced produce and a deeper connection to the region's agrarian heritage.

Currently about **125 miles** of multi-use trail and about **100 miles** planned for connection trails.



## Strengths: Higher Education Institutions

Visitors come to Lehigh Valley in the form of new students, visiting families, commencement ceremonies and for competition through athletics. Lehigh Valley is home to **11 colleges and universities** that award more than 10,000 degrees annually from prestigious private colleges, state universities, and two community colleges.



## Strengths: Iconic household names



Having iconic brands like ***Crayola, Martin Guitar & Co., FreshPet, Stuffed Puffs, Rodale Institute, Just Born, Cedar Fair (Dorney Park and Wildwater Kingdom), and Valley Preferred Cycling Center (The Velodrome)*** headquartered in a tourism destination provides a unique draw for visitors. These brands often offer engaging factory tours, exhibitions, and experiences that attract tourists interested in the creative processes behind these household names.

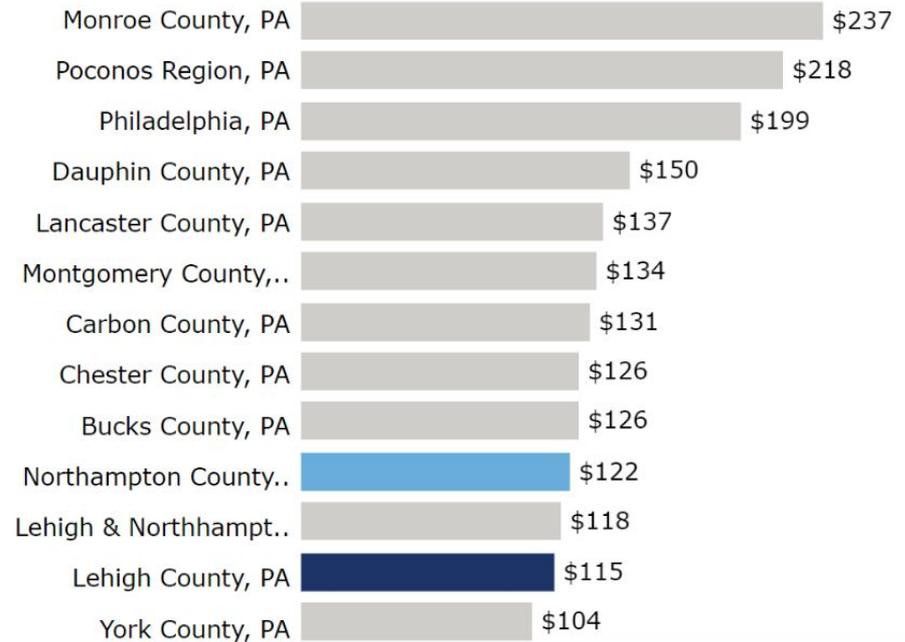
The presence of these well-known brands enhances the destination's reputation and visibility, drawing in a broader audience of tourists who want to experience the essence of these iconic companies firsthand.

# Strengths Affordability

Lehigh and Northampton County are historically in the lower tier among our competitive set in Average Daily Lodging Rate.

An affordable destination attracts a larger and more diverse tourist demographic, fostering economic sustainability and promoting a positive image of hospitality and accessibility.

## Average Daily Rate



\*STR Lodging Data, Comp Set, Rolling 12 months (February 2023-March 2024)

# Strengths: National Recognition



**EASTON PUBLIC MARKET**  
*USA Today 10Best Readers Choice  
Best Public Market 2023*



**HISTORIC HOTEL BETHLEHEM**  
*USA Today 10Best Readers Choice  
Best Historic Hotel 2021, 2022, & 2023*



**MUSIKFEST®**  
*USA Today 10Best Readers Choice  
Best Music Festival 2019 & 2020  
#10 Best Music Festival 2023*



**GARLIC FEST**  
*USA Today 10Best Readers Choice  
#8 Specialty Food Festival 2024*

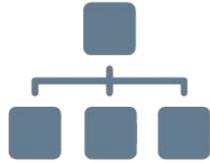
**PEEPS® CHICK DROP, PEEPSFEST®**  
*USA Today 10Best Readers Choice  
#5 Best New Years Eve Drop 2024*

# Strengths: Diversity of the traveler types



## ***Student***

Student travelers contribute to the destination's vibrancy by injecting youthful energy and fostering a dynamic cultural exchange.



## ***Business***

Business travelers travel to the destination for a short term stay.



## ***Leisure***

Leisure travelers enrich the local economy by patronizing attractions, restaurants, and accommodations, while also creating a positive impact on the overall tourism experience.



## ***Attendees***

Attendee travelers (conferences, sporting events, group tours) inject economic activity through spending on accommodations, dining, transportation, and other local services.



## ***Daytrippers***

Daytrippers infuse immediate revenue into the destination's economy through day-long visits, supporting local businesses and attractions.

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# New Considerations

- Generative AI
- Non templated website
- Emphasis on 2026
- Emphasis on Pass-Through Traveler
- Diversified Target Markets
- Opportunities in Product Development





## New Considerations: Generative AI

### ***Content Creation***

Generative AI can assist DMOs in generating high-quality and diverse content. From creating engaging promotional materials to crafting compelling narratives.

### ***Personalized Marketing***

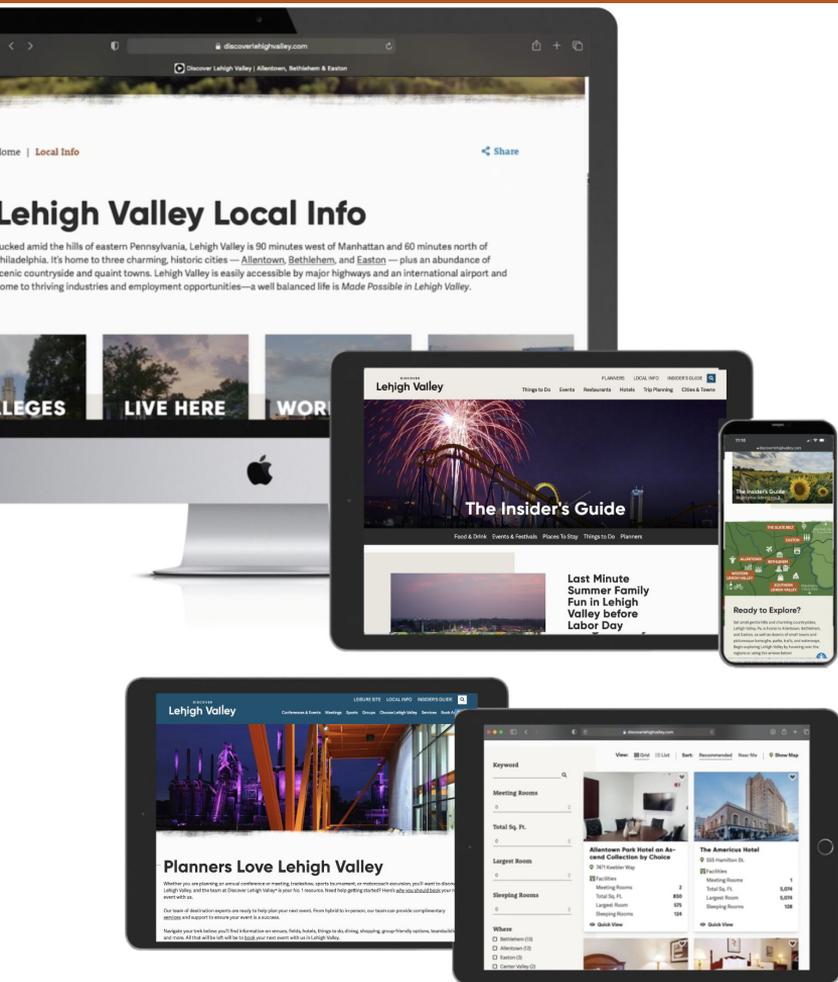
AI can analyze large datasets to understand traveler preferences and behaviors. This info can be utilized to personalize marketing campaigns, ensuring that promotional materials resonate with specific target audiences and cater to interests.

### ***Data Analysis and Insights***

Generative AI can process vast amounts of data to extract valuable insights. DMOs can leverage these insights to understand the impact of marketing strategies, identify emerging trends, and make data-driven decisions to optimize their promotional efforts.

### ***Language Translation and Localization***

Generative AI can aid in language translation and localization, allowing DMOs to create content that resonates with international audiences. This is crucial for attracting a diverse range of tourists from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.



## New Considerations: Non templated website

Shift DiscoverLehighValley.com to a website provider that allows for more design flexibility, and variation specific to our destination.

# New Considerations: Emphasis on 2026

## World Cup

**Increased Tourism:** The World Cup attracts millions of spectators from around the globe, creating a surge in tourism to the hosting cities and surrounding areas. Lehigh Valley would likely experience a significant increase in visitors seeking accommodation, dining, and entertainment options during the tournament. The influx of tourists for the World Cup can stimulate the local economy in Lehigh Valley.

**Leverage Excitement:** This milestone event presents an opportunity to engage communities across the valley to host watch parties, or themed activities related to the World Cup generating excitement and community pride.

**Collaboration Opportunities:** Hosting the World Cup fosters collaboration and partnerships between neighboring regions. Lehigh Valley could collaborate with Philadelphia and New Jersey on promotional campaigns, transportation solutions, and cultural events, leveraging the excitement of the tournament to strengthen regional ties and cooperation.

# New Considerations: Emphasis on 2026

## America 250 & PA 250

America 250 & PA 250 refer to the commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the United States of America and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, respectively, in 2026. These milestone anniversaries mark significant moments in American and Pennsylvania history and provide opportunities for reflection, celebration, and engagement in various activities and events. America 250 commemorates the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776, which declared the thirteen American colonies independent from British rule and laid the foundation for the United States.

**Tourism and Economic Impact** Attract visitors from across the country and abroad, contributing to tourism and economic development in Pennsylvania and beyond

**Celebration and Reflection** An occasion for Americans to celebrate the nation's history, values, and achievements

**Commemorative Events** Parades, festivals, reenactments, programs, art exhibitions, performances, and community projects highlighting aspects of American and Pennsylvania history, culture, and heritage.

**Legacy Projects** leaving a lasting impact on community, including restorations, public memorials, and initiatives to promote civic engagement.



## New Considerations: Inspire Pass-Thru Travelers to Stay

### *“Just driving through”*

Pass-through travelers contribute to the local economy by spending money on accommodations, meals, transportation, and activities during their brief stay, but might not know all that the destination has to offer. Even if their stay is short, and their collective spending can have a significant economic impact on businesses in the destination, we believe we can do more.

### *“Just going to school here”*

College graduates bring valuable skills and knowledge to the local workforce, which can benefit various sectors including tourism. Their expertise can enhance the quality of services offered in tourism-related businesses such as hotels, restaurants, tour operators, and cultural attractions.

Retaining these pass through travelers in the community fosters innovation and economic growth, which can lead to the development of new tourism offerings, experiences, and attractions, thereby attracting more visitors to the destination.

# New Considerations: Diversified Target Markets

## Current Target Audience

- Women 30-49, Adults 18-34, HHI \$75,000+, interests in travel, outdoors, arts & culture, history, food, libations, adventure

## Current Geography

- Lehigh Valley, New York/Northern New Jersey, DC/Baltimore, Philly
- HLLY (Harrisburg-Lncstr-Leb-York),
- Pittsburgh



## PLUS Personas/Traveler Types:

- Family-oriented
- Experience enthusiasts
- Cultural/heritage travelers
- Outdoor Adventurers
- Friends/family/alumni/students
- Pass-through traveler

## PLUS New Geographic Areas:

- Eastern Canada (Ontario)
- Central/Western Pennsylvania



## Opportunities in Product Development

*UNESCO World  
Heritage Site*

*New festivals/  
activations*

*Public transportation/  
mobility*

*Culinary experiences*

*Retail shops  
in downtowns*

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# Strategic Goals, Key Initiatives & Targets



# Strategic Goals, Key Initiatives & Targets

## *Strategic Sales & Marketing*

- Promote valley-wide brand to diversified targeted markets.
- Promote the connectivity of urban and outdoor landscapes.
- Increase meetings, events, and sports tourism.
- Enhance international visitors strategy.
- Emphasize family-friendly offerings and attractions.
- Develop destination video assets that can be adopted by DLV partners.
- Develop and execute a robust social media content strategy.

## *Targets*

- Increase group business by 10% by July 1, 2027.
- Conduct a strategic marketing plan with destination stakeholders for Moravian District, UNESCO World Heritage Site designation 2024-2027.
- Produce a commercial/campaign for Lehigh Valley that would be produced in 2024 and released 2024-2027.
- Social media content strategy shared with key marketing partners considered (ongoing).
- Develop and launch a new DLV Website beginning in Summer 2024 with launch in August, 2025.



# Strategic Goals, Key Initiatives & Targets



## *Proactive Destination Management*

- Develop and launch a new DLV Website and Customer Relations Manager.
- Leverage affordability while encouraging a lift in average daily rate based on STR data.
- Position the organization as a leader in destination research for Lehigh Valley partners and developers of tourism related products.
- Embrace and adopt new technologies.
- Enhance cybersecurity.

## *Targets*

- Continue utilization utilizes hospitality benchmarking marketing data (Smith Travel Research, STR) traveler sentiment (Longwoods International), insights from regional CRM & CMS (Simpleview) and migration data (Tourism Economics) to aggregate destination insights.
- Conduct new Visitor Sentiment Study in late-2025 with results in 2026.
- Implement technologies involving generative AI to internal processes and external marketing initiatives 2024-2027.
- Enhance and adopt best practices in protecting intellectual property and data (ongoing).

# Strategic Goals, Key Initiatives & Targets



## *Intentional Community Alignment*

- Enhance engagement with local city councils and civic organizations.
- Advance discussions on developing a Tourism Improvement District in Lehigh & Northampton Counties.
- Build a stronger coalition among the arts & cultural community.
- Be a more authentic ally for diverse communities.
- Improve & enhance Lehigh Valley Ambassador Program.
- Align with colleges and universities on destination promotion.

## *Targets*

- Present to county/city civic and governmental groups bi-annually.
- Present TID to Lehigh County in Fall 2024 and present to Lehigh County Hoteliers in Fall 2024 with plans to adopt TID in 2025.
- Increase the number of Lehigh Valley Ambassadors by 20% each year.
- Enhance incentive offerings to Lehigh Valley Ambassadors (ongoing).

# Strategic Goals, Key Initiatives & Targets



## *Strategic Partnerships*

- Strengthen statewide and national partnerships and affiliations.
- Become a re-accredited Destination Organization, Destinations International.
- Strengthen relationships and opportunity to partner with iconic household brands in Lehigh Valley.

## *Targets*

- Continue to support state-wide opportunities and affiliations: Visit PA Cooperative Campaign, and Pennsylvania Restaurant & Lodging Association, Pennsylvania Sports, PA 250/America 250, Destinations International (ongoing).
- Complete Destinations International DMAP Re-Accreditation Certification in 2024.

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