



VIEWS & VISIONS

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Explore Almost Heaven

Chelsea Ruby, Commissioner
West Virginia Tourism

Chelsea Ruby was appointed Tourism Commissioner by West Virginia Governor Jim Justice in January 2017. As commissioner, Ruby leads the effort to advance tourism development, expand West Virginia's travel and tourism industries and promote the Mountain State to a broader audience, featuring West Virginia as a year-round travel destination to both national and international travelers. Prior to her work as commissioner, Ruby served as Director of Marketing and Communications for the West Virginia Department of Commerce, where she earned numerous awards for the department's successful social media, print and comprehensive public relations and advertising campaigns.

As we kick off summer in West Virginia, the Tourism Office team is excited about our industry's prospects. Traveler spending and occupancy numbers are up. Our messaging is reaching millions of new potential visitors each week, and West Virginians have become some of our best marketers.

West Virginia is one of the only states to create a brand around a song. As we looked for new ways to tell our story, we found that the answer was right in front of us all along – in the profound and highly coveted lyrics of “Take Me Home, Country Roads.” The beloved song is an ode to West Virginia's scenic beauty and warm hospitality, and it has served as the official state anthem since John Denver first dubbed West Virginia “Almost Heaven” in 1971. It has served as the theme for West Virginia tourism campaign since last spring.

We know that visitors fall in love with the heaven-like feeling you get while traveling along our country roads and rolling hills. The goal of our campaign is to capture that feeling, the essence of “Almost

WEST VIRGINIA

Heaven,” and share it with new visitors through advertising that aims to connect on a deeper, more personal level.

Thanks to Governor Justice and the West Virginia Legislature, we are telling that Almost Heaven story louder than ever before. And West Virginians have become a major part of our strategy. Your heartfelt love for the state is the kind of advertising money can't buy.

Now more than ever, every paid advertising strategy has to be supported and complimented by extraordinary, innovative exposure on Facebook, Instagram and the like.

This isn't as easy as it might sound. On social media, you can't just buy your way to success. It's all about the user, and if you want to succeed, you need their help. Social media holds the single most important influence on Americans' choice of vacation destinations. Nothing





does more for our image than your sharing of unforgettable West Virginia memories and pictures. Data shows 86 percent of people have become interested in a specific location after seeing something posted by another user.

In celebration of West Virginia's 156th birthday, we asked you to do just that for the state you love. You came through for us with thousands of social posts and beautiful images. In just seven days, your posts had over 25 million impressions. You exceeded all our expectations and helped boost our paid advertising strategies throughout the region.

This summer, our challenge is easy. Keep exploring the state you love and keep posting your #AlmostHeaven photos. Every time you post, you boost a tourism industry that employs thousands and contributes billions to our economy. So, let's keep the momentum going! ♡

Whether you're planning your annual visit to your favorite place or looking to try something new, our team is happy to help you plan your vacation. Visit **WVtourism.com** or call us at **800-CALL-WVA** today.

