

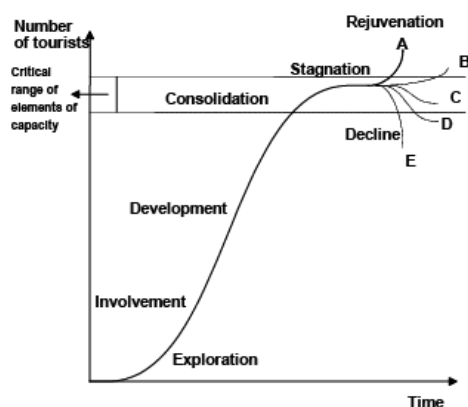
**Meet Cheatham County:**  
**Unifying Cheatham County's Tourism Marketing Efforts**

Brianna Vilayphanh, Gabe Soundara, Elizabeth Donaghey, & Tara Pickel

THM 3250: Tourism and Hospitality Management

November 26<sup>th</sup>, 2024

## Introduction & TALC Position



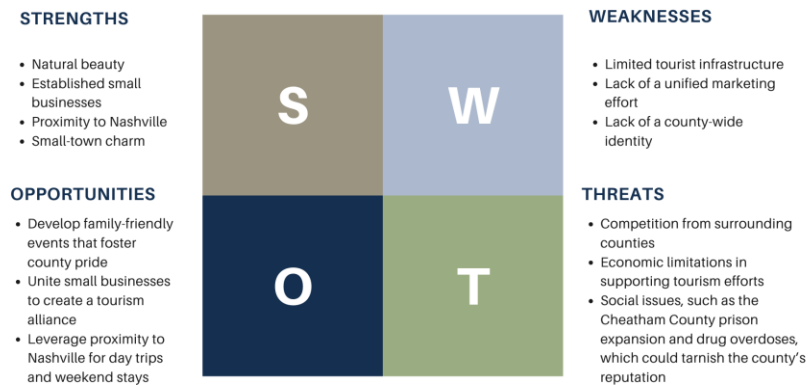
Cheatham County, Tennessee, located only 20 minutes outside of Nashville, integrates small-town charm with beautiful landscapes, positioning itself as a promising tourist destination. Despite these assets, the County's tourism development is still in its early stages, with limited infrastructure and incohesive marketing hindering

its growth. Based on the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC), Cheatham County is in its **involvement stage**, with tourism frameworks starting to be implemented and visitor numbers rising slightly every year.

The Tennessee Department of Tourism Development found that in Davidson Co. and the six counties surrounding it, including Cheatham County, visitor spending increased year-over-year by 19.5%. (TN Department of Tourist Development, 2023. Pg. 2). This rise in visitor spending is a positive sign towards tourism growth in Cheatham County. However, the lack of tourist infrastructure reflects its unpreparedness to capitalize on this influx of visitors. In a 2024 Community Data Profile, Middle Tennessee Industries Development Association, (MTIDA) reported Cheatham County only contains 7 Hotels & Motels, and 304 rooms in total. (Middle Tennessee Industries Development Association, 2023. Pg. 4). As Cheatham County continues to rise through the involvement stage and into its development stage, it must consider the longevity of its tourism climate and establish a cohesive marketing effort that reflects the destination, ensuring sustainability and a stronger tourism movement.

## SWOT Analysis

Conducting a SWOT analysis of Cheatham County's tourism highlights its untapped potential as a tourist destination and a community. It possesses many strengths that make it an ideal day trip location, but it is also limited by its weaknesses, some of which are uncontrollable at this stage in the destination.

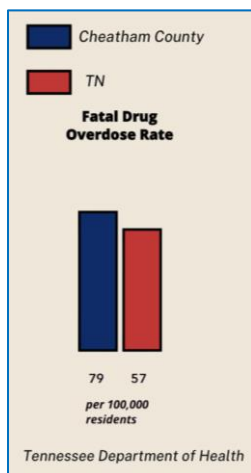


Cheatham County's strengths are inherently unique to the destination itself. Its scenic landscapes are an integral part of its marketability as a destination, and it boasts infrastructure such as campsites and trails for tourists to be fully immersed in it. Southern hospitality is also a deep-rooted feature within its community, resulting in an inviting environment for tourists. This authenticity builds a strong connection with visitors, and positive memories can be associated with the destination aside from its attractions. In a 2024 article titled, *How can tourism be made engaging and meaningful? As a measurement scale for ritual interaction*, the authors suggest, "Tourists no longer engage in travel in a cursory manner; they want interactive and meaningful experiences" (Lu, J, 2024. Pg. 5). With this in mind, Cheatham County already possesses strong characteristics that establish a foundation for meaningful tourist interaction.

In contrast, the County also has weaknesses that hinder its tourism growth and sustainability. As previously mentioned, the County only hosts a mere seven hotels and motels,

which creates a low tourist intake capacity. Another weakness of the County is its lack of a unified tourism message. Until recently, the Chamber of Commerce has been acting as a DMO for the County; however, new hirings have been made to restructure the system with the need for more tourism development. The County's social media presence is spread thin, with a single Facebook page hosting most of its followers. However, the social interactions between followers and the page are less than 0.1%. (Cheatham County Chamber of Commerce, 2024. P.g.1)

Although the County has weaknesses, its tourism industry has plenty of opportunities to succeed. One of these opportunities is the potential to unite Cheatham County small businesses and create a driven marketing effort. Because of its early stage in the TALC model, Cheatham is in a unique position to choose the perception of their County to new tourists who may have never even known the destination existed. The location of Cheatham County is also an opportunity concerning this because, naturally, tourists who visit Nashville may seek out experiences outside the city for lighter crowds and cheaper costs.



There are threats to Cheatham County's tourism industry, which has grown more significant over time. Some of these directly contrast its opportunities, such as the proximity to Nashville, which could pull tourists away from less developed destinations such as Cheatham County. Also, because Cheatham County's brand image has not been fully established, there are potential negative connotations that could be associated with it over time. Some of these include the expansion of the County jail or the drug issues that plague Cheatham County. According to the Tennessee Department of Health, there were an average of 79 fatal drug overdoses per 100,000 residents. This is in contrast to the state's average of 57 fatal drug overdoses per 100,000 residents. (Tennessee Department of

Health , O. of S. I. ,2023. P.g 2) Statistics like these threaten Cheatham County's tourism industry as they negatively reflect the safety and well-being of residents.

### **Identified Challenges**

Cheatham County's tourism development faces a fundamental problem: its need for cohesive products. Although the county has many strengths, these elements cannot be adequately highlighted without a consistent marketing message, which the county has yet to discover. With this centralized focus and feedback from locals, Cheatham County will be able to grow sustainably. According to a 2024 article titled *Rural Tourism Initiatives and Their Relationship to Collaborative Governance and Perceived Value*, the authors claim that "Sustainable tourism governance must include inclusive participation and mechanisms to ensure environmental and community well-being" (Reina-Usuga, L., 2024. pg. 3).

It is in the best interest of Cheatham County to develop a system to implement inclusive participation. The Cheatham County Chamber of Commerce has members from around the county. However, a \$180 fee is required yearly, which is not feasible for some. A restructuring of how feedback is collected from small businesses needs to occur so that community members can actively voice their concerns or ideas for tourism in the county. Furthermore, in *Rural Tourism Initiatives and Their Relationship to Collaborative Governance and Perceived Value*, the authors discuss the importance of ensuring that "multi-sectoral coordination takes place in rural tourism, which is essential for decision-making not only in initiatives but also at the territorial level". The county must embrace a governance model that actively involves community members in shaping its tourism strategy. Cheatham County can transition from a hierarchical governance process to horizontal governance by including more of its small businesses. This ensures more modern and sustainable tourism practices.

An example of a full tourism development reset was The Island of Timaru, located on the south island of New Zealand, with direct travel opportunities to the capital city, Wellington. Like Cheatham County, Timaru was marketed as a getaway from city life because of its proximity to a central urban area. However, during COVID-19, Timaru had to rethink its marketing efforts entirely and created an agency called Venture Timaru Tourism. The agency focused on local and regional visitors and had a central marketing message: "Time to unwind-Escape to Timaru." Timaru saw a "tourism surge" after this, and visitor spending increased by 16% in less than two years. (Perkins, H., 2022. Pg. 4). While Timaru demonstrates the power of a unified strategy and targeted marketing, Cheatham County needs a central message and the tools to communicate effectively with residents and visitors.

Cheatham County not only lacks a centralized message, but it also lacks a means to distribute the message effectively. As noted in the SWOT analysis, Cheatham County only possesses one Facebook page, which is not curated effectively to promote engagement. Not only does this create confusion for tourists looking to visit the county, but it also discourages community pride in Cheatham County. This is an important issue because it encourages locals to leave the county for entertainment and potentially creates a disconnect between teens and their hometowns. This lack of effective marketing and engagement also extends to social challenges in the county among youth, where limited experience opportunities contribute to disengagement with their hometown and illegal substance abuse.

In a 2011 study titled *Hitting the Wall: Youth Perspectives on Boredom, Trouble, and Drug Use Dynamics in Rural New Mexico*, the authors discuss how, in the city of New Mexico, "Many youths framed the relationship between boredom and trouble through a sense of disgust with the area." (Willging, C. E., 2014. Pg. 5). The SWOT analysis of Cheatham County shows that drug usage is a weakness for the destination. This suggests that teen drug use in Cheatham

County may be partly driven by boredom. Further on in the article, the authors discuss how the boredom experienced by teens isn't necessarily their fault, stating, "For these young people—the preponderance of whom perceive their life chances as constrained by economic circumstance—boredom and troublemaking are not simply age-appropriate forms of self-expression but manifestations of social position, political, economic realities, and assessments of possible futures."

### **Product Description**

Meet Cheatham County is a tourism alliance designed to address the challenges that the county faces. Its mission is to bridge the gap, celebrate small-town charm, expand the concept, solve key challenges, and ensure sustainability. This initiative aims to solve the critical challenges by creating a platform. This alliance will be a place for local businesses to collaborate and market themselves, free of charge, and drive economic development and tourism across Cheatham County.

Why meet Cheatham County? The name Meet Cheatham County can be interpreted in many ways. Initially, the locals need to meet Cheatham County and unite. As they experience all the cities through organized events, they will share a sense of unity and identity the county is craving. Then, the name can be branched to outside tourists as they come to experience/meet Cheatham County. They would then have that authentic feel of the small town that the locals experience every day.

The unification between the cities will be initiated through year-round, family-friendly events. Each city will have its own “big” event of the year, while there will be smaller events that rotate between the small cities and change locations so people are drawn to follow them. These events will showcase the county’s charm, involve local schools, and highlight the local businesses that become a part of the alliance.

Volunteer work plays a vital role in the success of this product. Cheatham County currently has a low budget for tourism, meaning that money can't be thrown around to make these events happen. These events will be held at county-owned locations around the cities to save money and make the events accessible to all. The local business that participates in the alliance also has the benefit of free advertisement at said events that will promote them individuals in and out of the county. The involvement of local schools is also vital for this product to succeed. They can assist in the set up of the events, gaining valuable first-hand experience and get recognition for their clubs and organizations.

This product is built to be a framework for Cheatham County to use and develop as a sustainable long-term strategy to unite the county, promote local businesses, and drive tourism.



The logo represents the vision of uniting all of Cheatham County under one alliance, the county in the center of the logo as the focal point. Stars from the Tennessee flag are incorporated to symbolize the state, while the blue from the flag and neutral tones inspired by the Chamber of Commerce logo represent Cheatham's natural landscape. The colors and font choices reflect a

unified marketing effort designed to evoke positive emotions and build a strong, trustworthy reputation. With a professional look, the logo adds credibility and impact, making a lasting impression whenever the community sees it on a flyer or promotional material

### **Initial Demand Estimation**

An initial assessment of demand was conducted to evaluate the need and potential for "Meet Cheatham County." A series of structured interviews were conducted with local residents



and business owners in Cheatham County. The interviews included questions targeted to discover the needs and interests of the locals. After completing all the issues, one key issue emerged.

There is a problem with unity between the cities. When asked the question, “Is there a sense of community for Cheatham County as a whole? Or do you really feel it's just city by city?”, most responded in the way that was expected, the owner of Stone Bridge Brooks said, “No, and it should be. You know, it really should be”. The Ashland City assistant librarian was also asked, “Do you associate more with Cheatham County or Ashland City?” she responded, “Ashland City for sure.” The big problem that everyone saw was the lack of unity, which would help the country strive. With a population of 42,000 and being confined to city-by-city living, this presents a significant problem that “Meet Cheatham County” aims to fix, while also driving tourism.

When asked if they wanted Cheatham County to keep the small-town feel or become like Nashville, everyone said they wanted Cheatham to get recognition like Nashville but keep what it already had. The utmost demand is for Cheatham to operate as a whole and not as individual cities. “Meet Cheatham County” will do just that. The product is built to be a process, and the first step is uniting the county with said events before outside tourists are even worried about it. They can’t market themselves as Cheatham County unless they can show unity and represent the county. In the article, *How Can Tourism Be Made Engaging and Meaningful?*, they said, “Shared positive emotions promote people engagement in rituals, and sharing emotions is necessary.” (Lu, J, 2024. P.g. 2), this emphasizes how communal events and activities will help bring the people together and collaborate, and they can express that to outside tourists when they start arriving sharing that small town feel that everyone loves.

### **Overall Analysis**

Building on this foundation, Cheatham County has the potential to grow its tourism industry and strengthen its community identity. The county faces a critical point in its involvement stage where a unified tourism strategy is essential for progress. The “Meet Cheatham County” tourism alliance addresses this need by creating a cohesive marketing effort that allows community input into tourism, ensuring sustainable growth. By leveraging its inherent strengths and addressing internal challenges, Cheatham County will be able to establish itself as an independent and appealing destination for all. Meet Cheatham County is the first step towards a brighter and better tourism future.

## References

- Lu, J., Ka, I., Zhang, H., Liu, G., & Li, J. (2024). How can tourism be made engaging and meaningful? A measurement scale for ritual interaction. *Tourism Management*, 103, 104900–104900. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2024.104900>
- Middle Tennessee Industries Development Association . (2023). *Cheatham County Community Data Sheet*. Mtida.org. [www.mtida.org/regions-listings/northern-middle-region/cheatham-county](http://www.mtida.org/regions-listings/northern-middle-region/cheatham-county)
- Perkins, H., & Mackay, M. (2022). *The Place of Tourism in Small-Town and Rural District Regeneration Before and During the Covid-19 Era*.
- Reina-Usuga, L., Camino, F., Gomez-Casero, G., & Angélica, C. (2024). Rural tourism initiatives and their relationship to collaborative governance and perceived value: A review of recent research and trends. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 34, 100926–100926. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2024.100926>
- Tennessee Department of Health , O. of S. I. (2023). 2023 County Data Package Cheatham County. In [www.tn.gov](http://www.tn.gov). [www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/health/documents/vitality-toolkit/data-packages/Data%20Package\\_Cheatham.pdf](http://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/health/documents/vitality-toolkit/data-packages/Data%20Package_Cheatham.pdf)
- TN Department of Tourist Development. (2023). *Tennessee Tourism Thrives: 141 Million Visitors Spent a Record \$29 Billion in 2022*. [Www.tn.gov](http://www.tn.gov). [www.tn.gov/tourism/news/2023/9/15/tennessee-tourism-thrives-141-million-visitors-spent-a-record--29-billion-in-2022.html](http://www.tn.gov/tourism/news/2023/9/15/tennessee-tourism-thrives-141-million-visitors-spent-a-record--29-billion-in-2022.html)
- Willging, C. E., Quintero, G. A., & Lilliott, E. A. (2014). Hitting the Wall: Youth Perspectives on Boredom, Trouble, and Drug Use Dynamics in Rural New Mexico. *Youth & Society*, 46(1), 3–29. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X11423231>