

NEWS RELEASE

Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau



Visitor Numbers Remain Strong in Rockford Region

7.6 million guests visited area sites, attractions and events in 2015

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 9, 2016

Rockford, IL – Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau announced strong attendance numbers for sites, attractions and events in Winnebago County in 2015. The region's tourism attractions and events welcomed **7,662,205 guests in 2015**, up from 7,604,578 guests in 2014, an increase of 57,627 people over the prior year.

Individual event attendance in the region grew by 21,216 to a total of 950,058 (event attendance was reported at 928,842 in 2014). That growth is thanks in part to Rockford AirFest, Winnebago County Fair, Stroll on State, Festival of Lights and Old Settlers Days all seeing an increase in numbers.

"Each year, we see that more and more people are experiencing the Rockford region," said Josh Albrecht, RACVB Director of Marketing & Public Affairs. "What is really amazing is that our overall attendance numbers are able to rise even as circumstances such as bad weather can affect attendance levels."

Rockford area sites and attractions saw strong numbers as well in 2015. Anderson Japanese Gardens set an attendance record with 49,272 guests. In addition, the Ski Broncs Waterski Show Team performances saw a substantial increase from 28,874 in 2014 to 56,275 in 2015.

"The quality of our sites and attractions is such an amazing calling card for our region," Albrecht said. "The fact that Anderson Japanese Gardens, Ski Broncs, Burpee Museum of Natural History and Midway Village Museum all improved on their attendance numbers shows that leisure travelers are looking to Rockford more and more."

The Top 10 events in the Rockford Region in 2015 were:

	2015	2014
AirFest	150,000	135,000
Fourth of July Celebration	125,000	125,000
Winnebago County Fair	95,000	93,000
Stroll on State	66,000	60,000
Festival of Lights	58,000	45,000
Young at Heart Festival	30,000	30,000
Old Settlers Days	29,500	16,977
Illinois Snow Sculpting Competition	28,000	35,000
Pec Thing - Spring and Fall	24,000	24,000
Rockford Home Show - Showtime Productions	23,000	24,500

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The Top 10 attractions in the Rockford Region in 2015 were:

	2015	2014
Sportscore Complexes / Indoor Sports Center	2,878,847	2,867,173
Rock Cut State Park	1,076,346	1,059,183
Ice Facilities - Carlson & Riverview	491,815	477,590
BMO Harris Bank Center (includes IceHogs)	289,837	292,210
Forest Hills Baseball Diamonds	200,000	280,000
Rockford Park District Golf Courses (combined)	187,006	188,528
Magic Waters Waterpark	186,331	170,021
Discovery Center Museum	181,961	169,328
Lockwood Park Equestrian Centre	135,200	133,720
Rockford Speedway	124,556	128,311

2015 Winnebago County Tourism Highlights

In addition to the 300 plus sports tournaments and other events and conferences influenced by RACVB, the following events added economic impact to the local economy.

- Rockford AirFest saw an increase of 15,000 spectators in 2015 reaching 135,000 visitors.
- Magic Waters Waterpark saw a pleasant jump in attendance going from 170,021 visitors in 2014 to 186,331 visitors in 2015 (an increase of more than 16,000 visitors).
- The region hosted many sports tournaments, such as the annual Puma Cup, USSSA Softball and the USA Ultimate, and attracted more than 2.8 million visitors for the second year in a row as local and out of town players, coaches and fans played at the MercyRockford Sportscore complexes.
- Bolstered by good weather, the annual Head of the Rock Regatta saw an increase of spectators, pushing their attendance numbers to 20,000 this past year.
- In just its second year, Alpine Hills Adventure Park (Gateway Parks Snow Park and Zip Rockford Zipline) jumped from 825 visitors in 2014 to 5,920 in 2015.
- The Rockford City Market took advantage of better weather and growing popularity as it broke the 100,000 visitor mark for the first time in its history. The popular farmer's market event had 75,500 visitors in 2014.
- The Rockford IceHogs remained a strong draw for visitors to the downtown as their winning ways and stint in the playoffs brought in 190,018 fans, an increase of 6,265 ice hockey fans over the prior year.

2016 attendance projections

For the second year in a row, attendance numbers have hit the 7.6 million mark in the Rockford region and as more events and activities come on line, RACVB expects those numbers to continue climbing.

Sports tourism will continue to rise as the UW Health Sports Factory opens June 1. With 15 tournaments booked already in 2016, the facility will be a strong influence on attendance numbers for years to come. Tough Mudder took place on May 21-22 and added 15,000 visitors to our region.

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Leisure travel and visitors will continue to see strong numbers as attractions such as Alpine Hills continue to build year over year. The new Rockford Rivets baseball team will add to the leisure market numbers, as well.

Although Rockford AirFest has been canceled for 2016, with the impact from these other events, plus the continued growth from the region's long-time attractions, numbers are expected to continue climbing towards the 8 million mark in 2016.

For a full list of regional Sites and Attractions numbers, go online to <http://www.gorockford.com/about-us/organizational-reports/>

The mission of the RACVB is to drive quality of life and economic growth for our citizens through tourism marketing and destination development. www.gorockford.com

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FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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