

NEWS RELEASE

Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau



Visitor Spending Up for Tenth Consecutive Year, Highlights Importance of Tourism on Economy *Economic Impact up 4.3%, Demonstrates Tourism Strategy Working*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 22, 2020

ROCKFORD, IL – Prior to the impact of COVID-19 and record losses in the industry, Rockford and Winnebago County achieved an unprecedented ten-years of growth in its tourism sector.

According to new data released by the Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity, in 2019 the economic impact of the tourism sector in Winnebago County **grew by 4.3 percent**, outpacing the state growth average of 3.3 percent. During the year, visitors spent more than **\$409 million** while visiting Winnebago County and directly **supported the livelihood of 3,091 hardworking area residents** with **employment income of \$100 million**.

“Prior to the pandemic, our region was on the rise and tourism was a driver of that success. Spending was up and our visitors were supporting new developments, businesses and experiences our residents enjoy. Now, amidst the pandemic and travel restrictions, with so many independently owned restaurants and retail shops hurting, hotel occupancy at historic lows and cultural attractions and venues struggling to survive we plainly see the value of the visitor and the money they leave behind when they return home,” said John Groh, RACVB president/CEO. “Our region’s tourism sector has a great foundation to rebuild from and RACVB will be there every step of the way doing our part to ensure our region recovers and remains a strong tourism destination in Illinois.”

Commenting on the city’s resiliency, Rockford Mayor Tom McNamara said, “The tourism industry is essential and perpetuates job growth along with overall economic prosperity throughout the City of Rockford. From downtown beautification efforts, to large-scale events, initiatives, and sports tournaments, the RACVB team creatively finds new opportunities to drive visitors here each year. Our resiliency will get us through the challenges of this current year and once we do we will be stronger than ever before.”

In addition to spending, visitors also generated increased funds for local and state tax coffers to use for core services such as police, fire and public works. In 2019, visitors paid **\$25.3 million** in state and **\$7.2 million** in local tax receipts (up 9.3 percent and 5.5 percent, respectively). Visitor expenditure, tax revenue and employment data are provided by the U.S. Travel Association and the Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity.

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Through 2019, tourism's economic impact grew for 10 consecutive years and was on track for additional growth. Recent additional investments in product development—including the new Embassy Suites by Hilton Rockford Riverfront and Rockford Conference Center and the revitalization efforts of Davis Park in downtown Rockford, and Home2 Suites by Hilton in Loves Park—figure to bolster the Rockford region's long-term tourism impact.

In addition to growth in Winnebago County, the Illinois Office of Tourism reported both international and domestic travel expenditures grew to \$43.1 billion in 2019, which is a \$1.3 billion increase to the state's economy over 2018. More than 120 million visitors came to Illinois in 2019 – the ninth-straight year of record tourism growth in the state—contributing to an increase of visitor spending, tax revenue and local jobs.

Fast Facts about Illinois Tourism in 2019:

- Illinois's 120 million domestic visitors directly supported more than 344,100 jobs in the Illinois travel and tourism industry, an increase of 1,800 jobs from 2018.
- Travel also generated nearly \$2.5 billion in state tax revenue, an increase of 7.7 percent.
- Domestic visitation to Illinois in 2019 increased by 5.1 percent, reaching 120.4 million visitors, well above the national growth rate of 2 percent.

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About RACVB: RACVB is responsible for promoting the Rockford region as an attractive travel destination and enhancing its public image as a dynamic place to live and work. Through the impact of travel, RACVB strengthens the economic position of the region and provide opportunities for people in our communities.
www.gorockford.com

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