

# NEWS RELEASE

Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau



## Rockford Area Visitor Spending Continues Post-Pandemic Climb, Recovery Outpaces IL and Comparable Counties

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**ROCKFORD, IL** – Spending by visitors to the Rockford region increased in **2021** according to a recently released report by the Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity. However, at the end of 2021, the market had not yet fully recovered from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

According to the report, **in 2021 total visitor spending increased to \$436.4 million**, which was a 21.7% increase over 2020, but still a 9.7% below 2019. Prior to the pandemic and record losses in the industry, Rockford and Winnebago County achieved an unprecedented ten-years of growth in its tourism sector.

While complete data for 2022 will not be released until late 2023, sector specific industry **data points to continued recovery in 2022**. For example, hotels in Winnebago County generated 11.4% more revenue in 2022 than 2019 on a 4.3% increase in the total number of room nights sold, per data from STR, a hotel data insights company. Additionally, in 2022 the City of Rockford's 1% tax on food & beverage, packaged liquor and hotels was up 16% over 2019 collections.

"Rockford's resilient performance is due in part to our diversified tourism product that includes sports tourism, leisure products and corporate travel, and our ability to focus on and market tourism products that allowed for continued visitation to outdoor experiences throughout the pandemic," **said John Groh, Rockford Area Convention & Visitors Bureau president/CEO**. "Location, location, location is a strength of our destination; sitting along a major interstate highway system with easy proximity to 20 million people within a three-hour drive, our outdoor recreation assets and our size as a mid-market city benefited the region during the pandemic years of 2020 and 2021."

Comparing 2021 to 2019, the economic impact of the visitor industry in **Winnebago County has recovered faster than nine of 12 comparative destinations in Illinois**. Local visitor spending had recovered to about 90% of 2019 levels, better than comparative average set recovery of 82% and the state's recovery at 79%. (See table below for a list of each county and their percent change between 2019 and 2021.)

"In Rockford, helping our hospitality and tourism businesses rebound is a priority. I'm excited to see that began to happen in 2021. With a breadth of experiences, I am confident tourism's economic impact will continue to climb and know that our businesses and attractions will thrive," **said Rockford Mayor Thomas P. McNamara**.

As visitors spent more than \$436 million while visiting Winnebago County, they directly supported the livelihood of 3,798 hardworking area residents working in hospitality and travel related jobs with employment income of \$130 million.

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In addition to spending, visitors generated **increased funds for local and state tax coffers** to use for core services such as police, fire and public works. In 2021, visitors paid **\$25.8 million** in state taxes (up 22% since 2020 and up less than 1% since 2019) and **\$11.2 million** in local tax receipts (up 13.13% since 2020 but down 1.75% since 2019). Visitor expenditure, tax revenue and employment data are provided by the Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity and Tourism Economics.

In addition to growth in Winnebago County, the Illinois Office of Tourism reported travel confidence in 2021 rebounded with easing restrictions and closures. Visitation recovered to about 79% of 2019 volumes with \$32.2 billion of direct visitor spending with a total economic impact of \$59.5 billion.

### **Fast Facts about Illinois Tourism in 2021:**

- Illinois's 97.1 million visitors directly supported 388,800 jobs in the Illinois travel and tourism industry.
- Travel generated nearly \$5 billion in state and local tax revenue.
- Each household in Illinois would need to be taxed an additional \$1,034 to replace the visitor-generated taxes received by state and local governments.

### **Comparing % Recovery in Visitor Spending: Winnebago County & Comparative IL Counties**

<b>IL Comparative Counties</b>	<b>% recovered '21 vs. '19</b>
McLean (Bloomington)	96.6%
Will (SW suburban Chicago)	95.9%
St. Clair (Metro East St. Louis)	94.9%
<b>Winnebago</b>	<b>90.3%</b>
Madison (Metro East St. Louis)	89.5%
Rock Island (Quad Cities)	82.3%
Champaign	81.9%
<b>Set Average</b>	<b>81.8%</b>
Sangamon (Springfield)	79.3%
Kane (Aurora, Geneva, etc.)	75.2%
Lake (Gurnee, Waukegan, etc.)	75.1%
Peoria	70.5%
DuPage (Wheaton, Naperville, etc.)	68.8%
Cook (Chicago + suburbs)	63.5%

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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 provides opportunities for people in our communities. [gorockford.com](http://gorockford.com)

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