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Grand Rapids and Kent County Visitorship Hit Record Levels in 2022

Convention comebacks and leisure travel drive recovery two years ahead of expectations

Grand Rapids, Mich. – As Grand Rapids hosts the annual Pure Michigan Governor’s Conference on Tourism this week, Experience Grand Rapids leaders released record-setting tourism economy data for Kent County in 2022. Hotel room sales and revenue in Kent County were the highest in the region’s history last year, exceeding pre-pandemic levels by a healthy margin and beating tourism industry predictions by two years.

“After two very rough years, group business has made a strong comeback in Kent County,” said EXGR President & CEO, Doug Small. “That, combined with robust leisure travel in 2022, drove huge increases in hotel room sales and revenues over 2021, and pushed us past 2019’s pre-pandemic record numbers. That’s two full years ahead of industry forecasts that predicted we wouldn’t see new sales highs until 2024.”

At 2,157,455, the number of hotel rooms sold in 2022 jumped by more than 350,000 — or about 19.4% — over 2021 figures and exceeded 2019 sales by nearly 91,800 rooms, an increase of about 4.4%.

At \$248,702,424 in 2022, Kent County hotel room revenue grew by nearly \$77.5 million over 2021, a 45% increase. Hotel revenue was nearly 10% higher than in 2019 with a more than \$22.5 million bump.

“Hotel room numbers matter because those overnight visitors make a big impact on local businesses and our regional economy,” Small said. “They’re also important for Experience Grand Rapids because hotel room sales drive the revenue that allows us to continue to market this destination to leisure, group and business travelers. That’s exactly what the tourism industry professionals here for the Governor’s conference are talking about—how to drive more visitorship to support jobs, businesses and the Michigan economy.”

A 2022 comeback in group business was a big contributor to the hotel sales growth. A total of 481 individual meetings, sporting events and group tours drew 443,024 attendees to the region, restoring 92% of the number of groups convening in Grand Rapids when compared to 2019.

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Small acknowledged the valuable role that EXGR’s partners at the West Michigan Sports Commission played in the comeback. “We couldn’t have reached this milestone without the talented team at the West Michigan Sports Commission,” he said. “Sporting events have been and will continue to be a very important component of our tourism economy.”

Small continued, “We are thrilled to welcome our meeting and convention travelers back after that sector of the industry came to a near standstill for much of 2020 and part of 2021. While leisure travel was certainly curtailed during the pandemic, the rebound was quicker as people began traveling to visit friends and relatives and getaway to drivable destinations.”

The comeback in meetings and conventions was thanks, in part, to some large national convention bookings. Last year, EXGR successfully hosted several significant meetings including the American Fisheries Society – Joint Aquatic Sciences Meeting (JASM) with 4000 attendees and total spending of \$5.3M, the U.S. Travel Association’s Educational Seminar for Tourism Organizations (ESTO), with 900 destination marketing professionals from state, regional and local organizations and total spending of \$1.7M, and Encounter Ministries with 4500 attendees and total spending of \$2M.

“The fact that we were selected to host one of the largest travel industry conferences in the country is a testament to EXGR’s and Grand Rapids’ reputation among travel professionals,” said Small. “I am so proud of our team and very grateful for the many partners who have a hand in making Grand Rapids and Kent County a fabulous destination.”

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About Experience Grand Rapids

Established in 1927, Experience Grand Rapids (EXGR) leads the marketing of Grand Rapids/Kent County as a premier convention & visitor destination providing a significant positive impact to the West Michigan economy. Previously named the Grand Rapids/Kent County Convention & Visitors Bureau, EXGR represents the second largest city in Michigan with over one million residents.