



PRESS RELEASE

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State of Illinois Announces Ninth Consecutive Year of Record Tourism Growth in 2019

With over 120 million visitors, Illinois set record \$43.1 billion in tourism spend in 2019

CHICAGO – Prior to the impact of COVID-19 and record losses in the industry, Illinois achieved its ninth consecutive year of record tourism growth in 2019. According to new data released today by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) and the Illinois Office of Tourism, Illinois welcomed a record 120 million visitors last year, and a record economic boost for the state. In 2019, visitors spent nearly \$43.1 billion, a \$1.3 billion increase over the prior year, according to the U.S. Travel Association.

These visitor expenditures 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. Last year's record-breaking tourism levels will prepare the state to make a healthy comeback once the tourism industry resumes normal activity.

"The 2019 tourism numbers demonstrate what we already know – that pre-COVID-19, Illinois offered one of the top destinations for travel in the country, supporting thousands of jobs and economic growth for our communities," said DCEO Acting Director Michael Negron. "Unfortunately, like many industries, tourism looks much different today than it did last year. Under Governor Pritzker's leadership, the state of Illinois is committed to a data-driven plan allowing a gradual reopening of key segments of our economy. This public health approach, matched with our strong tourism performance in 2019, offers a strong foundation that will allow Illinois to bring visitors back as soon as it is safe to do so."

According to DK Shifflet, 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. Visitation to the City of Chicago increased by 4.5 percent and downstate travel increased by 5.6 percent, fueled by a strong leisure tourism increase of 6 percent.

DCEO, which operates the Office of Illinois Tourism, has played a key role in working with public health officials to develop safety guidelines permitting some businesses and industries to reopen by implementing strategies to help reduce risk and protect the public as well as their employees.

While tourism has seen a marked impact in Illinois and across the country, state officials are taking steps to help residents who choose to travel to do so safely. Earlier this week, [the Illinois Department of Public Health released new guidance](#) to help residents take proper precautions when traveling. The new COVID-19 travel map helps inform residents of potential risks associated with traveling during the pandemic. The map indicates countries and U.S. states with increased risk of COVID-19 based on case rates.

“Last year’s numbers illustrate just how impactful tourism is for boosting the state’s economy,” **said Karla Flannery, Deputy Director of the Illinois Office of Tourism.** “While it’s unrealistic to expect the same results in 2020, we are looking forward to safely welcoming travelers back to Illinois and rebuilding our industry – while encouraging Illinois residents to use public health precautions in resuming local travel to any one of our iconic attractions found right here at home.”

The Illinois Office of Tourism continues to work with health officials to provide guidance for residents as well as local tourism partners, including museums, amusement parks and other tourist destinations. Illinois remains under Phase 4 of the Restore Illinois guidelines. For more information on current health safety guidelines, click [here](#).

For more information about travelling in Illinois, visit enjoyillinois.com.

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About DCEO and the State of Illinois

The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity’s mission is to support and maintain a strong economic environment for those we serve—taxpayers, employers, workers, and communities—by actively recruiting and growing businesses, maintaining a 21st-century workforce, enhancing innovation, and bringing jobs and investment to underserved communities throughout Illinois. For a list of upcoming webinars and to receive regular updates on grants and business assistance programs, please visit [DCEO's website](#) or follow us on social at @IllinoisDCEO. For more information on the statewide COVID-19 response, visit coronavirus.illinois.gov