

RALEIGH, N.C. — Record visitor spending in 2018 was reflected with visitor spending increases in all 100 counties, Governor Roy Cooper announced today. Visitor spending reached nearly \$5.7 billion in Mecklenburg, \$2.4 billion in Wake, nearly \$1.5 billion in Guilford, \$1.2 billion in Buncombe and nearly \$1.2 in Dare counties. Rounding out the top 10 counties for visitor spending were Forsyth (\$951 million), Durham (\$859 million), New Hanover (\$613 million), Brunswick (\$599 million) and Cumberland (\$574 million). The data comes from an annual study commissioned by Visit North Carolina, a unit of the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina.

Domestic visitors spent a record \$25.3 billion statewide in 2018, an increase of 5.6 percent from 2017. State tax receipts as a result of visitor spending neared \$1.3 billion in 2018, and local tax revenues directly resulting from visitor spending totaled \$774.6 million. Visitor expenditures directly supported more than 230,000 jobs and generated more than \$6.3 billion in payroll income across North Carolina.

“North Carolina’s tourism industry set a new record last year in visitor spending despite the effects of the storms,” said Governor Cooper. “This is a testament to the lasting beauty of our state and the determination of our people.”

Noting that North Carolina ranks sixth in the nation for overnight visitation, Visit NC Executive Director Wit Tuttell said the spending growth in all 100 counties confirmed the appeal of the state’s destinations. “There’s a lot of competition for travelers’ time and money,” Tuttell said. “But people come to North Carolina when they know about the state’s natural beauty, our residents’ welcoming spirit, and the irresistible mix of tradition and innovation.”

The visitor spending study commissioned by Visit North Carolina is conducted by the U.S. Travel Association. The study uses sales and tax revenue data, employment figures and other industry and economic data to determine the overall impact of visitor spending in North Carolina. Highlights include:

- Mecklenburg County received \$5.68 billion in domestic travelers’ expenditures to lead all of North Carolina’s 100 counties. Wake County ranked second with \$2.40 billion, followed by Guilford County with \$1.49 billion, Buncombe with \$1.21 billion and Dare with \$1.19 billion in visitor spending.
- The largest percent increases in visitor spending were seen in Onslow (8 percent), Beaufort (7.7 percent), Johnston (7.1 percent), Cherokee (7 percent) and Madison (6.8 percent) counties. Richmond and Brunswick counties followed with a 6.7 percent and 6.5 percent increase respectively. Rounding out the top 10 in largest increases were Transylvania (6.5 percent), Henderson (6.4 percent), and tied for the 10th spot Cleveland (6.2 percent) and Buncombe counties (6.2 percent).
- Positive spending growth was seen throughout the state’s economic development regions. The Southeast and North Central regions (5.8 percent growth each) and Western Region (5.7 percent) experienced the strongest growth, yet all eight regions had spending growth of 5 percent or more from 2017 to 2018.
- Mecklenburg County had the largest number of direct tourism employees (53,300) and the largest payroll (\$2 billion). Four other counties had more than 10,000 direct tourism employees: Wake (23,970), Guilford (14,240), Dare (13,550) and Buncombe (12,090).
- 100 percent of the state’s counties saw direct tourism employment growth in 2018. Counties with the largest year-over-year increases in direct tourism employment were Onslow (3.1 percent), Johnston (3.0 percent), Beaufort (2.9 percent), Brunswick (2.9 percent), Transylvania

(2.9 percent) and Henderson (2.8 percent).

Full tables are can be accessed at partners.visitnc.com/economic-impact-studies. For more information about the travel impact numbers, contact Visit North Carolina.

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