

RALEIGH, N.C. (May 3, 2022) — Gov. Roy Cooper announced today that the North Carolina tourism industry saw a major recovery in 2021 with \$28.9 billion in visitor spending. With domestic travel reaching new heights as international visitation lagged, the total falls just 1 percent below the record set in 2019 and represents a 45 percent increase from pandemic-stricken 2020.

"We know visitor spending helps fuel our economy in all 100 counties by sustaining local businesses, supporting thousands of jobs and bringing in tax revenue, and that's why we've been working to encourage tourism," Gov. Cooper said. "After being hit hard in 2020, tourism has bounced back as people around the world are again getting to see and experience the greatest state in the country."

Gov. Cooper's announcement coincides with [National Travel and Tourism Week](#) (May 1-7), when travel and tourism professionals across the country unite to underscore the value of travel to the economy, businesses, communities and personal well-being. Adding to North Carolina's reasons to celebrate: For the second year in a row, the state ranks No. 5 in domestic visitation.

The state's tourism-supported workforce increased 10.5 percent to 197,500 jobs in 2021. That figure reverses the more than 26 percent loss in employment suffered in 2020. But the total remains 18 percent below the record 242,600 jobs from 2019. Tourism payroll increased 19 percent to \$7.7 billion. Also as a result of visitor spending, state and local governments saw rebounds in tax revenues to \$2.3 billion.

The figures are preliminary findings from research commissioned by [Visit North Carolina](#), a unit of the [Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina](#), and conducted by Tourism Economics. In measuring the economic value of the travel sector, the research incorporates a broad range of data sources to ensure that the entire visitor economy is quantified in detail. The U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, OmniTrak visitor profiles, the U.S. Census, STR lodging reports and the N.C. Department of Revenue are among the sources included in this comprehensive model. More information about the study can be found online at partners.visitnc.com/economic-impact-studies, which also links to archived reports dating back to 2005.

The research shows that domestic visitor spending has fully recovered in North Carolina while international spending still lags. In 2021, domestic visitors spent \$28.6 billion, a figure that tops the 2019 record by 2.4 percent. International visitor spending rose nearly 26 percent, but it's still down more than 74 percent from 2019.

"We're encouraged by the report on the recovery of our tourism industry, which is essential to the state's economic well-being," said North Carolina Department of Commerce Secretary Machel Baker Sanders. "More than 45,000 small businesses across North Carolina rely on what visitors spend – on everything from lodging and dining to transportation, recreation and retail."

Sanders noted that as a result of travelers' contributions to state and local tax revenue, North Carolina households averaged about \$580 in yearly savings.

Tourism facts

- Total spending by domestic and international visitors in North Carolina reached \$28.9 billion in 2021. That sum represents a 44.9 percent increase over 2020 expenditures. The figure falls 1 percent below the record \$29.22 billion spent in 2019.
- Domestic travelers spent a record \$28.6 billion in 2021. Spending was up 45.2 percent from \$19.7 billion in 2020.

- International travelers spent \$337 million in 2021, up 25.6 percent from the previous year.
- Visitors to North Carolina generated \$3.9 billion in federal, state and local taxes in 2021. The total represents a 29 percent increase from 2020.
- State tax receipts from visitor spending rose 34 percent to nearly \$1.2 billion in 2021.
- Local tax receipts grew 26 percent to \$1.1 billion.
- Direct tourism employment in North Carolina increased 10.5 percent to 197,500.
- Direct tourism payroll increased 18.9 percent to \$7.7 billion.
- Visitors spend more than \$79 million per day in North Carolina. That spending adds \$6.4 million per day to state and local tax revenues (about \$3.3 million in state taxes and \$3.1 million in local taxes).
- Each North Carolina household saved \$580 on average in state and local taxes as a direct result of visitor spending in the state. Savings per capita averaged \$222.
- North Carolina hosted nearly 45 million visitors in 2021.

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