

RALEIGH, N.C. — In a year marked by pandemic shutdowns, virtual meetings and travel advisories, visitor spending in North Carolina dropped 32 percent in 2020, reversing a 10-year run of records set by domestic and international travelers. In releasing preliminary findings from research conducted by the U.S. Travel Association and Tourism Economics, Christopher Chung, chief executive officer of the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina, said the losses underscore the importance of recovery for one of the state's most vital industry sectors.

"For generations, North Carolina has banked on tourism's contributions to the local and statewide economy and to the livelihoods of thousands of residents," Chung said. "We hope that with continued progress in the fight against COVID-19, we can work together to restore the vitality of an industry that benefits every corner of the state."

Though unsurprising in light of the pandemic's pervasive effects, the numbers for 2020 quantify COVID-19's devastating toll on tourism. Of the total \$19.96 billion in tourism spending, domestic visitors contributed \$19.7 billion, a drop of 29.5 percent. The \$268 million spent by international travelers represents a 79.4 percent decrease from 2019.

The tourism-supported workforce decreased 26.4 percent to 178,700 jobs. Tourism payroll dipped to \$6.4 billion, a nearly 25 percent decrease from a record-breaking 2019. State and local governments saw similar decreases in visitor generated tax revenues to \$1.8 billion from \$2.4 billion in 2019. North Carolina ranked fifth among states for total visitor volume in 2020.

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 the U.S. Travel Association and 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.

"The recovery of our tourism industry is essential to the state's economic well-being," said Machel Sanders, North Carolina Commerce Secretary. "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. Jobs in all 100 counties are at stake." Sanders noted that as a result of travelers' contributions to state and local tax revenue, each North Carolina resident realizes about \$170 in yearly savings.

The release of the 2020 research findings coincides with National Travel and Tourism Week, an observance created to celebrate the value of travel to the economy, business and personal well-being. It also follows the April launch of "[Get Back to a Better Place](#)," a Visit NC marketing campaign to inspire travelers to rediscover the joys of a North Carolina trip. The campaign aligns with Gov. Roy Cooper's intentions to lift restrictions by June 1 based on continued progress with vaccinations and improving COVID-19 trends. The statewide mask mandate might also be adjusted.

"With the vaccine rollout and improved metrics in the fight against COVID-19, we're eager to jump-start the recovery of the North Carolina tourism industry," said Wit Tuttell, Director of Visit NC. "It might be a long road, but given our state's resiliency and its vast appeal to travelers, we have confidence in a comeback that will bring us back to a better place."

Tourism facts

- Domestic travelers spent \$19.7 billion in 2020. Domestic spending was down 29.5 percent from \$27.9 billion in 2019.
- International travelers spent \$268 million in 2020, down 79.4 percent from 2019.
- Visitors to North Carolina generated nearly \$3.0 billion in federal, state and local taxes in 2020. The total represents a 26.6 percent decrease from 2019.
- State tax receipts as a result of domestic visitor spending decreased 26.4 percent to more than \$891.6 million in 2020.
- Local tax receipts from domestic visitor spending dropped 21 percent to \$906.4 million.
- Direct tourism employment in North Carolina decreased 26.4 percent to 178,700.
- Direct tourism payroll decreased 24.5 percent to \$6.4 billion.
- Visitors spend more than \$54 million per day in North Carolina. That spending adds \$4.9 million per day to state and local tax revenues (about \$2.4 million in state taxes and \$2.5 million in local taxes).
- Each North Carolina resident saves on average \$170 in state and local taxes as a direct result of visitor spending in the state.
- North Carolina hosted 37 million visitors in 2020.

About Visit North Carolina:

Visit North Carolina is part of the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina. Established in 2014, the EDPNC is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation that oversees the state's efforts in business and job recruitment and retention, international trade, and tourism, film and sports development. The mission of Visit North Carolina is to unify and lead the state in developing North Carolina as a major destination for leisure travel, group tours, meetings and conventions, sports events and film production. For more information on North Carolina's destinations and travel assets, go to [VisitNC.com](https://www.visitnc.com).

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