

Southeast Tourism Conference



Many NCTIA members attended the Southeast Tourism Society Annual Conference this week in Concord.

The event was also attended by industry representatives from Alabama, Arkansas, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia.

"It's helpful to meet with colleagues from across the region to share ideas, learn, and discuss common challenges," said Donna Carpenter, President/CEO at Explore Cabarrus, which hosted the conference.

NCTIA lobbyist Brian Lewis served on a panel about lobbying issues facing the industry. Other panelists included lobbyists from Arkansas, Georgia, and Tennessee. Lewis talked about NCTIA's workforce development program, school calendar, and occupancy tax issues.

More Analysis of 2021 NC Tourism Data

The following analysis is provided by the John Locke Foundation, which published it on August 30. [Click here to read the entire article.](#)

North Carolina hosted nearly 45 million visitors in 2021 and was the fifth-highest in the nation for domestic visitation.

People are visiting NC in droves, mostly for leisure, which leans heavily on the tourism industry of foodservice, lodging, retail, and recreation.

This is fantastic news for the state, but how does it compare to pre-pandemic lockdown levels?

"According to the latest release from the North Carolina Department of Commerce, all 100 counties saw increases in visitor spending in 2021. Visitor spending is up 45% statewide from 2020 according to research commissioned by Visit North Carolina, a unit of the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina, conducted by Tourism Economics.

Even so, the spending total of \$28.9 billion fell roughly 1% below the 2019 record of \$29.2 billion. Adjusting for inflation, however, paints a more realistic picture.

Using average CPI data for 2019 and 2021, prices increased by 6.0% from 2019 to 2021. In real terms, it means that in order to break even with the 2019 record, 2021 visitor spending would have needed to be another \$2 billion higher.

As inflation wreaks havoc on family budgets, it is likely many families cut back on vacation spending.

International spending is only a small portion of overall visitor spending (4.5%) in 2019. Yet international spending alone was down 74.2% in 2021 since 2019, making up only 1.16% of total visitor spending.

Spending in 2021 was \$2 billion short of 2019 totals when accounting for inflation, but what about the health of the tourism workforce?

Anecdotally, we know the workforce is struggling. Businesses are cutting hours because they are understaffed. Many restaurants now have walk-in interview options. Some companies are offering sign-on bonuses when they traditionally would not.

