



# Tourism revenues increase in meeting of the great rivers

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ALTON - The tourism industry continued to grow at a steady pace throughout Madison, Jersey and Calhoun Counties in 2016 mirroring growth across the State of Illinois, according to early reports from the Illinois Department of Commerce's Office of Tourism.

In 2016, visitors to the Meeting of the Great Rivers which includes Calhoun, Jersey and Madison Counties, spent \$460.5 million, an increase of \$4.2 million over 2015. The region received local tax receipts of \$12.97 million from visitor spending in 2016 compared to \$12.18 million in 2015.

The State of Illinois reported traveler spending at \$37.9 billion, an increase of \$571 million over the same period in 2015. In addition, the Illinois tourism industry created over 10,000 new jobs in 2016.

Job growth climbed slightly in the Meeting of the Great Rivers region. While job numbers remained stable in Calhoun County, Madison and Jersey Counties saw a slight uptick in new jobs. Overall job growth in the region increased 2 percent in 2016.

"These numbers are encouraging and show how vital tourism is to the local economy," Brett Stawar, President and CEO of the Alton Regional Convention and Visitors Bureau said. "Our regional tourism industry is key to the continued economic growth of our region. "However, we are concerned that these numbers are not as strong as they could be. With delayed state funding and uncertainty in the Illinois budgetary process, 2016 did not shine as much as it could have. But, the year ahead is looking up!"

The economic impact numbers, provided by the U.S. Travel Association, are preliminary numbers only. Final visitor statistics will be available later this year.

Fast Facts about Illinois Tourism in 2016:

- Every \$1 invested in Illinois tourism generates \$9 in economic impact
- Illinois welcomed 110 million domestic visitors (an additional one million visitors over 2015)
- Of Illinois' 110 million domestic visitors, 17% were for business and 83% for leisure
- In the past 10 years, domestic travel to Illinois has increased by 19 million visitors
- Domestic travelers spent nearly \$35.1 billion in Illinois during 2016, a 1.8% increase over 2015
- In 2016, domestic travelers to Illinois generated \$2.6 billion in state and local tax revenue, an increase of \$122 million over 2015
- Length of stay per visitor increased by 3%, surpassing the US average of 2.4%

*The Alton Regional Convention and Visitors Bureau is the destination marketing organization serving northern Madison, Jersey and Calhoun Counties. The bureau is dedicated to educating visitors about the great things the region has to offer by providing information regarding the area's history, unique landmarks, recreational opportunities, leisure attractions, special events and scenic marvels. The Alton Regional Convention & Visitors Bureau is certified by the Illinois Bureau of Tourism. It is also nationally accredited through the Destinations International (DI).*