



Wisconsin State Legislature

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Tourism Important to Wisconsin Economy

Somehow, after the Fourth of July, it feels like we have hit the halfway mark of summer which means we have a limited amount of time left to take advantage of all Wisconsin has to offer as a vacation destination. Whether you are still planning to head up north, visit the Wisconsin Dells waterparks, see a Milwaukee Brewers game or go camping in one of our state parks, Wisconsin has something for everyone.

Tourism is vital to Wisconsin's economy. In the past five years, there has been a 30 percent growth in the state's tourism industry. The tourism sector was valued at \$19.3 billion last year, an increase of \$800 million from 2014. More people are coming to visit as well. There were 105.2 million visitors to the state in 2015, compared to 92.5 million visitors five years before. 26 percent of visitor spending in 2015 was on hotels and other lodging, up 7.3 percent from the prior year. According to the Department of Tourism, for every dollar that it spends on marketing the state, the state gets eight dollars back, making it an 8:1 return on investment and netting the state \$1.5 billion in state and local taxes.

The Department of Tourism is using a variety of tools to market the state, all the while streamlining their message. They have focused on keeping content updated on their website, www.travelwisconsin.com and had 7.4 million visitors to the website, an increase of 36 percent over 2014. The department has won 78 awards for marketing and public relations since 2011. They are active on social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest and YouTube. While they have expanded their digital reach, their new ad campaign focuses on a simplified

message by focusing on one key concept: fun. The newest ad focuses on the “real fun” and genuine experiences that you can have by visiting one of our state’s supper clubs, and traveling the state with your family and pets.

While the Department of Tourism focuses exclusively on promoting the state as a destination, other state agencies also play a role in making Wisconsin attractive to visitors. Last month, I was on hand, along with the Department of Tourism, officials from the Columbia County Visitors Bureau (CCVB), town of West Point and the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) to recognize improvements made to the Merrimac Ferry including recent completion of a new ADA-compliant restroom facility at the south ferry landing and planned construction of a public fishing pier at the site. The restroom facility included funding from the Department of Transportation and this project was part of an effort to make the ferry landing wayside a place people want to stop, rather than just a “pit stop.”

Throughout the 14th Senate District, we are fortunate to have countless attractions and events to entertain your entire family. Spending a fun day out engaging in tourism activities benefits not only our local communities but also our state. Across Wisconsin, our tourism industry employs more than 190,000 both directly and indirectly, which accounted for 8 percent of the state’s total workforce last year. We have many great family-run places to visit which are working hard to attract guests and even adapt to changes in tourism trends, such as an increase in culinary travel and interest in our many sports venues. As you plan your summer and fall travel, consider staying in the state and visiting one of our many attractions, including hundreds of Wisconsin supper clubs that offer a great experience and great food. In fact, I hope to see you at one soon!

If you have any questions about any of the information I have included or if you have suggestions on other topics or issues you would like learn more about, you may call my office toll-free at (800) 991-5541; write me at P.O. Box 7882, Madison, WI 53707; or e-mail me at:

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