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Guilford County visitor spending surges in 2021

The reduction of COVID-19 restrictions contributed to considerable annual growth in local visitor spending

HIGH POINT, N.C. (August 18, 2022) — The travel & tourism industry throughout North Carolina experienced a significant rebound in visitor spending during 2021, according to the [North Carolina Department of Commerce](#). The most recent study commissioned by [Visit North Carolina](#) found that annual visitor spending increased in all 100 NC counties, with Guilford County ranking #5 in visitor expenditures for the second consecutive year.

“The sustained growth of visitor spending within Guilford County is indicative of the recovery of our industry nationwide, and the latest study from Visit NC emphasizes the resilience of our local travel & tourism sector,” says Melody Burnett, Visit High Point President. “The 2021 visitor spending numbers not only met our expectations—they exceeded them by a wide margin.”

Guilford County in particular had strong economic numbers, seeing a 52% increase in tourism expenditures compared to the overall 45% increase statewide. According to Burnett, a burgeoning visitor economy is vital to local economic growth, with residents having a lessened local tax burden with outside visitors bringing an influx of dollars into the community.

“An increase in visitor spending is momentous for Guilford County residents as well. In fact, the NC Department of Commerce measures these savings locally for Guilford County at \$176.96/household,” stated Burnett. “The study found that visitor spending brought \$53 million in state taxes and \$43 million in local taxes to our county.”

The report reflected a 16% gain in tourism employees with 9,550 in 2021. Burnett says, workers employed in the tourism sector dropped 42% in 2020. Many in this category are employed in hospitality, where this sector has been hit the hardest.

“Locally, our Guilford County Hotel Association is working with our Guilford County Technical Educators, GTCC, and local universities to create stronger pathways to talent. On a state level, hospitality leaders have been working closely with the North Carolina Restaurant Lodging Association to communicate the needs in the workforce to address it collectively,” continued Burnett. “If demand is rising and we have a workforce shortage in our hospitality businesses, we are at risk of not delivering on our overall brand

promise. The service experience must match up to the expectations of the consumer. If there is a disconnect, then visitors will doubt the brand.”

The preliminary findings come from an annual study commissioned by [Visit North Carolina](#), a unit of the [Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina](#).

Local tourism impact in 2021:

- Guilford County generated \$1.29 billion in total visitor spending in 2021.
- Out of that total, \$420 million was in food and beverage (36% increase); \$361 million in transportation (69% increase), \$244 million in lodging (55% increase), \$159 million in recreation (67% increase) and \$108 million in retail (46% increase).
- Pent-up consumer demand coupled with the rising cost of goods and services reflects the overall 45% increase in overall state spending compared to 2020.

Additional key findings from the study:

- Mecklenburg County received \$4.1 billion (up 46 percent) in traveler expenditures to lead all 100 counties. For the first time, Buncombe County ranked second with \$2.6 billion (up 81 percent), followed by Wake County with \$2.3 billion (up 40 percent), Dare County with \$1.8 billion (up 30 percent) and Guilford County with \$1.3 billion (up 52 percent) in visitor spending.
- Top percentage spending increases from 2020 were Gates County (up 83 percent), Buncombe County (up 81 percent), Beaufort County (up 71 percent), Moore County (up 70 percent) and Alexander County (up 68 percent).
- Seventy-five counties had 2021 spending that topped 2019’s record sums. Four of these counties had spending up 50 percent or more from two years ago: Warren County (up 68 percent), Stokes County (up 66 percent), Madison County (up 59 percent) and Alexander County (up 57 percent).
- Mecklenburg County had the largest number of direct tourism employees (28,438), an increase of nearly 6 percent from 2020. Three other counties had more than 10,000 direct tourism employees: Wake (21,357, up 23 percent), Buncombe (18,278, up 31 percent) and Dare (12,295, up 4 percent).
- Top counties for percentage increases in tourism employment were Buncombe (up 31 percent), Gates (up 25 percent), Wake (up 23 percent), Cabarrus (up 21 percent) and Alexander (up 20 percent).

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About Visit High Point:

Visit High Point is the official destination management and marketing organization that positions High Point as a vibrant destination that visitors will enjoy, and locals will want to promote. Our vision is to leverage High Point’s reputation as the Home Furnishings Capital of the World™ and the home of a world-class University to further the evolution of High Point as a unique destination. While the focus is to increase economic impact by providing first-class service to our visitors and meeting planners, Visit High Point also works to develop our city as a year-round destination that is competitive in the marketplace,

generating more brand ambassadors and fans. We want each visitor to make yourself at home in High Point, NC. Established by state legislation in 1984, Visit High Point, a non-profit 501 c 6 organization is funded by a self-imposed three percent room occupancy tax on local hotels. No taxpayer funds – city, county, or state – are used to fund Visit High Point. The Regional Visitors Center is located at 1634 N. Main St., Suite 102, High Point, N.C. For more information, visit www.visithighpoint.com.