

Kentucky wouldn't be where it is without tourism

From the lakes of the Purchase Region to the forests of Eastern Kentucky, the Commonwealth's one of a kind attractions and picturesque landscapes draw visitors year-round from across the state, the country and even abroad.

Sightseers bet at our horse tracks, dine at our restaurants, tour our distilleries, hike our trails and spend their nights in our hotels and bed and breakfasts. This is tourism, and it is critical to the livelihood of our state.

The travel industry is a major economic driver for Kentucky, bringing in \$14.5 billion each year. In terms of revenue, it is the Commonwealth's third largest industry, only behind health care and automotive. Tourism has created nearly 200,000 jobs statewide, representing nearly 10% of the entire Kentucky workforce. It also delivers one of the highest returns on investment for taxpayers: Every dollar spent on advertising to attract tourists generates \$16 in state and local tax revenue.

If Kentucky truly wants to thrive, we must do more to increase prospective visitors' awareness of what Kentucky offers. Despite the travel industry's tremendous economic benefits, Kentucky's tourism advertising budget remains one of the lowest in the region. Nationally, we fall in the bottom half for state tourism advertising dollars. No matter how great a company's products are, that business won't reach its potential unless consumers know about it. Kentucky tourism is no different.

Kentuckians are tourism's ultimate winners. Visitor spending generates \$1.52 Billion in state and local taxes. That is enough revenue to save Kentucky taxpayers on average nearly \$1,200 per household – money that is instead available for the mortgage, buying your groceries, or sending your kids to college. And think how much more of an impact the industry could have on our local economies if it received more sufficient funding.

Time and time again, we've seen our policymakers demonstrate their commitment to building up Kentucky's other flagship industries. Legislators are constantly looking for new ways to build up the infrastructure needed for these sectors to flourish. The tourism industry—considering the revenue it accounts for already and its potential to do more—deserves the same level of attention and investment.

Kentucky offers tourists an abundance of attractions and experiences that cannot be replicated, and our hospitality is second to none. But without continued, long-term investment in the travel industry, we'll continue to only tap a small portion of our tourism potential.

As a member of the Kentucky Travel Industry Association, I see firsthand the critical role that tourism plays in helping our state grow. That is why I implore our local business leaders to

engage with your local elected officials and remind them of the impact that tourism plays in your success. Certainly, now is not the time to cut funding or to alter funding sources that provide the catalyst for growing our local businesses and communities. Now is the time to do more, not less.

Kentucky tourism is one of Kentucky's premier economic generators. As a state, we must refocus our mindset and open our eyes to the endless possibilities that the travel industry possesses to bring greater vitality to Kentucky's economy. The opportunity is there. We just have to seize it.