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Gov. Beshear: Kentucky Tourism Industry Achieves Historic Success With Record Year for 2023 in Economic Impact

Kentucky Tourism generated \$13.8 billion in economic impact, 95,222 jobs in 2023, making it best ever year for Kentucky Tourism

FRANKFORT, Ky. (May 30, 2024) – Today, Gov. Andy Beshear announced that 2023 marked a new record year for Kentucky tourism, with \$13.8 billion generated in economic impact and 95,222 jobs, as tourism remains a key piece of the commonwealth's booming economy. The Governor joined state tourism leaders at Castle & Key Distillery to celebrate the second straight record-breaking year for tourism in Kentucky.

"Our economy and our tourism industry are booming. More and more people want to visit Kentucky for our world-class destinations and events – creating more experiences for their families while generating jobs for Kentuckians," said **Gov. Beshear**. "Kentucky is on the biggest tourism and economic roll of our lifetime, and this is a direct result of Team Kentucky's hard work and investments in building a thriving, welcoming tourism industry. Together, we will continue to expand this success and welcome visitors to experience the natural beauty and warm hospitality of our new Kentucky home."

According to a study by Tourism Economics, 79.3 million travelers visited Kentucky in 2023, a 4.5% increase from 2022. Those travelers spent a total of \$9.7 billion across the state. The breakdown of spending is as follows:

- \$2.54 billion on food and beverage,
- \$2.28 billion on lodging,
- \$1.86 billion on transportation,
- \$1.82 billion on retail, and
- \$1.26 billion on recreation and entertainment.

“Tourism in Kentucky is thriving thanks to the leadership of Gov. Beshear, the hard work of our communities, large and small, and the world-class destinations that welcome visitors to the commonwealth,” said **Tourism, Arts & Heritage Cabinet Secretary Lindy Casebier**. “Today’s numbers emphasize the importance of tourism to Kentucky’s economy and the impact created by all of our local partners. Tourism is economic development that creates jobs, investment and transformative experiences while improving quality of life for all Kentuckians.”

“We are thrilled to break another economic impact record, thanks to this administration’s investments and the hard work of our staff and tourism partners,” said **Tourism Commissioner Mike Mangeot**. “The effect tourism has on our communities across the state is significant and essential. With no plans to slow down, we look forward to building on this success and are excited to support the tourism initiatives launching this year.”

President and CEO of the Kentucky Travel Industry Association (KTIA) **Hank Phillips** commends Team Kentucky and tourism partners for continuing to invest in Kentucky’s tourism industry: “From Gov. Beshear’s leadership to support from the General Assembly and the great work of the Tourism, Arts & Heritage Cabinet and Department of Tourism, everyone deserves enormous credit for Team Kentucky’s tourism success. At the core of this success are the multitude of tourism businesses and organizations that do the heavy lifting that has elevated the commonwealth to premier status as a travel destination and tourism to being a driver of Kentucky’s economy.”

Castle & Key Distillery, a revitalized, historic destination in Frankfort, has experienced a steady increase in visitors over the years. In 2015, following the recommendation of the Tourism, Arts and Heritage Cabinet, Castle & Key

Distillery received final approval from the Kentucky Tourism Development Finance Authority for incentives totaling nearly \$1.7 million for its tourism development project. The distillery offers a range of tourist experiences, including tours, tastings, shopping and special events. Head Blender Brett Connors attributes Kentucky's strong tourism industry to the growing number of visitors, a testament to the positive impact of tourism on local businesses.

"The unprecedented growth we have witnessed in Kentucky tourism has resonated throughout the Bourbon trail. This has enlivened distillers to offer more unique experiences than ever before while expanding our hiring across all departments," said **Connors**. "Tourism is truly the best marketing opportunity for a brand to build impactful consumer relationships."

The Governor's announcement of 2023 being the best year on record for tourism follows a record-breaking 2022, when he announced that tourism had generated more than \$12.9 billion in economic impact and created 91,668 jobs in Kentucky that year.

To see a full list of economic impact and jobs by county, [click here](#).

Kentucky's impressive economic success over the last four years is a direct reflection of the Beshear administration's continued investments in the tourism industry. In November 2023, Gov. Beshear [announced](#) that the commonwealth broke an all-time record with nine new tourism development projects set to generate an estimated \$292.1 million in economic investment. These projects also expect to create 550 jobs once operational.

The state's bourbon and spirits industry recorded its [best year](#) for growth in 2022, with over \$2.1 billion in new investments and approximately 700 new jobs for Kentucky residents. The sector followed with a strong 2023, including \$713.8 million in new investments and 229 full-time jobs. Since the start of his administration, Gov. Beshear has announced roughly 100 new location and expansion projects within the bourbon and spirits sector, contributing to over \$4.2 billion in new investments and more than 1,800 full-time jobs for Kentuckians.

In 2022, Gov. Beshear [announced](#) \$75 million in ARPA funding to boost the state's tourism industry and economy. Previously, the Governor dedicated [\\$5.3 million in](#)

[federal funding](#) to 103 tourism and destination marketing organizations in 88 Kentucky counties.

Since the beginning of his administration, Gov. Beshear has announced more than 1,000 private-sector new-location and expansion projects totaling over \$31.7 billion in announced investments, creating approximately 53,300 jobs. This is the highest investment figure secured during the tenure of any governor in the commonwealth's history.

For more information and to view the full economic impact report, please visit: kentuckytourism.com/industry.

For the latest [Tourism, Arts and Heritage Cabinet](#) updates, follow the cabinet on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) or [LinkedIn](#). To learn more about tourism and arts in Kentucky, visit tah.ky.gov.

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