

## **WISCONSIN TOURISM MEANS BIG BUCKS**

**A legislative column by state Senator Mary Lazich (R-New Berlin)**

Wisconsin is about to enter summer, the most important period of the state's tourism industry. With gas prices at an all-time high, the summer tourism forecast is uncertain. Will people stay home, or will they opt to spend their leisure time close to home here in Wisconsin?

What is clear is that Wisconsin's year-round tourism business translates into big bucks for the state economy. The Department of Tourism estimates tourism, the state's third largest industry, added more than \$12.8 billion to the state economy during 2007. From 1994 through 2007, travel expenditures increased in Wisconsin 122 percent.

Calculating the impact of state tourism is based on a formula that includes about 2,000 face-to-face interviews with travelers to Wisconsin in all seasons at various events, 3,000 telephone interviews with lodging properties, and over 1,000 telephone interviews with Wisconsin households that hosted travelers or other guests.

Summer, the period June through August, is Wisconsin's busiest and most productive tourism season, raking in \$4.9 billion during 2007. Fall, September through November comes next with \$3.1 billion, followed by spring, March-May with \$2.6 billion, and winter, December 2007 through February 2008 with \$2.2 billion.

Where are most of the tourism dollars spent? Milwaukee County leads the pack with \$1.678 billion. Next is Dane County with \$1.184 billion. During 2007, Sauk County, home of Wisconsin Dells became the third Wisconsin county to surpass the billion-dollar mark in tourism spending at \$1.047 billion.

Rounding out the state's top ten counties in traveler spending were Waukesha, Brown, Walworth, Door, Outagamie, Sheboygan and Vilas counties.

The contribution to Wisconsin businesses by travelers is significant. Wisconsin travelers spend \$3.94 billion on shopping, \$3.41 billion on food, \$2.84 billion on lodging, and \$1.61 billion on lodging.

The vast majority of travelers are here for leisure, 70 percent. The leisure category includes sporting events, casino trips group tours, festivals, and visit to families and friends. Another 19 percent were here during 2007 on business, and 11 percent attended meetings or conventions.

Over half, 53 percent of travel expenditures during 2007, \$6.7 billion was spent on overnight stays in hotels, motels, resorts, and Bed and Breakfasts (B & B's).

Another 37 percent did not spend on lodging. Instead, they fell into the category of day trippers, or they visited families and friends. Even so, they still spent \$4.71 billion, a sizeable figure for travelers just passing through. The rest of the travelers were campers or stayed in cabins, cottages or condos.

Businesses prosper. So does state employment. Wisconsin's tourism industry during 2007 supported the full-time equivalent of 200-thousand jobs and \$3.6 billion in wages and salaries, covering a wide variety of positions from entry level and part-time to management and executive slots. The Tourism Department estimates that if jobs indirectly related to tourism are factored in, the industry supports 302,000 jobs and \$7.09 billion in wages and salaries.

The contribution in taxes and fees is also substantial, \$1.422 billion to the state and \$638 million to local governments, totaling \$2.06 billion.

The Department of Tourism is banking on the state's new branding initiative to help grow Wisconsin's tourism industry. According to the Department, "The new brand platform pays tribute to Wisconsin as a place where the people are fiercely proud, passionate and loyal, and where the culture fuels creativity and embraces originality. It puts the spotlight on the Wisconsin style of hospitality and the friendly people who deliver it, giving visitors a genuine sense of belonging. This hospitality and culture of originality allow visitors to fully 'be themselves,' in other words, to relax and pursue their passions."

The brand promise reads: "Because of the passionate nature of the state's people to create fun, express themselves in original ways and feel more comfortable doing it here than anywhere else, in Wisconsin originality rules." A new theme line, advertising concepts and marketing materials will be developed based on the brand promise.

If your summer vacation plans include Wisconsin, know that you are contributing to the state economy and one of the state's largest and most successful industries.

If you have comments on this or any other issue, please contact me at [Sen.Lazich@legis.wi.gov](mailto:Sen.Lazich@legis.wi.gov) <mailto:Sen.Lazich@legis.wi.gov> , Senator Mary Lazich, State Capitol, P.O. Box 7882 Madison, WI 53707 or 1-800-334-1442.