

AMID HURRICANE HELENE RECOVERY, NC TOURISM SPENDING CHARTS VARIABLE GROWTH

Visitor spending increased for 59 of North Carolina's 100 counties in 2025



RALEIGH, NC (August 13, 2026) — Visitor spending increased for 59 of North Carolina's 100 counties in 2025, according to data released Thursday by the NC Department of Commerce. The preliminary findings from an annual study commissioned by [Visit NC](#), a unit of the [Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina](#), reflect the economic impact of tourism on local economies across the state.

Ten of the state's [11 marketing regions](#) experienced growth in visitor spending. In the three mountain regions, the numbers reflect continued resiliency in the aftermath of Hurricane Helene. The Smoky Mountains & Cherokee region, which sustained the least damage, saw the largest boost at 4.3%, driven largely by increases in Cherokee (+14%) and Macon (+11%) counties. With 2.5% growth in visitor spending, the High Country region charted a solid rebound, led by Yancey (+6%) and Ashe (+4%) counties. While Asheville & the Foothills region saw a 0.7% decline overall, notable growth was recorded in Caldwell (+7%), Burke (+6%) and Cleveland (+5%) counties.

“From the mountains to the coast, the findings underscore North Carolina’s enduring appeal to travelers,” said North Carolina Commerce Secretary Lee Lilley. “They also speak to the resilience that has fueled the mountain recovery, and we can celebrate the strength of our tourism industry, which generated \$37.2 billion in visitor spending last year.”

The findings also reinforce the goals of North Carolina's *First in Opportunity* Strategic Economic Development Plan, which recognizes vibrant communities and quality-of-place investments as key drivers of long-term economic competitiveness and regional prosperity. Tourism is an important contributor to those goals, supporting jobs, small businesses and local economies across North Carolina.

The visitor spending study, commissioned by Visit NC and conducted by Tourism Economics, provides preliminary estimates of domestic and international traveler expenditures as well as employment, payroll income, and state and local tax revenues directly generated by these expenditures. The statistical model draws on detailed data from Visit NC as well as data derived from federal and state government sources, nationally known private and non-profit travel organizations, and other travel industry sources.

KEY FINDINGS

- 2025 saw growth in visitor spending for 59 of North Carolina 100 counties compared to 2024.
- With double-digit increases, Cherokee (+13.9%) and Macon (+11.1%) helped lead the state’s 1.3% growth in visitor spending, which reached a new high of \$37.2 billion in 2025.
- Others among the state’s 100 counties that posted significant gains included Richmond (+9.7%), Chatham (+8.9%), Bertie (+8.8%), Johnston (+7.2%), Caldwell (+6.5%), New Hanover (+5.8%), Burke (+5.6%) and Yancey (+5.5%).
- Growth in direct tourism employment was also seen in about half of all counties. Jackson led all counties with a 7.3% increase. Other counties with top increases in tourism employment were Johnston (up 5.3%), Bertie (up 5.0%), Avery (up 5.0%) and Richmond (up 4.9%).
- Mecklenburg received \$6.5 billion (up 1.5%) in traveler expenditures to lead all counties. Wake ranked second with \$3.6 billion (up 2.4%). Despite a 2.1% drop, Buncombe ranked No. 3 with \$2.6 billion. No. 4 Dare dipped by 0.6% with \$2.1 billion in visitor spending.

“As much as we’d love to see growth in each of our 100 counties, the study confirms the vitality of North Carolina’s tourism economy,” said Wit Tuttell, executive director of Visit NC. “Our appeal is rooted in our culture, our natural wonders, and the creative forces that shape the experiences in each destination. Those strengths can withstand a hurricane and the economic uncertainties we’ve experienced since the pandemic. We can draw inspiration from the mountain counties that have triumphed over Helene’s challenges as we continue the effort to see every destination reach higher ground.”

Full tables can be accessed on [Visit NC's Industry site](#).

Visit North Carolina



NORTH CAROLINA TOURISM FACTS

- Total spending by domestic and international visitors in North Carolina reached \$37.2 billion in 2025. That sum represents a 1.3% increase over 2024 expenditures.
- Domestic travelers spent a record \$36.1 billion in 2025. Spending was up 1.5% from \$35.6 billion in 2024.
- International travelers spent \$1.1 billion in 2025, down 2.8% from the previous year.
- Visitors to North Carolina generated more than \$4.7 billion in federal, state, and local taxes in 2025. The total represents a 2.5% increase from 2024.
- State tax receipts from visitor spending rose 2.0% to nearly \$1.4 billion in 2025.
- Local tax receipts grew 2.6% to more than \$1.3 billion.
- Direct tourism employment in North Carolina increased 0.3% to 230,997.
- Direct tourism payroll increased 3.5% to \$9.8 billion.
- Visitors spend more than \$101 million per day in North Carolina. That spending adds \$7.5 million per day to state and local tax revenues (about \$3.8 million in state taxes and \$3.7 million in local taxes).
- Each North Carolina household saved \$605 on average in state and local taxes as a direct result of visitor spending in the state. Savings per capita averaged \$244.

ABOUT VISIT NC

Visit North Carolina, the state's official destination marketing organization, is part of the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina, a private nonprofit corporation that serves as North Carolina's economic development organization. The EDPNC focuses on business and job recruitment, existing industry support, international trade, tourism and film marketing.

The mission of Visit NC is to unify and lead the state in positioning North Carolina as a preferred destination for leisure travel, group tours, meetings and conventions, sports events and film production to maximize economic vitality statewide. Each year, North Carolina welcomes about 40 million visitors who spend more than \$37 billion during their visit. The tourism industry employs more than 230,000 people and generates more than \$2.7 billion in state and local tax revenues. For more information, travel ideas and inspiration, go to [VisitNC.com](https://www.visitnc.com).

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