



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



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CHICAGO RECORDS 86% INCREASE IN TOURISM IN 2021 COMPARED TO 2020

After re-opening in June, Chicago's tourism industry saw strong recovery despite international travel bans and COVID-19 surges.

Tourism-related employment has returned to 60% of pre-pandemic levels, and last year generated an estimated \$1.3 billion in tourism tax revenue.

CHICAGO — Mayor Lori Lightfoot and Lynn Osmond, CEO of Choose Chicago, today announced Chicago hosted 30.7 million domestic and international visitors in 2021, an 86% increase over 2020.

"I cannot overstate how proud I am of Chicago's continued recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic," Mayor Lightfoot said. "Our city was hit harder than most in the early days of the pandemic — and one of the most impacted industries was tourism. The numbers for 2021 show that visitors throughout the United States and world are hungry to return to our incredible city."

The strong recovery came despite Chicago only achieving Phase 5 reopening in mid-June 2021, the international travel ban remaining in place until mid-November, and the country enduring the Delta and Omicron surges. Additionally, Chicago theaters did not reopen until October 2021.

"We are excited to see these numbers for 2021 despite the challenges we faced," Osmond said. "It is a true testament to Chicago's resilience and strength as a top destination for tourists, businesses, and events. I have never been more confident in our ability to make a full recovery."

Domestic leisure travelers drove the recovery in 2021. This was expected due to the international and business travel restrictions in place yet is reflective of Chicago's reputation as a desired leisure destination.

Tourism-related employment has returned to 60% of pre-pandemic levels and last year generated an estimated \$1.3 billion in tourism tax revenue. Meanwhile, total tourism spending is estimated at \$9.8 billion, about half of 2019.



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The city's lodging industry similarly continued to recover. Key performance indicators for 2021 include:

- \$1.13 billion in hotel revenue
- \$127.2 million in local hotel tax revenue, 163% higher than 2020.
- Average occupancy rate in 2021 was 43%, a 63% increase over 2020, with
- Average daily room rate ending the year at 90% of pre-pandemic levels.

Business travel continues to reflect a more significant contribution moving through 2022. In May, occupancy at hotels in the central business district averaged 66%, and room rates averaged more than \$242 per night, surpassing May 2019 levels.

Additionally, McCormick Place is conservatively estimated to host 183 events in 2022, attracting 1.5 million visitors and generating \$1.8 billion in economic impact this year. Recent conventions, such as the National Restaurant Association and American Society of Clinical Oncologists, exceeded attendance expectations.

This decrease in international visitors was expected due to the U.S. ban on international travel, which was in place until November 2021. Additional policies such as the pre-flight COVID testing requirement were just recently lifted on June 12, 2022. International visitation to Chicago is expected to return to pre-COVID levels of 2.1 million by 2024.

Hotel expansion, as well, is on track for positive growth with an additional 1,338 daily rooms expected to be added to the city's inventory by the end of 2023.

"The positive momentum from 2021 has continued into 2022," said Osmond. "Looking ahead, we are going to continue to grow our share of national and international guests by showcasing the authentic and diverse experiences that Chicago offers. Simultaneously, we will engage with our neighbors, locally and regionally, to be tourists in their own town. And, finally, we will leverage our global reputation as a city where business gets done to bring new meetings and conventions to Chicago."

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