



PRESS RELEASE

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Illinois Office of Tourism Announces Robust Growth

An additional one million domestic travelers visited Illinois in 2016, bringing an increase in visitor spending, tax revenue and local jobs

Chicago, IL – The Illinois Office of Tourism announced robust growth during a press conference today kicking-off National Travel and Tourism Week (NTTW) May 7-13. In celebration of the US travel and tourism industry, an expanded *Illinois Made* program was also introduced featuring unique artisans and creators, all small business owners helping to drive tourism around the state.

Illinois Governor Bruce Rauner released domestic Illinois tourism figures for 2016, highlighting that for every \$1 invested in tourism in Illinois, it generates \$9 in economic impact.

- Illinois welcomed an additional one million visitors than 2015 (110 million total domestic visitors)
 - Of those 110 million domestic visitors, 17% of visitors were for business and 83% for leisure purposes
 - In the past 10 years, domestic travelers visiting Illinois increased by 19 million
 - Chicago experienced stronger year-over-year domestic traveler growth (2.7%) than total U.S. domestic traveler growth (2.4%)
- Domestic travelers spent nearly \$35.1 billion in Illinois during 2016, a 1.8% increase from 2015
 - In 2016, domestic travelers to Illinois generated \$2.6 billion in state and local tax revenue, an increase of \$106 million from 2015
- In 2015 and 2016, 20,000 tourism-related jobs were created in Illinois
- Domestic travel supported 302,000 jobs within Illinois, an increase of 9,600 jobs from 2015 on top of the 10,000 jobs created the previous year
- Visitor length of stay increased by 3%, higher than the US average of 2.4%

According to Skift and Peak DMC, a global travel expert network, more than 72% of consumers would rather spend money on “experiences” than things. In that light, the new *Illinois Made* “Art-is-an” interactive itineraries were created to drive tourism to the state by highlighting truly local experiences tourists can’t find anywhere else. They include:

- Illinois Made on Route 66: Cruise the state’s iconic Mother Road to experience Illinois’ best and eccentric experiences. Taste classic Illinois Made flavors and explore hidden gems along the way.
- Illinois Made Outdoor Adventures: Witness the natural wonders of Illinois state parks from Peoria and Utica to scenic bike trails in Alton and the Garden of the Gods at Shawnee National Forest.



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- Illinois Made in Chicago: Discover the latest local artisans and hangouts in Chicago’s diverse neighborhoods including Pilsen, Logan Square and Wicker Park.
- Illinois Made Local Flavors: Taste your way through Springfield, Alton and Southern Illinois through local wineries, craft brewers and hand-picked coffee spots and neighborhood restaurants.

New *Illinois Made* partnerships include a first-of-its-kind tourist attraction launching this summer on the Chicago River. Shoreline Sightseeing will offer Illinois Made themed cruises in June and August where tourists and locals can experience an authentic “Taste of Illinois” culinary cruise featuring food and beverages from *Illinois Made* artisans.

“This year’s National Travel and Tourism Week theme recognizes ‘Faces of Travel,’ saluting the amazing people behind the travel industry. Here in Illinois we want to recognize and promote more of our *Illinois Made* artisans who are small businesses and job creators helping to drive the state’s economy,” said Cory Jobe, Director of the Illinois Office of Tourism. “The expanded *Illinois Made* program will attract new visitors to explore our state, while supporting local businesses and generating important tourism spending for our communities.”

The latest Illinois Made artisans include:

- **[Optimo – Chicago, IL](#)**
Optimo owner Graham Thompson is Chicago’s last true hat maker known for handcrafting the best custom hats in the country. Thompson’s creations are worn by people around the world including Hollywood movie stars. Optimo’s hat making factory is housed in a former Chicago Fire house in Chicago’s Beverly neighborhood. Visitors to Chicago can experience Thompson’s work at his shop located in the historic Monadnock Building.
- **[Eshelman Pottery - Elizabeth, IL](#)**
Artisan Paul Eshelman’s craft is inspired by bringing everyone together around a dinner table. His pottery reflects an artful expression of the everyday, bold, innovative, austere and practical. Eshelman pottery is featured in art shows across America as well as well-reviewed restaurants, including Chef Grant Achatz’s Roister in Chicago’s Fulton Market District.
- **[Heritage Bikes – Chicago, IL](#)**
Heritage Bikes in the Lakeview neighborhood is the first bicycle manufacturer to set up shop in Chicago since Schwinn shuttered its production plant decades ago. Heritage builds around 500 bikes every year and each bike takes six weeks to assemble. Custom bike maker Mike Salvatore opened Heritage Bikes in Chicago’s Lakeview neighborhood which doubles as a café. Today Salvatore continues to grow his business customizing the Chicago commute, one made-to-order bike at a time.



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- **Blaum Brothers Distilling Company - Galena, IL**

Against their mother's wishes Matt and Mike Blaum both quit their day jobs to take their passion for good booze to a higher level. After learning everything they could about crafting fine whiskey, Blaum Brothers Distilling Company was born. Now a popular Galena tourist attraction the Blaum brothers take pride in producing highest quality spirits the old-fashioned way.

Illinois Made recognizes the artisans, products and experiences that are unique to the state. Launched in 2016, the program inspires Illinois at www.EnjoyIllinois.com/Illinoismade which encourages people to extend their travel beyond a day trip by exploring the local businesses and great attractions around the state.

The 34th annual National Travel and Tourism Week (May 7-13) unites communities across the country to celebrate what travel means to American jobs, economic growth and personal well-being. The theme of this year's NTTW, "Faces of Travel," shines a spotlight on the 15 million people who make up America's travel industry. To learn more about NTTW visit <https://www.ustravel.org/events/national-travel-and-tourism-week>

To learn more about Illinois Made and to view the latest video content and featured makers, visit www.EnjoyIllinois.com/Illinoismade or www.Facebook.com/EnjoyIllinois.

Note to media: For more information and to download images, visit <http://media.enjoyillinois.com>.

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The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Office of Tourism manages industry efforts that result in sustainable and significant economic and quality-of-life benefits for Illinois residents.



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