

ADVOCATING FOR OUR INDUSTRY

Experience Champaign-Urbana's mission states that we will promote a welcoming destination for visitors to strengthen economic opportunity and enhance the lives of residents. A significant portion of our funding to fulfill this mission comes from tax dollars generated by visitors while in our destination. Advocating for these dollars is a daily activity as we work to execute our mission and vision.

Advocacy within the tourism industry involves communicating the value and benefits of tourism to stakeholders, including elected officials, policymakers, and the public, to support the industry and its initiatives. It involves promoting policies and initiatives that benefit the sector, including supporting a skilled workforce and addressing industry threats while highlighting tourism's economic and cultural value. Tourism advocacy helps ensure that the industry's needs and interests are considered in policy decisions, which can lead to increased investment, better infrastructure, and a more favorable environment for tourism businesses and destinations.

Examples of advocacy efforts include:

- Meeting with local, state, and national leaders to discuss the importance of tourism to the economy.
- Presenting data and research to demonstrate the financial returns of tourism investments.
- Working with local communities to ensure that tourism benefits everyone.
- Advocating for better infrastructure and services to support tourism.
- Promoting attractions and partners.
- Seeking local input.
- Sharing stories with future visitors.

We advocate for the industry and our community through legislative outreach as a member of the Illinois Destinations Association (IDA), which is made up of 38 CVBs around Illinois. This could involve lobby days in Springfield, alongside communicating with our elected officials throughout the year. Recently, we contacted Senator Paul Faraci about SB1967 in his role as Chair of the Senate Commerce Committee. The bill involves receiving timely grant funding to avoid lost opportunities to compete for events and administrative hardships.



Johnathan Williams from Congresswoman Budzinski's office



2024 Champaign County First advocacy trip

We also actively participate in national advocacy and legislative outreach through Destinations International with Jayne DeLuce serving on the DI Advocacy Committee, as well as the DI Foundation Board. We also participate in U.S. Travel Association's National Travel & Tourism Week to shine a spotlight on the contributions of the U.S. travel industry, showcasing how travel drives economic growth, cultivates vibrant communities, and enriches the lives of Americans nationwide.

On April 27-30, Jayne will travel with other members of Champaign County First (governmental and private entity leaders) to Washington, D.C. to advocate for community infrastructure projects, followed by a day trip to Springfield on May 8 to talk with our state elected officials and associations.

In an era of more need for public support and a growing need for transparency, it is more essential than ever for destination organizations to make an emotional and value-based appeal. This supports our message of return on investment by demonstrating that we are providing the people in our community with new opportunities for work, economic development, and public services.

our **IMPACT**

Tourism generated
\$666.9
million in visitor spending

Directly supporting
5,033
JOBS in our communities

Generating
\$172.7
million in **PAYROLL**

Investing
\$19.3
million in local taxes
INTO THE COMMUNITY

From Our CEO



As we quickly moved through a really busy third quarter filled with events and community outreach, it's important we keep the big picture in mind, which is why I'm thrilled that the ECU Board approved our Destination 2028 strategic plan during the April board meeting with the following goals:

- Enhance our destination and community engagement.
- Structure partnership/supporter program to strengthen economic opportunity.
- Amplify our stories.
- Build a high-performance sales program.
- Strengthen our organization, team, and boards.

Working alongside our destination partners and the community, the future is bright as we continue to focus on our core values: spark, illumination, and brilliance.

I spoke with destination partners: Champaign City Council on January 28 and Savoy Village Board on February 5 to wrap up several months of partner presentations, only to turn around and start mapping out the FY26 budget with pivotal financial support from those same partners.

Thank you to I Hotel & Illinois Conference Center for hosting our January ECU Board meeting, to the brand-new Urbana Health & Wellness Center for hosting our February Board meeting, and to Farnsworth Group for hosting our March Board meeting.

We are grateful for our board leadership, our partners, and our workforce as we build bigger tables to foster a place where residents and visitors feel a shared sense of belonging. When we come together to create more inclusive and welcoming spaces, we all win!

Jayne DeLuce



CCAAHT Community Tours

The Champaign County African American Heritage Trail launched their first community tour on February 17. Led by Estella, the tour took over 30 community members to various places of significance in Champaign-Urbana. Additional tours were also held for sponsors and stakeholders of the Trail. Additionally, Estella collaborated with Champaign Unit 4 School District for a tour for 70 second graders from Stratton Academy for the Arts.

Through expanding the trail, we have also reached outside organizations, including Lincoln Academy of Illinois, Lumpkin Family Foundation, and more. Before a ceremony recognizing this year's Lincoln Laureates, including local five-time Olympic gold medalist Bonnie Blair, we will provide a tour, taking Laureates and their families around the Champaign and Urbana area to learn about our local African American History. This tour will focus on impactful women as this year's class of Laureates is all female. For the second year in a row, we will be providing a tour to community members through the Healing Illinois grant, coordinated by Abby Hobbs. **Stay tuned here** for additional opportunities for community tours!

Foundation Update

The ECU Foundation focused on plans for the upcoming Toast to Tourism: Celebrating Community Brilliance on May 7, 4:30–6:00 p.m. at the Hilton Garden Inn. This newly rebranded event serves as a fundraiser for the Foundation to support our capacity to host large-scale visitor events, assist film productions, attract new residents, and develop the Champaign County African American Heritage Trail. Please join us for the Brilliant Spirit Awards, community updates presented in a Pecha Kucha format, and food from local businesses. Purchase tickets at: experienceecu.org/toasttotourism

JOIN US

TOAST TO
Tourism
CELEBRATING COMMUNITY BRILLIANCE

May 7, 2025 • 4:30–6:00 p.m.
Hilton Garden Inn • 1501 S. Neil St., Champaign
Program begins promptly at 5:00 p.m.

SUPPORTING THE

EXPERIENCE
CHAMPAIGN
URBANA
FOUNDATION

Celebrating our Brilliant Spirit Awards • Taste of our Community • PechaKucha-Style Community Updates
\$10 per person • RSVP by April 29 • experienceecu.org/toasttotourism

Presenting Sponsor

OSF HEALTHCARE

Event Sponsors

ClarkOletz

Farnsworth Group

Hickory

SERRA

STERLING

U of I

First State

First Federal

Hilton Garden Inn

Yarbo

551

2 | April 2025 | experienceecu.org

Out & About

IHSA Wrestling & Basketball Wrap-Ups

ECU hosted two IHSA championship events this quarter: individual wrestling and boys basketball. Wrestling attracted 672 wrestlers from across the state, welcoming 36,000 fans through the turnstiles at State Farm Center over the three-day event. A few weeks later, IHSA Boys State Basketball returned to the State Farm Center as the first year of a new five-year contract. This year featured a revised schedule that kept teams in town for at least one overnight stay, enhancing the overall economic impact of the event. Each team received a community host to ensure a positive experience in our community, while fans enjoyed activities in the All Star Zone.

Illinois Destinations Associations Meeting

Gina, Robert, and Cristy attended the Spring IDA meeting in Springfield in March, which provided an opportunity to collaborate with our tourism counterparts and learn about IDOT initiatives and tourism grants that will impact our community. Discussions included Illinois events and programming to celebrate the 250th Anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, short-term rental policies and tax revenue, and Main Street partnerships. Natalie Phelps Finnie, Director of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, gave an update on revitalization projects across the state, including improvements to Lincoln's New Salem State Historic Site and Illinois Beach State Park in Lake County. The Illinois Office of Tourism shared the upcoming international and domestic media and advertising plan to support Route 66 road trip travel in 2026.

Quadball National Qualifier

After successfully hosting the US Quadball Midwest Qualifier in 2023, the organization returned to the Rantoul Sports Complex to hold US Quadball's National Qualifier in early March. Nineteen teams, including the Illini Quadball team, competed for a place in the Quadball Cup.

Middle School Basketball

ECU partnered with State Basketball Championships to host the 2025 Illinois Middle School Basketball Championships. 187 teams from across the state competed at the ARC, Leonhard and Martens Rec Centers, St. Thomas More High School, JW Eater Jr. High School, and Brookens Center. The tournament continues to grow each year with increased team participation, bringing over \$2 million in economic impact.



National Intercollegiate Wheelchair Basketball Championships

The State Farm Center saw more basketball action at the end of March as they hosted the National Intercollegiate Wheelchair Basketball Championships, returning after hosting in 2019. ECU assisted with hotel blocks for the 17 competing teams and provided signs to boost the welcoming atmosphere. We provided community information for two days of the tournament, encouraging fans to visit our local amenities. We were excited to see wins from both Fighting Illini Men's and Women's Wheelchair Basketball teams!



Rotary Lithuanian Group Visit

The Rotary Club of Champaign hosted several visitors from Lithuania as part of the Rotary's Open World/Congressional Office from International Leaders. The group was focused on accessibility and inclusion, so they stopped in the ECU office to talk to Terri about the Accessible CU program. They were very excited to learn about our efforts in promoting and sharing accessible destinations across our region as a model for their communities.

CEO Summit

Jayne was grateful to participate in the Destinations International Board meetings and CEO Summit on March 23-25 in Savannah, GA. Education centered around global uncertainty, leadership, measuring DMO value, metrics, and fans' first experience (via the Savannah Bananas president!) An added bonus was the azaleas in full bloom and an immersive experience at the historic Lucas Theatre for the Arts.





New to CU Mixer

Our winter New to CU Mixer, held at Triptych Brewing in February and sponsored by the Village of Savoy, attracted over 70 new residents and members of the Champaign Welcome Crew to mingle in a relaxed atmosphere. Food from Watson's Shack & Rail and plenty of local brews from Triptych created the ideal setting for new residents to learn more about the area and forge new connections.

Film Workshop on Casting

Continuing our series on Film in Champaign County, our March workshop featured Bokeh Background Casting at Phillips Rec Center. The workshop drew 44 people who aspire to be background cast members for locally produced films. Presenter Sarah Cayce provided an engaging look at the film industry's standards and procedures for background cast.

Sales & Marketing Efforts

RCMA Conference

Gina attended the Religious Conference Management Association conference in Phoenix, AZ, during the first week of January. This conference and tradeshow bring together religious meeting planners from across the country with venues and DMOs. Experience Champaign-Urbana participated in an Illinois aisle with seven other Illinois destinations from across the state. The "Meet Illinois" DMOs also hosted a private dinner for twenty-six tour operators during the conference. Gina met with 48 meeting planners who were at the conference, sourcing locations for upcoming regional meetings, conferences, and conventions.

American Bus Association

The American Bus Association Marketplace, held in Philadelphia, February 1-4, is one of the largest group motorcoach conferences in the country, hosting suppliers, destinations, and operators from across the US. Robert attended, representing various area attractions that would draw group travel such as Hardy's Reindeer Ranch, Prairie Fruit Farms & Creamery, Krannert Art Museum, Amish Country, Allerton Park & Retreat Center, and the Champaign County African American Heritage Trail. Sample itineraries were provided during 39 one-on-one appointments where Robert established new relationships and maintained existing business. Tour Illinois hosted a dinner with 30 tour operators and 11 Illinois CVBs in attendance, providing an intimate gathering with food and bingo that highlighted each of the destinations. Robert returned with solid leads that will turn into definite tours and experiences.

MarComm Summit

Terri and Cristy met with their peers at the annual Destinations International MarComm Summit in Austin, TX. This continuing education conference features a variety of topics, with a heavy focus on AI and crisis communication this year. This conference provides an excellent opportunity to learn and network from DMOs across North America.



SPORTS, EVENTS, & FILM

0

leads

2

tentative

6

definite

CONFERENCES

7

leads

6

tentative

6

definite

GROUP TOUR

0

leads

0

tentative

2

definite

LEAD: A sales prospect with active client discussion. Could also be an active proposal where the RFP has yet to be submitted.

TENTATIVE: RFP or bid proposal has been submitted, waiting for feedback or confirmation from client.

DEFINITE: Event proposal is signed, hotel bid proposal(s) signed or pending.





Restaurant Week's Biggest Year

The 2025 Champaign-Urbana Area Restaurant Week was our largest yet, with 60 restaurants participating from the region. We saw new participation from fifteen restaurants, several of which were on the University of Illinois campus, giving students more access to the event. The website saw over 56,000 pageviews with 5.22 pages per user. During the event, we utilized several new advertising opportunities that included CTV ads (streaming) as well as co-op ads through e-mail marketing and the News-Gazette. Restaurant Week will return January 30-February 6, 2026.



Mocktail Passport

Adding to our list of Experience Passes, we launched our CU Mocktail Trail passport in the midst of Dry January. Many local bars and restaurants have adapted their cocktail menus to be more inclusive for those looking for non-alcoholic options. This passport highlights over two dozen spots around the C-U area that have thoughtfully crafted NA mocktails. Upon it's launch, over 220 people have signed up. Continued promotion throughout the year will shine a spotlight on those businesses that are building an accessible and inclusive environment.

Social Media & Web Stats



Facebook

New to CU Mixer
13,207 reach
54 reactions

12,541

Followers



Instagram

CU Mocktail Trail
2,547 views
52 reactions
11 shares

9,169

Followers



BlueSky

Jose Vasquez Mural
6 likes
1 share

130

Followers



Instagram— CCAAHT

Community Tour
9,232 views
141 reactions
20 shares

604

Followers

WEBSITE REPORT

110,094 Page Views
2,964 Clicks on Page
24,635 Total Users
21,328 Users via Organic Search

TOP VISITED PAGES

Restaurant Week
Calendar of Events
Our Stories
Food & Drink
Hotels & Motels

71.2%

of website traffic is from outside the greater Champaign-Urbana area

27.5%

is from outside of Illinois
Top States: Texas, Indiana, Missouri



Lodging + Visitor Data

Reporting January–March 2025 | Data provided by Zartico
Based on 19,578 credit cards and 26,438 mobile devices observed.

HOTELS SHORT TERM VACATION RENTALS

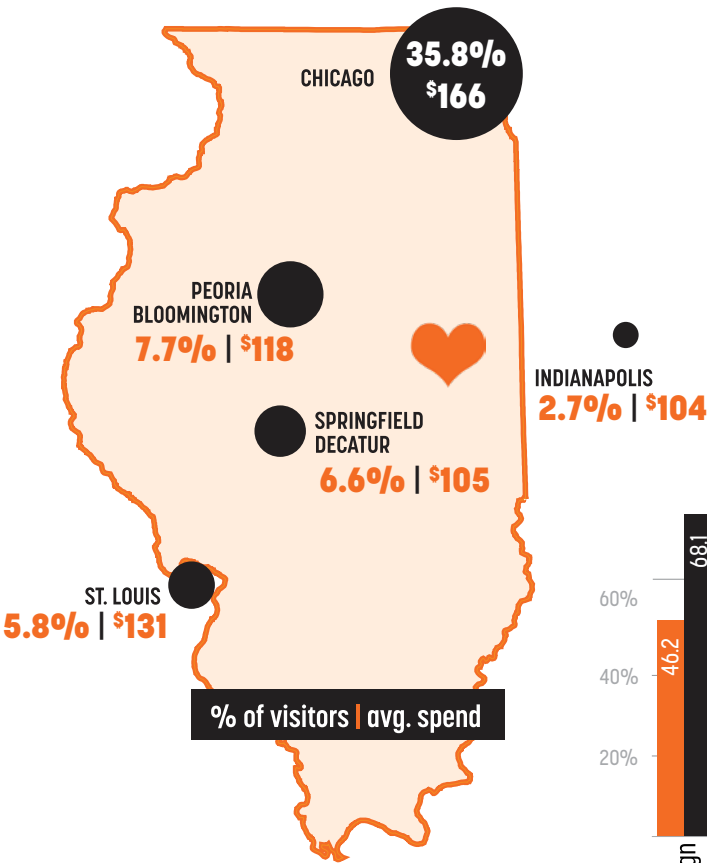
	AVERAGE STAY VALUE	AVERAGE OCCUPANCY	AVERAGE LENGTH OF STAY (in days)	DEMAND (in thousands)
Champaign	\$488.33	27%	3.9	16.9
	\$245.00	59%	2.1	94.6
Rockford	\$693.33	33%	5.5	9.6
	\$227.67	57%	2.0	82.2
Peoria	\$357.33	39%	3.7	10.7
	\$263.00	53%	1.9	106.9
Bloomington	\$489.33	33%	4.2	4.8
Normal	\$209.67	51%	1.7	92.1

VISITOR % OF TOTAL
16.3%
of all mobile devices
observed that were visitors

VISITOR SPEND OF TOTAL
17.6%
of all spend came
from visitors

% OF VISITOR SPEND
towards local businesses
27%

41.9% of visitors were from
out-of-state.



VISITOR IMPACT



35%

visitor spend of total

\$73

avg. visitor spend



16%

visitor spend of total

\$103

avg. visitor spend



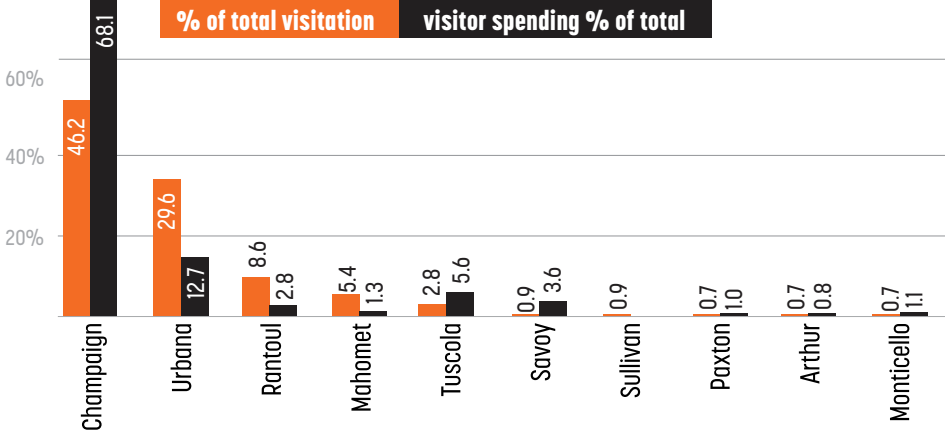
32%

visitor spend of total

\$38

avg. visitor spend

VISITATION & SPENDING BY CITY



OUR MISSION

We promote a welcoming destination experience for visitors to strengthen economic opportunity and enhance the lives of residents.

Partners

DESTINATION FOUNDER

Illinois Office of Tourism // City of Champaign
University of Illinois

DESTINATION LEADER

Busey // Carle // City of Urbana // Village of Rantoul

DESTINATION BUILDER

Champaign County // Village of Savoy

DESTINATION BACKER

Lynne & Dick Barnes // Champaign County Forest Preserves
Champaign Park District // Farnsworth Group
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Hilton Garden Inn & Conference Center // I Hotel & Illinois
Conference Center // Illinois American Water
Lenschow Insurance & Financial Services
Max & Betty Mitchell // Janet & Doug Nelson
OSF Healthcare // Parkland College // Robeson Family
Benefit Fund // Tuscola Chamber & Tourism // Urbana Park
District // Village of Mahomet // Village of St. Joseph

REGIONAL PARTNERS

Amish Country of Illinois
Make It Monticello
City of Paxton

For information on our Destination Partner Program and
how you can support our mission visit:

experiencecu.org/partners

Experience Champaign-Urbana Team

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2024-2025

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