



Old Mill Spring



Whitaker Point



Thorncrow Chapel

ARKANSAS TOURISM TICKER



Editor's note: The Arkansas Tourism Ticker is sponsored by the Arkansas Hospitality Association.



Arlington Hotel



Big Piney

ARKANSAS TOURISM *TICKER*



Roby Brock

WHY THE TICKER?

Arkansas' tourism industry is an important economic engine for the state, and is often cited as Arkansas' second largest industry – behind agriculture.

There are many reports and economic indices to measure several areas of the state's economy. Talk Business & Politics issues a monthly housing report (The Arkansas Home Sales Report). The University of Arkansas issues a quarterly report on economic activity, and has published reports on the economic impact of the Fayetteville Shale Play. There are reports to measure public opinion on various social issues.

But there has not been an independent report looking at the health of the state's tourism sector. Therefore, Talk Business & Politics decided to work with officials in the state's travel and tourism sector to capture some indication of the relative health of the industry.

The inaugural Ticker report showed that 2014 hospitality tax revenue in the cities was up 3.7% over 2013; Arkansas' 2% tourism tax revenue in 2014 was up 7.48% compared to 2013; and jobs in the state's travel and tourism sector were up 6.5% in 2014 compared to 2013.



Arkansas Tourism Ticker: Tourism industry sets new records in 2015

By Talk Business & Politics Staff

Tourism and business travel in Arkansas during 2015 created new highs in the collection of the state's 2% tourism tax and the number employed in the sector. Also, hospitality tax collections were up more than 7% in the 17 cities reviewed for the Arkansas Tourism Ticker.

The Arkansas Tourism Ticker is managed by *Talk Business & Politics*, and is published every two months, or six times a year. The ticker uses the following three measurements to review the health of the state's tourism industry.

- Hospitality tax collections – prepared food tax and lodging tax – of 17 Arkansas cities (cities listed below along with collections for each city);
- Tourism sector employment numbers as reported by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; and
- Collections of Arkansas' 2% statewide tourism tax.

Montine McNulty, executive director of the Arkansas Hospitality Association, said the ticker confirms that investments in advertising and promotion efforts are paying off.

"The numbers for 2015 are great news for Arkansas hospitality businesses. The state 2% tax collected from travelers is up over 7% and employment is up over 5%. This means that our state's tourism plan and investment of tax dollars in advertising and promotion is growing the Arkansas economy and increasing jobs," McNulty said. "Tourism is leading the state's economy in growth, and Arkansas businesses are also doing a better job with customer service and our product has improved. There is more to come."

Results for the 2015 full year ticker report are:

2015 vs. 2014

7.41% increase



Hospitality tax revenue in 2015 of 17 Arkansas cities reviewed for the Arkansas Tourism Ticker

8.31% increase



Collections of Arkansas' 2% statewide tourism tax in 2015 over 2014

5.04% increase



Increase in Arkansas' tourism industry jobs in 2015 compared to 2014



Hospitality Taxes

The combined hospitality tax collections in the 17 cities totaled \$43.275 million in 2015, up 7.41% compared to 2014. The gains were equal among hotel and prepared food tax collections.































Restaurant (prepared food tax) tax collections among the 17 cities totaled \$32.047 million in 2015, up 7.39% compared to the \$29.84 million in 2014. Hotel tax collections among the 17 cities totaled \$11.227 million in 2015, up 7.44% compared to the \$10.45 million during 2014.

During the 2015, Texarkana was the only city among the 17 cities surveyed for the Arkansas Tourism Ticker to post an annual decline in collections. Percentage changes for the cities during the year ranged from a decline of 0.86% in Texarkana to a high of 30.2% in El Dorado.



The list of cities and collections:

( restaurant &  hotel)

- Bentonville  
- Conway  
- El Dorado 
- Eureka Springs  
- Fayetteville  
- Fort Smith 
- Harrison  
- Hot Springs  
- Jacksonville  
- Jonesboro 
- Little Rock  
- North Little Rock  
- Pine Bluff  
- Rogers 
- Russellville 
- Springdale 
- Texarkana  
- Van Buren  



Statewide Tourism Tax

Collections of Arkansas' 2% tourism tax in 2015 totaled \$14.815 million, up 8.31% compared to the \$13.677 million in 2014. The record collections marked the first time the tax topped \$14 million and marks the fifth consecutive year of year-over-year gains of the tax.

Following are the past six years of 2% tax collections.

2015: \$14.815 million

2014: \$13.677 million

2013: \$12.716 million

2012: \$12.404 million

2011: \$12.025 million

2010: \$11.492 million



Following are the top 10 counties in terms of collecting 2% tourism tax between January and November (latest detailed county numbers available), and the percentage increase/decrease from the same period in 2014.

Pulaski: ↓ \$2.958 million down 1.17%

Benton: ↑ \$1.669 million up 14.35%

Garland: ↑ \$1.322 million up 18.81%

Washington: ↑ \$1.125 million up 39.02%

Carroll: ↑ \$674,538 up 5.39%

Sebastian: ↑ \$501,045 up 3.23%

Faulkner: ↓ \$340,343 down 0.58%

Baxter: ↑ \$344,501 up 11.18%

Craighead: ↓ \$327,298 down 3.16%

Crittenden: ↓ \$312,928 down 11.71%

Tourism Job Numbers

The monthly jobs average in the state's travel and tourism sector during 2015 was 113,500, up 5.04% compared to an average of 108,050 during 2014.

Travel and tourism sector employment ranged from a low of 112,000 in October to a high of 116,000 in December. The December level, if not revised, set a new record for the sector. Travel and tourism sector employment during 2014 ranged from a 106,200 low in January to a high of 113,100 in December.

Job growth in the sector has been significant during the past 10 years. December employment of 116,000 is up 21.8% compared to December 2005 employment of 95,200.

Of the eight metro areas in or connected to Arkansas, the Bureau of Labor Statistics provides tourism employment data on five. The Fort Smith and Memphis-West Memphis areas were the only metro areas to see travel and tourism sector employment declines in 2015 compared to 2014. The Memphis-West Memphis area is the only one of the metro areas to see a decline in 2015 compared to 2010.



Following are comparisons of the monthly employment averages during the years noted.

Northwest Arkansas

2015: **23,140**
2014: **21,990**
2010: **18,150**

Fort Smith

2015: **8,700**
2014: **9,110**
2010: **8,450**

Central Arkansas (Little Rock-North Little Rock-Conway)

2015: **34,100**
2014: **32,300**
2010: **29,760**

Memphis-West Memphis

2015: **64,240**
2014: **64,860**
2010: **65,090**

Texarkana (Arkansas-Texas)

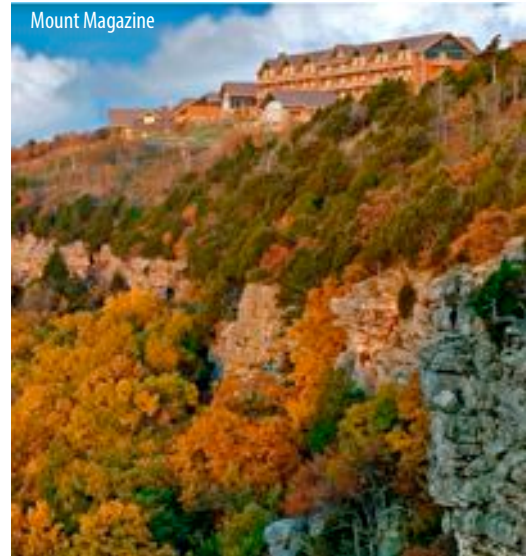
2015: **6,510**
2014: **6,240**
2010: **5,750**



Tourism Tax Collections (by city)

CITIES AND COLLECTION AMOUNTS

| 2015 | 2014 | |
|---|------------------|-------------------|
| Bentonville \$2.145 million | \$1.888 million | up 13.9% |
| Conway \$3.832 million | \$3.569 million | up 7.36% |
| El Dorado \$381,471 | \$292,886 | up 30.2% |
| Eureka Springs \$1.32 million | \$1.23 million | up 7.3% |
| Fayetteville \$3.066 million | \$2.717 million | up 12.8% |
| Fort Smith \$799,821 | \$761,826 | up 4.98% |
| Harrison \$639,922 | \$620,663 | up 3.1% |
| Hot Springs \$5.784 million | \$5.291 million | up 9.3% |
| Jonesboro \$639,096 | \$558,074 | up 14.5% |
| Little Rock \$13.153 million | \$12.605 million | up 4.3% |
| North Little Rock \$6.603 million | \$6.173 million | up 6.96% |
| Pine Bluff \$1.626 million | \$1.501 million | up 8.3% |
| Rogers \$823,680 | \$741,662 | up 11.05% |
| Russellville \$419,905 | \$370,367 | up 13.3% |
| Springdale \$426,905 | \$376,156 | up 13.5% |
| Texarkana \$1.149 million | \$1.159 million | down 0.86% |
| Van Buren \$454,817 | \$430,084 | up 5.75% |





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Contact Roby Brock at robby@talkbusiness.net for approval requests.

