



Arkansas Tourism Ticker



January-October 2021



sponsored by the Arkansas Hospitality Association



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**Following are recent reports
from Arkansas' tourism industry.**

Gina Gemberling named interim CEO of LRCVB

The Little Rock Advertising & Promotion Commission named Gina Gemberling as interim President & CEO of the Little Rock Convention & Visitors Bureau (LRCVB). On Jan. 26, current President & CEO Gretchen Hall announced she would be departing the post March 22 to take on the role of Chief Operating Officer for Destinations International. (Jan. 28)

Bass Reeves impersonator Baridi Nkokheli has died

Baridi Nkokheli, the former Fort Smith Sanitation Director whose impersonation of legendary lawman Bass Reeves helped raise awareness of the historic figure and money for a Reeves statue now in downtown Fort Smith, has died. Nkokheli, hired as sanitation director in 2005 and the first African American to lead a city department, depicted Marshal Reeves since 2007 on behalf of the city of Fort Smith and worked with the Bass Reeves Legacy Initiative to raise funds for the Reeves statue. (Jan. 24)

Arkansas Symphony Orchestra unveils plan for \$9 million music center

The Arkansas Symphony Orchestra (ASO) has announced plans for a new \$9 million, 20,000-square-foot music center in Little Rock's East Village. The state-of-the-art facility will be named the Stella Boyle Smith Music Center and will expand ASO's capacity for education programming and additional musical offerings. (Jan. 12)

Shea Lewis named director of Arkansas State Parks

Shea Lewis was named as the new director of Arkansas State Parks. He replaces Grady Spann, who retired at the end of December. Lewis began in the role on Jan. 3 at a salary of \$120,002. Lewis brings 24 years of experience with Arkansas State Parks, both in day-to-day operations and in executive leadership roles. He currently serves as deputy director, a position he has held since 2017. (Jan. 3) **TBP**



Arkansas' tourism tax likely to set new record, but hotel numbers lag

The good news about Arkansas' tourism industry is the state's 2% tourism tax is on pace to top the \$20 million mark for the first time in 2021. The not-so-good news is tourism job numbers are 8.3% below pre-pandemic levels and hotel tax revenue still lags.

Arkansas' 2% tourism tax revenue between January and October was \$17.582 million, up 50% compared with the \$11.72 million in the same period in 2020 and up 15.6% over the same period in 2019. The 2019 collections set a record for the tax. Collections of the tax set monthly records for the six months between March and October. July set a new series record for the tax with \$2.486 million in revenue from the tax.

January-October hospitality tax collections among 17 cities surveyed for the Arkansas Tourism Ticker were up 30.1% compared with the same period in 2020, and up 5.6% compared with the same period in 2019, according to the Arkansas Tourism Ticker.

The tourism industry entered 2021 following a year in which the COVID-19 pandemic shuttered much of the state and national economy for much of the year. The state's 2% tourism tax revenue fell almost 23% in 2020, and fell to levels not seen since 2014. 2019 set several records for the sector in terms of hospitality tax revenue and job gains, and marked the fifth consecutive year of growth as measured by the Arkansas Tourism Ticker.

The Arkansas Tourism Ticker is managed by Talk Business & Politics, and sponsored by the Arkansas Hospitality Association. 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. **TBP**

Results for the January-October 2021 Tourism Ticker report



30.1% increase

Hospitality tax revenue in January-October 2021 among 17 Arkansas cities reviewed for the Arkansas Tourism Ticker compared with the same period in 2020.



50% increase

Collections of Arkansas' 2% statewide tourism tax in January-October 2021 compared with the same period in 2020.



7.6% increase

Gain in monthly average of Arkansas' tourism industry jobs in January-October 2021 compared with the same period in 2020.

Hospitality tax revenue up 51.5% in all 17 cities surveyed

The combined hospitality tax collections in the 17 cities totaled \$47.84 million in January-October 2021, up 30.1% compared with \$36.78 million in the same period in 2020, and up 5.6% from January-October 2019 revenue of \$45.3 million.

Restaurant (prepared food tax) tax collections among the 17 cities totaled \$36.57 million in January-October 2021, well ahead of \$29.33 million in the same period of 2020. The revenue also was up 10.5% compared with what were previous record collections of \$33.08 million in the same period of 2019.

Hotel tax collections among the 17 cities totaled \$11.27 million in January-October 2021, up 51.5% compared with \$7.44 million in the same period of 2020. Hotel tax collections are down 7.7% compared with the previous record of \$12.217 million in the same period of 2019.

All 17 cities surveyed for the Arkansas Tourism Ticker posted hospitality tax collection increases in January-October 2021. The range of gains was 84.3% in Russellville and 20.8% in Little Rock. **TBP**

Following are the past 11 years of 2% tax collections

2020: \$13.61 million	2014: \$13.67 million
2019: \$17.6 million	2013: \$12.71 million
2018: \$16.42 million	2012: \$12.4 million
2017: \$15.89 million	2011: \$12.02 million
2016: \$15.46 million	2010: \$11.49 million

Tourism tax collections by county



Following are the top 10 counties in terms of 2% tourism tax collections in January-October 2021, and the percentage increase/decrease compared with the same period in 2020.

Pulaski		\$3.3 million up 54%
Garland		\$1.97 million up 52.1%
Benton		\$1.66 million up 49.8%
Washington		\$1.28 million up 70.5%
Carroll		\$1.05 million up 44.9%
Sebastian		\$690,353 up 64.2%
Crittenden		\$624,052 up 60.7%
Baxter		\$500,683 up 18%
Craighead		\$459,002 up 56.6%
Faulkner		447,838 up 67.2%



Tourism job numbers up over 2020 levels, still behind 2019 employment

Monthly average tourism sector jobs in January-October 2021 was 111,500, up 7.6% compared with 103,650 in the same period of 2020. The 2021 period is on the average 10,160 jobs less, or down 8.3%, compared with the same period in 2019. The sector first reached record monthly employment of 122,900 in December 2019, then fell precipitously to an estimated 75,100 in April 2020.

Of the eight metro areas in or connected to Arkansas, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics provides tourism employment data on five. Three of the five posted employment gains compared with the same period in 2020. Of the five, only the Northwest Arkansas metro had tourism jobs above the pre-pandemic period in 2019. Following is the average monthly employment during the first eight months of 2021 for the five metro regions. **TBP**

Monthly employment averages

Northwest Arkansas

January-October 2021: **26,500**

(up 8.2% compared with the same 2020 period)

January-October 2020: **24,500**

January-October 2019: **26,000**

January-October 2010: **18,070**

Fort Smith

January-October 2021: **8,980**

(up 3.6%)

January-October 2020: **8,670**

January-October 2019: **9,550**

January-October 2010: **8,450**

Central Arkansas

(Little Rock-North Little Rock-Conway)

January-October 2021: **30,250**

(up 1.85%)

January-October 2020: **29,700**

January-October 2019: **35,590**

January-October 2010: **29,670**



Memphis-West Memphis

(Arkansas-Tennessee-Mississippi)

January-October 2021: **60,900**

(up 0.8%)

January-October 2020: **60,400**

January-October 2019: **73,000**

January-October 2010: **64,950**

Texarkana

(Arkansas-Texas)

January-October 2021: **6,600**

(up 4.7%)

January-October 2020: **6,300**

January-October 2019: **7,100**

January-October 2010: **5,720**



Tourism Tax Collections (among 17 cities)

CITY	January-October 2021	January-October 2020	% CHANGE
Bentonville	\$2.24 million	\$1.52 million	up 47.7%
Conway	\$4.28 million	\$3.38 million	up 26.5%
El Dorado	\$262,252	\$214,813	up 22.1%
Eureka Springs	\$1.67 million	\$1.05 million	up 59.8%
Fayetteville	\$6.71 million	\$4.92 million	up 36.4%
Fort Smith	\$807,296	\$544,627	up 48.2%
Harrison	\$722,812	\$541,369	up 33.5%
Hot Springs	\$6.91 million	\$5.18 million	up 33.3%
Jonesboro	\$641,326	\$468,840	up 36.8%
Little Rock	\$12.12 million	\$10.03 million	up 20.8%
North Little Rock	\$6.83 million	\$5.36 million	up 27.4%
Pine Bluff	\$1.59 million	\$1.28 million	up 24.4%
Rogers	\$696,436	\$550,921	up 26.4%
Russellville	\$404,369	\$219,405	up 84.3%
Springdale	\$341,077	\$238,963	up 42.7%
Texarkana	\$1.3 million	\$967,543	up 34.4%
Van Buren	\$619,451	\$491,168	up 26.1%





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