

Central Texas tourism is thriving

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Tourism pumped \$2.8 billion into the local Austin area economy last year and created thousands of jobs, according to a recently completed tourism study.

The latest study reveals that Austin's tourism industry is thriving, according to the Austin Convention & Visitors Bureau.

Last year, the Austin area attracted 18.9 million visitors. To compare, Austin attracted 17 million visitors in 2003. Tourism created an economic impact of \$2.2 billion that year.

ACVB commissioned the tourism study, which was released in phases and is now complete.

The study, which was led by research firm Global Insight, looks at tourists who stay overnight or travel more than 50 miles for a day trip.

Leisure tourism now accounts for 55 percent of the Austin area market, with business travelers making up the rest.

"In 2003, our industry was still recovering from the effects of 9-11 and struggles in the national and local economies," says Bob Lander, President and CEO of the Austin CVB. "Once again, we're leading the state's major cities in hotel occupancy rates and attracting larger national conventions to the city...These figures certainly validate Austin as one of the country's emerging premier destinations."

Austin-Round Rock's hotel occupancy rate -- an industry measuring stick -- ended 2006 at a healthy 62.7%. The Austin metro occupancy was at 66.4 percent in 2006. Both occupancy rates were higher than the state's average, which was at 61.1 percent in 2006.

Locally, the tourism industry has grown in the past few years, replacing manufacturing as the city's fifth largest economic sector, according to ACVB.

The sector also created 10,000 new jobs over the last three years.

Additionally, the sector was a boon to local governments, which received \$200 million from tourism-related taxes in 2006.

Courtesy of JB Goodwin