



Minnesota's Parks, Trails, and Tourism

Tourism in Minnesota is big business. Every day throughout the state, tourists spend \$34 million on travel, lodging, souvenirs, and recreation. Annually, these sales accumulate to \$12.5 billion, account for \$4.3 billion in local wages, and contribute \$811 million in state sales taxes. These numbers are not inconsequential: tourism generates nearly 20% of the state's sales tax revenues and supports over 10% of Minnesota's private sector employment. Promoting tourism is popular and cost effective. Nearly all Minnesotans (94%) believe tourism is important to the economy, and Explore Minnesota estimates that every \$1 invested in state tourism marketing returns \$8 in state and local taxes, \$22 in local wages, and \$84 in gross sales.

Outdoor recreation is a significant driver of tourism. Other than ensuring a location is safe, "scenic beauty" is Americans top preference in a vacation destination. Additionally, a significant portion of leisure travelers participate in nature-based activities during their trip. Among Minnesota tourists, nearly half participate in outdoor



activities, nearly a fifth visit a state or national park, and 12 of Minnesota's top 35 most visited attractions are state parks. When tourists in Minnesota are asked what they are visiting, state parks rank second only to friends and family.

Out-of-state residents account for nearly 20% of state park visitors, generate \$75 million business sales during their trip, and support 757 private-sector jobs. Minnesota's state trails are another huge draw: While results vary by location, between 20% and 70% of tourists surveyed along state trails say the trail itself was the main reason for their trip. In sum, out-of-state

residents spend \$440 million along Minnesota's non-motorized trails every year, supporting over 7,000 jobs for Minnesotans.

Considering Americans' enjoyment of outdoor recreation, investing in public lands is a boon for private providers of leisure and hospitality services. Minnesota counties with abundant outdoor recreation opportunities generate more than double the leisure and hospitality sales than do counties with few recreation opportunities. The National Association of State Park Directors estimates that every dollar spent on state parks results in an \$8 return in tourism dollars for local communities.

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What do Americans do on their leisure trips?

- 45% Go to a beach or lake
- 34% Visit an historical place or attraction
- 25% Visit a state or local park
- 23% Visit a national park
- 21% Go day hiking
- 17% Go camping

The Main Attraction: Minnesota's State Trails

Did the trail have at least some influence on your decision to visit this region?

- 99% of visitors on the Root River/Harmony Preston State Trail
- 66% of visitors on the Heartland State Trail
- 63% of the visitors on the Paul Bunyan State Trail

The most appealing descriptions of Minnesota among tourists:

- 69% Stunning scenery
- 48% Great parks and trails for hiking, biking, and camping
- 35% Great outdoor activities
- 24% Premiere sporting events
- 23% Excellent shopping



Minnesota's Parks, Trails, and Tourism, *continued from front*

Parks are a key component of Minnesota's tourism branding.

The results of a recent Explore Minnesota Tourism branding initiative clearly show just how important state parks and trails are to Minnesota's regional and national brand. The study, which surveyed residents in Minnesota, other Upper Midwest states, and residents in key target cities across the country, found Minnesota's

appeal centers around its natural beauty, lakes and rivers, parks and trails, and outdoor activities. Minnesota's parks and trails were even ranked as more appealing than Minnesota's professional sporting events and shopping opportunities. Further, the two traveler segments that were identified as holding the greatest growth potential for travel to, and within, Minnesota – labeled by

the study as "Cultural Explorers" and "Spontaneous Adventurers" – are both especially interested in Minnesota's outdoors.

Overall, Minnesota's parks and trails are already a key driver of tourism in Minnesota, and will be major catalyst for the growth of one of Minnesota's largest industries.

More parks and trails = More tourism

There is a strong correlation between tourism-related sales and public open space. On average, counties in the highest quartile of quantity of parks, trails, and forests generate more than double the tourism-related sales than do counties in the lowest quartile.

Quantity of public parks, forests, and non-motorized trails

- Very high** Above 75th percentile
- High** 50th-75th percentile
- Moderate** 25th-50th percentile
- Low** Below 25th percentile



Data: University of Minnesota Center for Changing Landscapes and Minnesota Department of Revenue

Resources

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