



The Power of Travel: DESTINATIONS Can Help Drive America's Economic Rebound

Travel's ability to bounce back after periods of economic hardship—and inject much-needed revenue directly into southwest Illinois' economy—is why the theme of this year's National Travel and Tourism Week (NTTW) is the Power of Travel.

NTTW (May 2-8), the 38th annual celebration of the U.S. travel industry's contributions, is an opportunity to remind visitors and residents of the incredible value the travel industry holds not just for our local economy and workforce, but for our communities' identity and culture—and to remind policymakers of travel's ability to help power recovery efforts.

Travel and tourism are such an important part of who we are as a region. One need only recall how visitors to our destination delighted in visits to Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site, National Great Rivers Museum, Pere Marquette State Park, Route 66, and the Great River Road. Before the pandemic, visitors spent more than \$1.4 billion dollars in southwest Illinois. Nationally, travel generated \$2.6 trillion in economic output, supported 17 million American jobs, and delivered a \$51 billion trade surplus to the U.S. in 2019.

However, this vital revenue source stemming from business and leisure travelers was severely diminished during the pandemic.

In 2020, the entire U.S. travel industry lost half a trillion dollars in travel-related spending—10 times the economic impact of 9/11. Nationally, total travel-supported jobs accounted for a staggering 65% of all U.S. jobs lost amid the pandemic. With such disparate losses, it is clear that a broader economic recovery hinges on a recovery within the travel industry.

While the rapid pace of vaccinations has provided hope that a return to normal is on the horizon, a resurgence in travel demand is not inevitable. Without aggressive federal action to reopen the travel economy and spur demand, the travel industry's recovery is expected to take as long as five years—far too long to wait for the workers whose livelihoods depend on this vital industry.

With the right measures in place, we can get people moving again in a safe and healthy way, restore our workforce and help power a broader economic recovery. The travel industry needs sustained relief to ensure businesses can maintain operation and workers can stay on payrolls until sustained demand can truly take hold.

Importantly, policymakers must also identify the path to reopening our borders and safely restarting international inbound travel, as well as restarting professional meetings and events; these are crucial segments of our local economy, without which we cannot fully recover.

The road ahead is challenging, but the travel industry is resilient and has an incredible ability to rebound after hard times. We have been through historic floods, 9/11, the 2008 financial meltdown, and health scares such as Zika, Ebola and SARS. This is the toughest challenge the U.S. travel industry has ever faced, but we know travel is one of the best-equipped industries to lead a revival.

If lawmakers act now to jumpstart recovery efforts and get Americans moving, then all of us in southwest Illinois can get back to doing what we do best -- quickly providing quality job opportunities for Americans of all background, reconnecting family and friends, and showing international travelers the only place where historic Route 66 meets the Great River Road, in southwest Illinois.