

Tourism Fuels: Visit Milwaukee's Weeklong Campaign Underscores \$4.2 Billion Economic Engine

May 6, 2025



Visit Milwaukee is proud to join the nationwide celebration of [National Travel & Tourism Week \(NTTW\)](#), May 4-10, 2025, with a weeklong campaign spotlighting the economic, cultural, and civic value of the travel industry in Milwaukee. To build even more excitement for [Visit Milwaukee's Annual Meeting](#) on May 13 -- its largest annual celebration of the impact of tourism -- the destination marketing organization's NTTW activations will showcase how tourism drives prosperity across every neighborhood, and how it connects to a broader national engine that supports one in every ten American jobs.

This year's celebration comes as tourism in Milwaukee reaches new heights: In 2023, Milwaukee County generated a record \$4.167 billion in tourism-related economic impact, over \$2 billion in direct visitor spending, supported more than 27,000 full-time jobs, and contributed over \$231 million in state and local tax revenue. That local success mirrors national trends; according to the [U.S. Travel Association](#), travel is a \$2.8 trillion industry that supports nearly 15 million American jobs and generated \$89 billion in state and local tax revenue in 2023 alone.

"Travel is essential to Milwaukee. It powers small businesses, strengthens our workforce, supports infrastructure and economic development, and most importantly, brings people together," said Peggy Williams-Smith, president and CEO of Visit Milwaukee. "This week, we celebrate the real people behind those numbers: The festival organizers, hotel workers, artists, restaurant staff, volunteers, event producers and the people who run our attractions. It is Milwaukeeans who make Milwaukee a destination worth discovering."

Throughout the week, Visit Milwaukee will launch themed digital campaigns, online storytelling, and in-person events that highlight different facets of the city's visitor economy, which represents a quarter of the state's total visitor spending.

Highlights include:

Sunday, May 4 – City of Festivals

A [new commercial](#) debuts to celebrate Milwaukee as the City of Festivals, spotlighting the more than 150 cultural and entertainment events that define summer from the neighborhoods to the lakefront—with mainstays like Summerfest, Bastille Days, PrideFest, Polish Fest, Puerto Rican Fest, Juneteenth, Wisconsin State Fair and more.

Monday, May 5 – Meetings & Baird Center Anniversary

Visit Milwaukee will highlight the [Baird Center](#)'s one-year anniversary as a game-changer for the city's meetings and conventions sector. In just 12 months since the expansion was complete, Visit Milwaukee's sales team has booked events that will bring more than \$174 million in future economic impact to the city and fill over 192,000 hotel room nights, figures that wouldn't have been possible to achieve without the expansion. To reach the market with the most association meeting planners, a segment on FOX 5 DC airing on May 5 will position Milwaukee as a smart, sustainable choice for business events nationwide.

Tuesday, May 6 – The Arts in Milwaukee

With over 2,000 performances annually and 17 venues in the [Milwaukee Theater District](#) alone, the city's arts scene is a powerful tourism driver. Visit Milwaukee will shine a light on groups supported by UPAF, local galleries, and murals, as well as community anchors like Imagine MKE—all of which contribute to the region's \$334 million arts economy. Promotions will also spotlight upcoming cultural developments like the completion of the Thomas Dambo troll sculpture in Wauwatosa's forthcoming Firefly Grove Park this month, as well as Milwaukee Repertory Theater's \$80 million transformation of its theaters, which will be complete this fall.

Wednesday, May 7 – Celebrating Our Volunteers

From helping at Baird Center to greeting guests during marathons and conventions, Visit Milwaukee's 100+ [volunteers](#) are key to Milwaukee's warm hospitality. Visit Milwaukee will honor longtime volunteers and recruit new ones for the upcoming USA Triathlon National Championships and other major events.

Thursday–Friday, May 8-9 – From MKE to MSP!

Visit Milwaukee hits the road with [a bold market activation](#) taking place in the rotunda of Mall of America in Bloomington, Minnesota, May 8-9. The Twin Cities represent one of Milwaukee's fastest-growing visitor markets, thanks in part to targeted marketing from both Visit Milwaukee and Travel Wisconsin, along with increased options for transit like Amtrak's successful Borealis line.

The pop-up experience will feature Milwaukee-made products, live music, trivia, and travel planning tools for Twin Cities residents seeking their next weekend getaway. Partners joining the Visit Milwaukee team for this activation include:

- [Mexican Fiesta](#), highlighting one of Milwaukee's most iconic cultural celebrations
- [Urbaine Oasis Spa](#), bringing MKE's self-care luxury to the Cities
- [Pabst Theater Group](#), promoting Milwaukee's legendary live entertainment venues
- [Summerfest](#), representing the world's largest music festival
- [Lakefront Brewery](#), serving up authentic Cream City flavor with beer samples onsite

Saturday, May 10 – Built for Champions, Ready for Fans

Milwaukee's sports tourism sector gets its own spotlight, celebrating the economic boost from Bucks, Brewers, Admirals and Wave games, youth tournaments, NCAA tournament play, and national events like the U.S. Women's Open (May 30-June 1 at Erin Hills), USA Triathlon's Age Group National Championship (Aug. 8-10), and the return of IndyCar at the Milwaukee Mile (Aug. 23-24). With a growing portfolio of sports events and a dedicated [Sports Milwaukee](#) sales division, the city is positioned as a leader in the competitive sports tourism landscape.

Check in Live with the Bronze Fonz

Since 2008, the Bronze Fonz statue has stood in downtown Milwaukee, flashing his signature double thumbs up in tribute to Arthur Fonzarelli—the iconic “Happy Days” character and symbol of 1950s cool. In partnership with EarthCam, Visit Milwaukee now offers [a live stream of the statue](#), giving viewers around the world a glimpse into the daily life of the Bronze Fonz. Viewers might even catch a celebrity, friend, or surprise guest on camera!

Tourism Powers Progress

Visit Milwaukee's campaign builds on the U.S. Travel Association's message that travel is more than an experience—it's an essential economic strategy. From supporting 43,000+ jobs across the metro Milwaukee area to generating \$353 million in local tax revenue, tourism strengthens communities and helps fund the public services that benefit everyone.

And the return on investment is undeniable: Every \$1 Visit Milwaukee invests in marketing returns \$244 in local visitor spending.

For deeper insights into the impact of tourism on Milwaukee's economy and community, visit visitmilwaukee.org/tourism-insights.

To purchase tickets for Visit Milwaukee's Annual Meeting at American Family Field, [click here](#).