

# Gov. Evers: Celebrates National Travel and Tourism Week, highlights budget investments to bolster Wisconsin tourism

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MADISON — Gov. Evers, this week, traveled across the state to celebrate National Travel and Tourism Week and highlight Wisconsin's thriving tourism industry. During the week, the governor highlighted his historic 2023-25 budget investments and initiatives to bolster the state's tourism industry that will expand existing programs, attract and recruit large-scale events and conventions to Wisconsin, and provide for the local arts with innovative programs and funds.

"Wisconsin's tourism industry is an essential economic driver and one my administration has been proud to support," said Gov. Evers. "Tourism is a more than \$20 billion industry in our state, and we're proud to be outpacing our Midwestern neighbors. That's a win not only for our economy and workforce but a win for the hardworking folks who keep this industry moving forward, and it's why investing in its success continues to be critically important to ensuring our economic momentum continues."

To kick off National Travel and Tourism Week, last Friday and Saturday, Gov. Evers participated in the 2023 Governor's Fishing Opener in Phillips, where the governor [caught](#) a 23" walleye.

On Monday, Gov. Evers visited Spring Green, where he toured the American Players Theater grounds and received updates on their ongoing parking lot expansion and revitalization project, which was made possible by a more than \$970,000 Tourism Capital Investment grant [awarded](#) by Gov. Evers in 2022. Photos of the governor's

visit to American Players Theater are available [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#). Following this, the governor toured the Pump House Regional Arts Center in La Crosse, which [received](#) a \$288,140 Tourism Capital Investment grant to replace chairs in their theater and update their restroom facilities. Photos of the governor's visit to the Pump House are available [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).

On Tuesday, the governor and Wisconsin Department of Tourism Secretary Anne Sayers visited Brillion and toured the newly finished AriensCo Museum and the Ariens Nordic Center. Photos of the governor and secretary's visit to AriensCo are available [here](#) and [here](#). Following this, the governor went on to visit Ukwakhwa (Our Foods), a 10-acre property on the Oneida Nation Reservation, where Becky and Steve Webster, both Oneida citizens, bring together community members and visitors to learn about planting, growing, and harvesting traditional, heirloom foods, especially Haudenosaunee varieties of corn, beans, and squash. Ukwakhwa was [recently featured](#) in Condé Nast Traveler, and photos of the governor's visit are available [here](#) and [here](#). They continued their day with a stop at the Leinenkugel's Disc Golf Course in Chippewa Falls with the Chippewa Falls Area Chamber of Commerce, which [received](#) a \$30,000 Tourism Capital Investment grant to construct the course. The governor and secretary concluded their day with a tour of the Children's Museum of Eau Claire. Photos of the governor's visit to the Leinenkugel's Disc Golf Course are available [here](#) and [here](#), and a photo of their visit to the Children's Museum of Eau Claire is available [here](#).

Then, on Wednesday, Gov. Evers traveled to Crandon and was joined by the Forest County Chamber of Commerce, where the governor toured the Crandon International Raceway, visited the Northern Lake Service Inc. to learn of their efforts to test for PFAS in the area, and stopped by Yeti's Drive-In for some twist cones. Photos of the governor's visit to Crandon are available [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).

Finally, on Thursday, Gov. Evers visited Baraboo, where he toured the Circus World Museum and the Al. Ringling Theater, and then later traveled to St. Croix Falls and went on a hike at Wisconsin's oldest state park, Interstate State Park. Photos of the governor's visit to the Circus World Museum and the Al. Ringling Theater are available [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#), and photos of the governor's visit to Interstate State Park are available [here](#) and [here](#).

Since 2020, Gov. Evers has invested more than \$1 billion of Wisconsin's federal pandemic relief funds in economic resilience, including small businesses and other industries impacted by the pandemic, and more than \$200 million of that total was

invested in the travel and tourism, hotels and lodging, and entertainment industries alone. As a result, Wisconsin ranks first in the country for federal relief aid directed to economic development and first in the country in aid allocated to assist businesses.

Additionally, success in the state's tourism and outdoor recreation industries has served as a key indicator of Gov. Evers' strong economic recovery strategy. In November, Gov. Evers [announced](#) that visitor spending in Wisconsin grew 5.9 percent in September 2022 compared to September 2019, which was the largest gain of any month since the start of the pandemic when compared to the same month in 2019. In December, Gov. Evers [also announced](#) that the outdoor recreation industry contributed a record-setting \$8.7 billion to the state's gross domestic product in 2021 and that the outdoor economy grew by 14.1 percent—more than three times faster than the state's overall economy. Economic impact data for 2021 also showed tourism generated \$20.9 billion in total economic impact—a 21 percent increase from 2020—and supported more than 169,000 full- and part-time jobs, demonstrating the significant economic impact of the industry in Wisconsin.

The governor's 2023-25 budget ensures the continued success of the state's travel and tourism industry by making more than \$117 million in additional investments to bolster the state's tourism industry, including efforts to expand existing programs, such as the Tourism Capital Investment Grant Program, increase support for marketing and advertising initiatives, attract and recruit large-scale events and conventions to Wisconsin, and provide for the local arts with innovative programs and funds. Unfortunately, last week, Republicans on the Joint Committee on Finance voted to remove the governor's proposed \$50 million investment to continue the successful Tourism Capital Investment Grant Program, along with more than [540 other provisions](#) from his budget.

The governor's plan to invest in and bolster the tourism industry is available below.

### **Expand Existing Programs to Promote Tourism**

Gov. Evers is proposing additional investments into existing programs and departments that already work daily to increase travel and tourism opportunities in the state, including:

- \$37 million over the biennium for marketing and advertising so the Wisconsin

Department of Tourism can continue its good work to promote Wisconsin as a premier business, cultural, and recreational destination; and

- Continuing the state's investment in the Office of Outdoor Recreation to expand the state's growing outdoor recreation market by providing \$1.1 million and three full-time equivalent (FTE) positions over the biennium to make the office a permanent hub for outdoor partners, brands, and industries.

### **Recruit and Attract Large-Scale Events**

Gov. Evers' budget includes funding to recruit and attract major events and become a staple destination by:

- Creating and funding an opportunity and attraction fund with more than \$30 million over the biennium to recruit large-scale events to Wisconsin. This substantial investment will help showcase everything Wisconsin has to offer and reap significant benefits for local businesses and the statewide economy. This would allow Wisconsin to compete for several major events, such as NFL Drafts in Green Bay, the NBA All-Star Game in Milwaukee, World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) events, and NASCAR races; and
- Creating a new Meetings, Conventions, and Sports Bureau within the Department of Tourism, supported by \$2.7 million and three FTE positions over the biennium, to focus on promoting the state as a destination for large events.

### **Investing in the Arts**

Gov. Evers understands how critical arts are to the state's culture and economy and is proposing innovative initiatives to fund Wisconsin's investment in the arts for years to come, including:

- Increasing funding for the Wisconsin Arts Board by \$552,500 over the biennium to maximize the drawdown of available federal funds and continue supporting individuals and organizations engaged in the arts; and
- Transferring \$100 million from the General Fund to the Artistic Endowment Fund. Every year the proceeds on the interest in earnings will be distributed to fund investments in arts, including the Arts Board, throughout Wisconsin.

### **Tourism Capital Investment Grant Program**

The governor's proposal would have invested \$50 million to continue the Tourism

Capital Investment Grant Program, which Gov. Evers created using Wisconsin's federal pandemic relief funds to assist local and Tribal governments and nonprofit organizations in bolstering Wisconsin's tourism, travel, and lodging economies.

The Tourism Capital Investment Grant Program ensures the state's travel and tourism economy continues its momentum by providing support for major tourism-related capital improvement projects across the state that help promote, maintain, or bolster Wisconsin's tourism industry. To date, [\\$21.9 million](#) in grants have been awarded to 26 local governments and organizations through the Tourism Capital Investment Grant Program, including investments to support the American Birkebeiner Ski Foundation for facility upgrades to better serve the more than 10,000 participants who come to Northern Wisconsin each year for the "Birkie," to construct the new Experience Greater Green Bay Visitor Center in Green Bay, and to expand maritime infrastructure at Port Milwaukee to accommodate larger cruise ships.

An online version of this release is available [here](#).