

## A DEEP DIVE INTO HOTEL DATA

When measuring economic impact of travel and tourism to our community, we look first to hotel data. The term “heads in beds” has long been a measure of success across the tourism industry. While our key performance indicators now go well beyond overnight stays, they remain a critical component to generating spending in our community from outside visitors.

In 2024, accommodations accounted for 12% of all visitor spend, with an average of \$334 spent per visitor. We have long relied on the Smith Travel Research (STR) data, provided monthly, that allows us to see hotel occupancy and average daily rate in our region in comparison to other key markets in Illinois. However, this data collection tool is primarily capturing data at flagship hotels such as Hilton, Marriott, and more. Within our community, independent properties such as the I Hotel & Conference Center and the Illini Union Hotel aren't factored into those numbers, though their contributions to overnight stays is significant.

As part of our focus on data collection through Zartico to measure visitor behavior and movement, we are now able to take a deeper dive into overnight stays, from hotels and motels to short-term vacation rentals (STVR). This gives us a clearer picture of how many visitors are staying overnight, the impact of events, and the revenue being generated for our community.

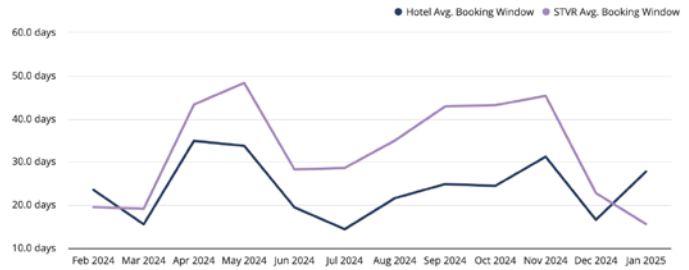
On page 6, you'll see a variety of statistics that measure our hotel and STVR occupancy, average length of stay, and demand for rooms. In reviewing this data quarterly, we're able to estimate the impact generated in our community from overnight stays. It also allows us to measure our success against similar markets in Bloomington-Normal, Peoria, and Springfield/Decatur.

Through the new data platform, we are also able to see our top feeder markets for overnight stays and their respective stay value, which provides helpful information in determining what markets to target when needing to fill our hotel properties. Additionally, we are also able to see the future pacing of hotel booking up to 7 months out, allowing us to see opportunities for additional conferences and events to fill non-peak times. For example, looking ahead to the University of Illinois' Mom's Weekend, we can already see 68% of rooms filled in the area.

These new insights will be invaluable tools to our entire team, allowing our sales team to better coordinate conferences and events and our marketing team's ability to promote to high-value markets during critical need periods.

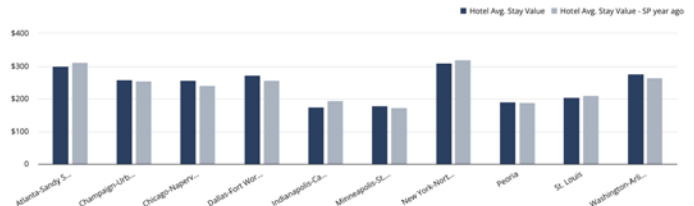
Stay tuned every quarter as we summarize this data and connect monthly through our Upcoming Events + Data email. Don't receive that communication? Contact Terri to get added at [terrir@experienceceu.org](mailto:terrir@experienceceu.org).

Avg. Booking Window by Month



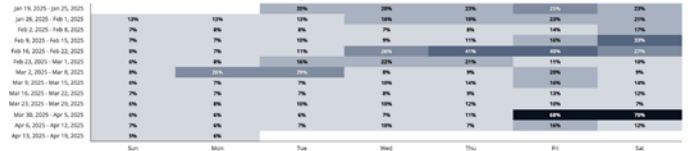
This shows average booking window by month. Average booking window is 24 days, but in April, May, and November, the average is over 30 days thanks to events like Mom's & Dad's weekend, and Commencement.

Hotel Avg. Stay Value by Feeder Market



This shows the value of each market compared to previous years. Chicago, Dallas/Ft. Worth, Minneapolis, Peoria, St. Louis, and Washington D.C. all have increased in stay value year-over-year.

Hotel Occupancy - Next 90 days -



This shows bookings over the next 90 days. February 20-22 is over 40% booked because of the IHSA Wrestling Tournament. April 4-5 rooms are 58-70% booked due to Illinois Mom's Weekend.

# From Our CEO



A special moment during this second quarter of FY25 was celebrating 15 years with ECU alongside Kelly White, who started with 40 North around the same time! Many people may not realize we've shared office space since

40 North's beginning, creating synergistic

brilliance through both our organizations. We recently talked about this amazing journey, not without its challenges, but we both agreed that it's about the people we get to do this work with and for all day, every day.



Our team was rounded out by the hiring of Cristy Gillespie, Director of Marketing. Together, we all met on November 11 at Prairie Fruits Farm & Creamery to define Destination 2027 objectives, milestones, and key indicators. The future is bright working alongside our destination partners and the community as we continue to focus on our core values: spark, illumination, and brilliance.

Spoke with destination partners: St Joseph Village Board on October 8, Urbana City Council on October 14, and Rantoul Village Board on November 5. We will wrap up with Champaign City Council on January 28 and Savoy Village Board on February 5.



Thank you to Curtis Orchard for hosting our October ECU Board meeting (and the same week for the ECUF Trustees meeting), to the Virginia Theatre for hosting our November board meeting, and to Pour Bros for hosting our joint ECU, ECUF, and Economic Development Corporation Holiday Board meeting and social.

Grateful for our board leadership, our partners, and our workforce as we build bigger tables to foster a place where residents and visitors feel a shared sense of belonging. When we come together to create more inclusive and welcoming spaces, we all win!

Jayne DeLuce



## Welcome Cristy!

We're excited to introduce Cristy Gillespie to ECU as the new Director of Marketing. She has extensive experience planning, crafting, and executing an array of unique marketing and advertising campaigns through previous work as a copywriter and strategic creative director. Before joining Experience Champaign-Urbana, she helped collaborate on ECU's rebranding at Surface 51. She's a longtime 40 North board member, and loves exploring all things CU—especially art!—with her 12-year-old daughter.



## CCAAHT Update

Phase 1 development is nearly complete with the installation of the Tribute to African American musicians art piece at Skelton Park, where an official celebration will occur next summer. Sign unveilings were held for Urbana Businesses (sponsored by Busey), Underground Railroad (sponsored by the Village of Savoy), Douglass Park (sponsored by Champaign Park District), and Douglass Library (sponsored by Champaign Public Library). Phase 2 will begin official trail tours in spring 2025.

In collaboration with 40 North and Stacey Gross, K-12 Visual Arts Coordinator for Champaign Unit 4 School District, we conducted a tour for art teachers focusing on the murals along the Trail. Estella, from ECU, guided the teachers through the murals including, Breaking Barriers by Jeremy Biggers; KOFENA by Georgie Nakima; Each One - Teach One by Rob "ProBlak" Gibbs; EPOCH by Oscar Joyo; and the North First Street Barbershop mural by Langston Allston. At each stop, the mural themes were discussed alongside their historical inspiration. Kelly White and Elsie Hedgpeth from 40 North explained the mural creation process by sharing photos and details. We also provided coloring sheets created by Jan Troutt and a "Make Your Own Trail Sign" activity sheet.

Finally, on October 12, the Trail participated at the Urbana Free Library's annual Archives Bazaar. This year's event commemorated the 100-year anniversary of the Illinois Central Depot and the raising of the train track, where local museums, historical societies, and collectors joined forces to showcase their collections related to the railroad. Representatives co-chair Angela Rivers and ECU's Marcus Flinn educated guests on how African Americans utilized the Central Railroad in the Civil War era, where fugitives from slavery managed to travel mostly without arrest.







## Foundation Update

The ECU Foundation welcomed new trustee Jami Painter. They celebrated several heritage trail sign unveilings and supported multiple event bid incentives to continue bringing business to our brilliant community. They also confirmed **May 7, 2025**, as the date for the enhanced Toast to Tourism—stay tuned for more details! The mission of the ECUF remains to support our capacity to host events, assist film productions, attract new residents, and develop the Champaign County African American Heritage Trail. For more information on how to get involved with the Foundation, please visit [experiencecu.org/foundation](http://experiencecu.org/foundation).

# Out & About

## Board & Trustees Familiarization Tour

This September, the ECU Board and ECU Foundation Board of Trustees toured various stops along the Champaign County African American Heritage Trail. Led by Estella, this tour highlighted the new murals, as well as stops at Skelton Park, Douglass Park, and various signs in Champaign and Urbana. This was followed by discussion about the tour at Douglass Center, catered by Wood N' Hog Barbecue, with ideas and feedback to help our team bring this tour to life for the public. The first public tour will be held on February 17. Stay tuned for details!



## Film Discussion at APA Illinois Conference

Mark and Terri teamed up with filmmaker Brett Hays to host an hour-long panel at the American Planning Association's September conference in Champaign. Municipal planners from throughout the state discovered how they can collaborate with filmmakers to foster film-friendly communities. They also had their questions addressed by the panel.



## Forty Under 40

Robert was recognized as one of The News-Gazette's 2024 "Forty Under 40" honorees. He says, "It is a humbling experience and a testament to the vibrant community I'm fortunate to serve. As the Director of Group Sales and Partnerships at Experience Champaign-Urbana, I'm passionate about showcasing our region as a premier destination for visitors, events, and unforgettable experiences. It's amazing to promote the area I call home and contribute to its growth and appeal. This recognition isn't just about individual achievement; it reflects the collaborative spirit of our region. I'm inspired by the people I work with and the opportunities to make a meaningful impact within the community."

## Social Inclusion Summit

Jayne participated in the Destinations International Social Inclusion Summit on October 28–30 in Spokane, WA, where she was invited to speak on "Fostering a Gender-Inclusive Destination" alongside representatives from Visit Milwaukee and Simpleview. Summit topics included inclusive hospitality, retention strategies for a diverse workforce, building bridges to foster community, and an immersive cultural exchange that involved learning from the indigenous population about challenges and outcomes over the decades.

## IDA Fall Meeting

Jayne and Gina both participated in the Illinois Destinations Association (IDA) Fall Meeting on October 2–3 in Schaumburg. The areas of discussion included AI in destination sales and marketing, adopting new industry key performance indicators, the role of tourism in retail revitalization, and an update on Illinois Office of Tourism grants and marketing outreach. A three-part video series was shared, "Illinois Recharged: Real Stories on Route 66", produced in collaboration with Matador Network and Rivian Automotive, Inc. The three-part video series showcases the Illinois stretch of Route 66, as experienced by three travel influencers and friends – Tonia Hope, Phil Calvert and Brian McIntosh – traveling in a Rivian R1S electric vehicle, custom-wrapped with Route 66 branding.

## Tolono Development Group Presentation

Terri was invited to present to the newly formed Tolono Development Group on December 10. The group is interested in redeveloping their downtown area, and met in the recently remodeled 108 Events space. She discussed the impacts ECU makes on the community and shared how they work with communities and local businesses to tell their story. Over 40 people attended and asked many questions about ways Tolono should look at economic development and tourism. It was a great evening with many ideas for a bright future for this community!







### Downtown Mural

Late this fall, we were excited to watch the talented muralist, Jose Vasquez, on the Ten Thousand Villages building in downtown Champaign. The mural was sponsored in part by Experience Champaign-Urbana, and brought to life in collaboration with 40 North. Jose recently completed a large-scale mural at the Champaign-Urbana Public Health District. His focus on various cultures represented in the region made him the ideal muralist to coincide with the mission of Ten Thousand Villages while also being representative of the community as a whole.

## Sales & Marketing Efforts

### Reverse Sales Mission: International Tour Operators

The ECU sales team collaborated with the Illinois Office of Tourism to host several international tour operators in November. Their familiarization tour included visits to Riggs Brewery, Prairie Fruits Farm, IBRL, and Hardy's Reindeer Ranch. They also engaged in focused meetings with various hotels and local attractions at the Virginia Theatre, and enjoyed meals from Caprae at the Farm, Pekara, and Martinelli's.



### Ontario Motorcoach Association (OMCA) Marketplace

Gina attended this group tour conference in Windsor, Ontario, Canada, for the first week in November as part of the Illinois State Tourism International Grant. This annual event is the largest gathering of group tour operators in Canada. During this conference tour operators met one-on-one with tourism suppliers, including Experience Champaign-Urbana, to discuss

destination points of interest and services available in supplier communities. Gina met with more than 19 tour operators based in Ontario and Eastern Michigan. She presented information on various ECU tourist destinations and categories, including Champaign County Agritourism, Amish Country, Arts & Culture, and the Champaign County African American Heritage Trail. In addition to the one-on-one meetings, the conference included evening networking receptions, networking lunches, and educational sessions taught by industry leaders to help destination management organizations navigate the motor coach and group tourism industry.

### Hotel Partner Meeting

ECU hosted a hotel partner meeting at the Hilton Garden Inn for all local hotel managers and sales staff in our area. These quarterly meetings foster an open dialogue between the ECU sales team and hotel partners. During this meeting, we explored ways to collaborate in securing new business, retaining existing business, and ensuring a seamless experience for out-of-town visitors.



## SPORTS, EVENTS, & FILM



## CONFERENCES



## GROUP TOUR



**LEAD:** A sales prospect with active client discussion. Could also be an active proposal where the RFP has yet to be submitted.

**TENTATIVE:** RFP or bid proposal has been submitted, waiting for feedback or confirmation from client.

**DEFINITE:** Event proposal is signed, hotel bid proposal(s) signed or pending.





## OutCoast FAM

This November, we hosted OutCoast.com, a LGBTQ+ Travel website out of Florida. The FAM tour was part of a week-long tour of the state, concluding in the Champaign-Urbana area. Terri coordinated a full itinerary for the 24 hours they were in the region, including a guided tour of Allerton Park & Retreat Center, a lunch meeting with Uniting Pride, visits to Krannert Art Museum, Curtis Orchard, Prairie Fruits Farm & Creamery, Gallery Art Bar, Rose Bowl Tavern, and finally, breakfast at Hopscotch Bakery. Rachel and Fay, the representatives from OutCoast, were highly impressed with the inclusivity of our region. Their first article about our region, focusing on Allerton Park, has already been shared, and multiple social media posts about the Lesbian Dreams exhibit at Krannert Art Museum were shared with over 60K followers.



## 100 Episodes of Chambana Proud

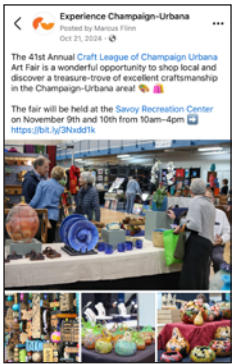
The Chambana Proud podcast celebrated its 100th episode this past November. Hosted by Terri & Carly from the Champaign County EDC, the podcast has hosted many guests spanning a variety of industries. Guests have included Chancellor Jones, Josh Whitman, Maize Mexican Grill, Krannert Center for the Performing Arts (also our sponsor), various artists, the Champaign County African American Heritage Trail, and many more. There have been over 10,000 downloads with listeners from all but 5 states in the country, as well as Canada, Australia, UK, Sweden, and Germany. Stay tuned in at [chambanaproud.com](http://chambanaproud.com) or wherever you podcast.



## iStar Training

The iStar program on the University of Illinois campus provides guided tours for prospective and new students. To ensure the community is represented in those tours, Terri attended one of their trainings and shared top C-U area highlights that can be incorporated into the talking points. The students were highly engaged and excited to explore the community themselves.

# Social Media & Web Stats

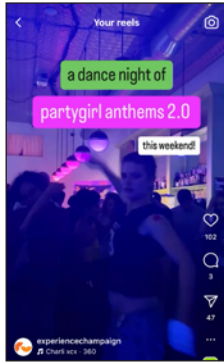


### Facebook

Craft League of CU  
Fine Art Fair  
5,656 reach  
168 reactions  
31 shares

**12,356**

Followers

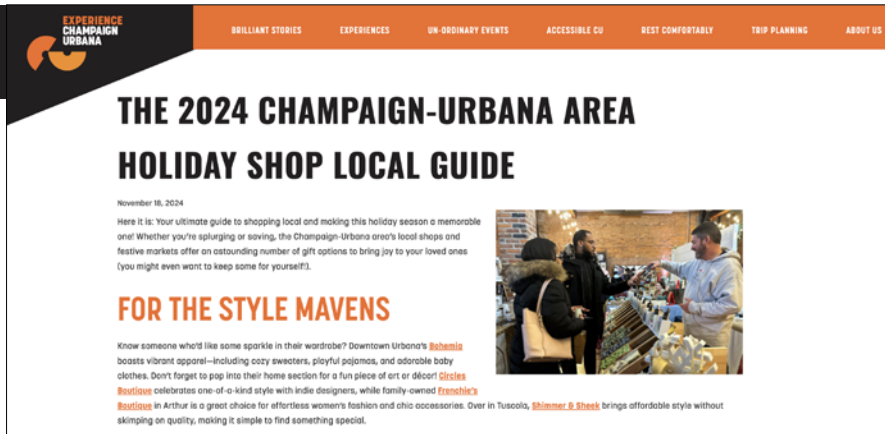


### Instagram

Brat Night at Gallery  
Art Bar  
4,428 views  
102 likes  
47 shares

**9,042**

Followers



## WEBSITE REPORT

58,824 Page Views  
2,738 Clicks on Page  
21,336 Total Users  
14,138 Users via Organic Search

**82.2%**

of website traffic is from outside the greater Champaign-Urbana area

## TOP VISITED PAGES

Calendar of Events  
Our Stories  
Food & Drink  
Experience Passes  
Shopping

**32.4%**

is from outside of Illinois  
Top States: Texas, Indiana, Missouri



# Lodging + Visitor Data

Reporting October–December 2024 | Data provided by Zartico

Based on **34,146** credit cards and **57,885** mobile devices observed.

HOTELS SHORT TERM VACATION RENTALS

|   | AVERAGE STAY VALUE | AVERAGE OCCUPANCY | AVERAGE LENGTH OF STAY (in days) | DEMAND (in thousands) |
|---|--------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Champaign   | \$462.00           | 29%               | N/A                              | 19.3                  |
|   | \$254.00           | 61%               | 1.8                              | 99.8                  |
| Springfield*<br><small>*Dec. data not available</small> | \$456.67           | 36%               | N/A                              | 4.1                   |
|   | \$239.00           | 59%               | 1.9                              | 44.3                  |
| Peoria  | \$446.33           | 40%               | N/A                              | 11.5                  |
|   | \$245.67           | 51%               | 1.87                             | 111.2                 |
| Bloomington Normal                                      | \$432.00           | 31%               | N/A                              | 6.8                   |
|   | \$195.00           | 54%               | 1.7                              | 98.7                  |

VISITOR % OF TOTAL

**30.9%**

of all mobile devices observed that were visitors

VISITOR SPEND OF TOTAL

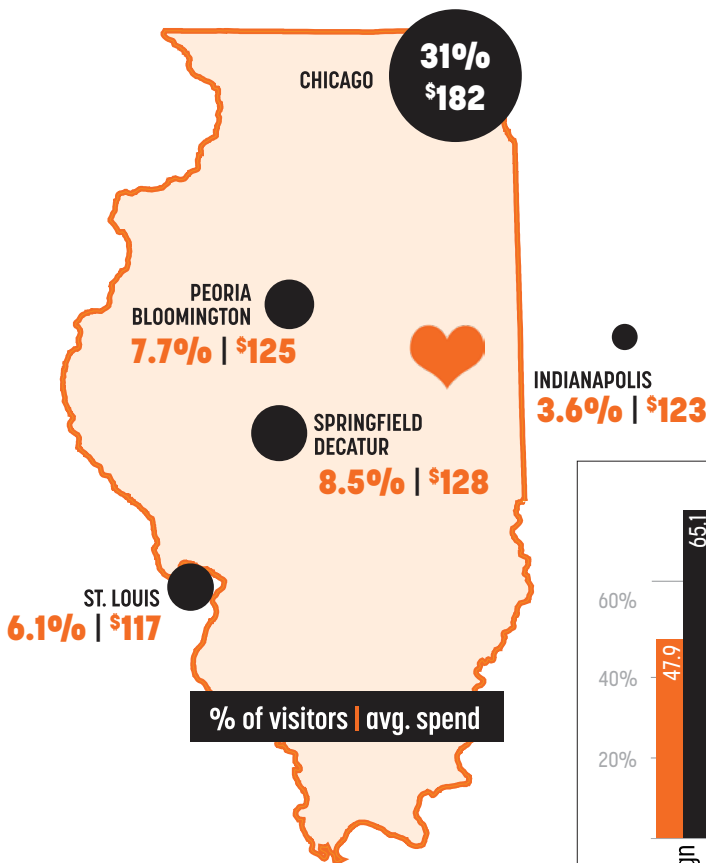
**17.1%**

of all spend came from visitors

% OF VISITOR SPEND towards local businesses

**29%**

**44.3%** of visitors were from out-of-state.



## VISITOR IMPACT



**28%**

visitor spend of total

**\$77**

avg. visitor spend



**17%**

visitor spend of total

**\$112**

avg. visitor spend



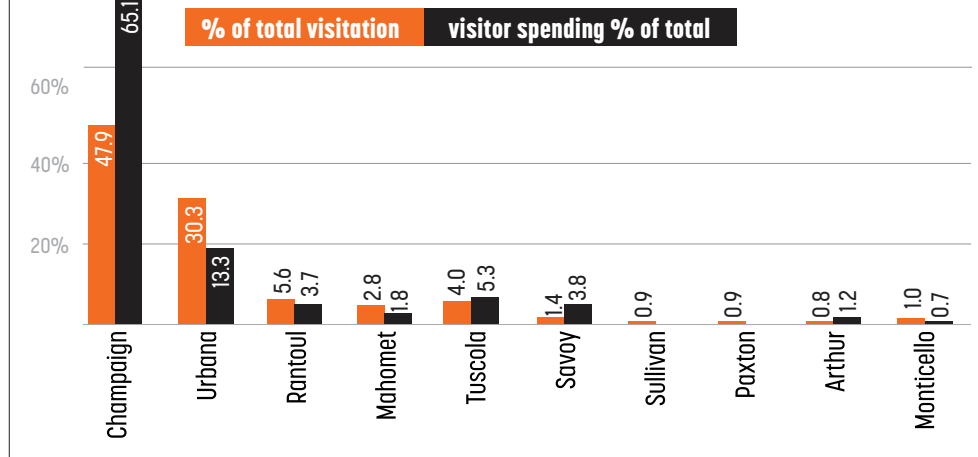
**28%**

visitor spend of total

**\$44**

avg. visitor spend

## VISITATION & SPENDING BY CITY





# OUR MISSION

We promote a welcoming destination experience for visitors to strengthen economic opportunity and enhance the lives of residents.

## Partners

### DESTINATION FOUNDER

Illinois Office of Tourism // City of Champaign  
University of Illinois // Rotary Club of Champaign

### DESTINATION LEADER

Busey // Carle // City of Urbana // Village of Rantoul

### DESTINATION BUILDER

Champaign County // Village of Savoy // OSF Healthcare

### DESTINATION BACKER

Parkland College // Illinois American Water // Champaign Park District // Urbana Park District // Gies College of Business // I Hotel & Illinois Conference Center // Village of Mahomet // Village of St. Joseph // Tuscola Chamber & Tourism // Hickory Point Bank // Farnsworth Group // Lenschow Insurance & Financial Services // Sterling Wealth Management // Robeson Family Benefit Fund // Janet & Doug Nelson // Lynne & Dick Barnes // Max & Betsy Mitchell // Eric Meyer // Habeeb Habeeb

### REGIONAL PARTNERS

Amish Country of Illinois  
Make It Monticello  
City of Paxton

For information on our Destination Partner Program and how you can support our mission visit:

[experiencecu.org/partners](http://experiencecu.org/partners)

## Experience Champaign-Urbana Team

217.351.4133 | 17 E. Taylor St., Champaign, IL 61820



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**Experience Champaign-Urbana**  
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