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Visitors spend like they mean it

A Wisconsin State Journal editorial
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Wisconsin tourism officials were derided this spring for their new state promotional slogan: "Live like you mean it."

The collective public reaction seemed to be: "We paid \$50,000 to a marketing firm to come up with that!?"

But [new numbers on state visitors](#) and their economic impact suggest state promoters might actually know what they're doing.

Travelers spent \$13.1 billion in Wisconsin last year -- a 2.7 percent increase -- despite the recession, terrible flooding and \$4-a-gallon gasoline. Factor in harsh weather that wiped out most of Door County's cherry crop, and those are impressive numbers.

The jump was [even higher in Dane County](#). Visitors to the Madison area spent \$1.2 billion last year -- a 4.5 percent increase, according to the study by Davidson-Peterson Associates of Kennebunkport, Maine.

Those of us who live in the capital city and region often forget that our home is Wisconsin's second largest tourism draw behind only Milwaukee.

Even Sauk County, which places third for tourism, experienced a slight increase in traveler spending last year despite flooding that washed away Lake Delton in the heart of the Wisconsin Dells tourism mecca.

In short, Wisconsin's many visitors still spend like they mean it. And that's great for those of us who live here year-round.

Tourism last year supported 310,000 jobs and generated \$2.1 billion in tax revenue for state and local governments. Without those dollars, the state's massive budget deficit would be even worse.

Wisconsin should not retrench from its aggressive effort to promote Wisconsin's beautiful scenery, quaint towns, exciting cities and outdoor fun. Tourism Secretary Kelli Trumble makes a strong argument that her agency's \$10 million marketing budget should be maintained.

Wisconsin cannot afford to stop selling itself to visitors. Tourism means too much to our economy to pull back on promotion now.

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