



## **It's Time to Invest in Vermont Tourism**

By Amy Spear, Vice President of Tourism for the Vermont Chamber of Commerce

Tourism is a significant economic driver for many of Vermont's rural communities. Visitors spend more than \$2.5 billion in Vermont each year, and the tourism industry employs more than 32,000 Vermonters. The tax revenue generated by the tourism industry each year equates to a \$1,450 tax savings for every Vermont household. Yet, the State budget has decreased promotion for this important industry by 6% over the last five years, resulting in an overall budget of \$3.1 million with only \$2 million designated for destination marketing. It's time to reverse that trend and invest an additional \$500,000 in destination marketing to help the small businesses remain viable and contribute to the economic vitality of our rural towns and villages.

After manufacturing, tourism represents the largest contribution of out-of-state money into the state's economy. Additionally, the economic activity in our accommodations sector generates three times more dollar volume compared to the national average. We are fortunate that our robust tourism economy extends beyond the peak summer months typical of Northeastern destinations and includes busy foliage and winter tourism.

Vermont's destination marketing capitalizes on distinct local characteristics which define towns and regions, amplifying Vermont's authentic experiences to the 80 million people within a day's drive of Vermont. The same attributes that give Vermonters a good quality of life also attract visitors. Many of Vermont's intrinsic qualities in our rural communities are not available to those living in major metros, and they are desirable qualities in a vacation destination.

It's not just vacations that benefit Vermont, but visitors who become residents contribute even more to our economy. When out-of-state people visit our communities, they experience a glimmer of what life could be like for them to live and work here. During their vacation, they might meet future colleagues and neighbors, discover a new business adventure, engage in a conversation that sparks a job idea, stumble upon their perfect community or home, or reaffirm a desire to make a life change and move to Vermont. Many Vermonters were once visitors who chose to become residents. In fact, according to Vermont's Agency of Commerce and Community Development, 79% of remote worker program grantees first experienced Vermont as a tourist.

Courtenay Dundy exemplifies a visitor who became a Vermonter. She spent more than a decade living around the world working in hospitality before settling in Ludlow, a rural community with less than 2,000 residents, where she purchased the Pettigrew Inn. She wanted a location where she could plant roots and become part of a community. When she found the inn for sale in Ludlow, she knew it would become her home.

“I appreciate the comradery and support within the community here. I feel like everyone wants me to succeed and has helped me to navigate some of the challenges I face as a first-time entrepreneur,” she said. An increase in destination marketing funding by the State will help rural innkeepers, like Dundy, by encouraging tourists to call Vermont home.

Our neighboring and competing states, like New Hampshire, New York and Maine, have much larger budgets, ranging from \$8 million to \$50 million annually. What’s more, according to the U.S. Travel Association, Vermont is the only New England state to lose visitor spending market share over the last five years. Without a commitment to destination marketing, Vermont risks losing more of our market share and having the story of our iconic experiences muted compared to other states.

It’s time to work together as Vermonters to reverse the trend and increase spending on destination marketing efforts. A \$500,000 increase in the budget of the Vermont Department of Tourism and Marketing is an investment that will support our towns, local businesses, workers, taxpayers and our future.

Join the tourism industry on January 15, 2020 for the second annual Tourism Day at the State House and visit the Vermont Chamber’s [tourism advocacy landing page](#) to sign the petition to support increased tourism funding and learn how to get involved. With strong support, Vermont can maintain its preeminence as a world-class destination and ensure a thriving economy that benefits all Vermonters.



Amy Spear is the Vice President of Tourism for the Vermont Chamber of Commerce. As a legislative priority, the Vermont Chamber supports increased and dedicated investment in tourism marketing to maintain Vermont’s competitive market share. Amy Spear lives in Killington.