Missouri Economy Indicators Tourism Job Trends

VOL. 6, ISSUE 5, 31 MAR. 2025

Tourism plays a vital role in Missouri's economy, with visitors contributing to local businesses as they explore the state's scenic areas, attractions, and entertainment options. According to the Missouri Division of Tourism's <u>annual report</u>, the top activities for overnight visitors in 2024 included shopping (28%), sightseeing

(22%), attending celebrations (15%), and visiting landmarks or historic sites (15%). In 2024, visitor spending supported nearly 320,000 tourism-related jobs in Missouri, representing 11.8% of all private-sector employment.

Restaurants and other food/drinking establishments dominate the tourism workforce, making up three out of four jobs in the industry. Along with lodging (9%), these businesses account for 83% of tourism employment, with the remaining 17% of jobs in performing arts, amusement, recreation, and related activities. From 2021 to 2024, Missouri's tourism

Missouri Tourism Jobs, 2021-24

Tourism-Related Industries	2021 Jobs	2024 Jobs	% Job Chg.
Food & Drink	216,090	236,970	10%
Lodging	24,054	28,647	19%
Perform. Arts, Sports, & Related	12,048	16,637	38%
Outdoor Amusement & Rec.	10,814	12,506	16%
Other Amusement & Recreation	9,149	10,742	17%
Other Tourism-Related Services	8,913	10,365	16%
Museums, Zoos, & Parks	3,317	4,125	24%
TOTAL	284,384	319,992	12.5%

Source: MU Extension graphic using Lightcast payroll and self-employment job estimates.

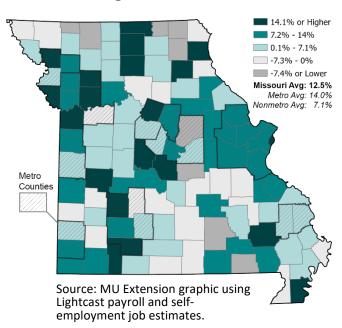
workforce grew by 35,600 jobs—a 12.5% increase—as it recovered from pandemic-related declines in 2020. However, most industries grew slower than the 17% national average over the same period. An exception was performing arts and sports, which grew by 38% in Missouri and outpaced the national rate (33%). This surge was driven by expanding entertainment venues and professional sports business employment.

Tourism Job Growth Strongest in Missouri's Large Metros

Several rural counties in northern and southeast Missouri saw significant percentage increases in tourism jobs from 2021 to 2024, though their overall employment gains were modest compared to more populous counties.

In highly urban counties, tourism job growth was both strong and substantial. In the Kansas City metro, Jackson and Platte counties saw increases of 23% and 19%, respectively, adding more than 8,400 jobs. Similarly, in the St. Louis metro, St. Louis City and County grew by 25% and 14%, respectively, contributing more than 12,000 tourism jobs.

Percent Change in Tourism Jobs, 2021-24



Many Rural Economies Rely on Tourism

While tourism-related jobs comprise 11.8% of Missouri's private sector employment, the share varies between metro and nonmetro areas. Most tourism jobs are found in the state's metro regions, where 254,300 workers are employed, representing 11.5% of private sector employment. However, tourism supports 13.3% of private sector employment in nonmetro areas, employing 65,700 workers.

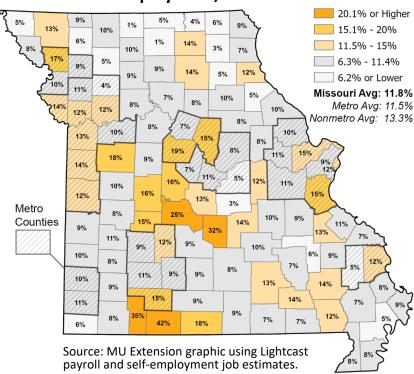
Tourism is particularly important to Stone and Taney counties, home to Branson and Table Rock Lake, where more than one in three private sector jobs are related to tourism spending.

In mid-Missouri, Camden County—home to the Lake of the Ozarks—relies on tourism for 25% of its employment, with vacationers and retirees drawn to the area for watersports and outdoor recreation.

Southeast Missouri counties near the Ozark National Scenic Riverways also have above-average tourism employment, fueled by visitors seeking popular rafting and canoeing destinations. In addition, some rural counties benefit from visitor spending linked to larger colleges and military installations.

While tourism significantly impacts Missouri's economy, the seasonal nature of outdoor recreation activities presents

Tourism Jobs as a Share of Private Sector Employment, 2024



challenges for year-round employment in some rural areas. Communities that invest in broadband access, and have amenities such as healthcare and educational institutions, can better attract retirees and remote workers to help sustain economic activity beyond peak tourism seasons.

Additional Resources

• The Missouri Division of Tourism offers a variety of resources to understand tourism trends across the state, including the monthly travel barometer and market studies. This brief defines tourism-related industries using the division's methodology and includes self-employment figures. The North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) does not categorize tourism as a distinct industry, so the division uses several tourism-related business groupings that capture typical visitor spending activities. For more research on Missouri's tourism economy, visit: https://industry.visitmo.com/research/.

All briefs in this indicators series and future updates will be available at http://muext.us/MissouriEconomyIndicators
Author: Alan Spell, Assistant Extension Professor, alan.spell@missouri.edu



