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DESTINATION CLEVELAND OUTLINES 10 YEARS OF GROWTH OF COUNTY'S TOURISM INDUSTRY, CELEBRATES IMPACT OF VISITOR BRAND

*Organization announces increase in resident recommendation of city as visitor destination
and shares plans for continued industry growth at 2025 Annual Meeting*

Producer/Editor Note: The videos shown at today's annual meeting can be viewed [here](#).

CLEVELAND (April 16, 2025) – At its 2025 annual meeting, Destination Cleveland announced the 10-year growth figures for Cuyahoga County's travel and tourism industry. The region's destination marketing and management organization also celebrated the adoption and impact of the Cleveland visitor brand's first decade in the atrium ballroom at Huntington Convention Center of Cleveland.

"As the steward of the industry, Destination Cleveland's work consistently delivers results," said David Gilbert, president and CEO of Destination Cleveland. "We're redefining the city's image – exactly as we set out to do a decade ago. Tourism is a growth industry in Cleveland, generating nearly \$7 billion in direct sales. To say this is an industry that makes a difference in Cleveland is an understatement – for our community, tourism matters in an outsized way."

10-YEAR GROWTH OUTLINED

Since the launch of the Cleveland visitor brand in 2014, Cuyahoga County's travel and tourism industry has grown consistently. From 2014-2023:

- Visitation to Cuyahoga County is up nearly 8.5%, essentially mirroring the U.S. domestic growth rate of 10%. Additionally, Cuyahoga County's annual visitation growth rate surpassed the U.S. domestic tourism growth rate in eight of the past 10 years.
- Tourism-related direct sales in Cuyahoga County are up 36%, which is on par with the state of Ohio (37%) and just shy of domestic travel-related direct sales growth (41%).
- Tourism-related employment is up 7.5% in Cuyahoga County and 7% of jobs are supported by the visitor economy.
- In 2023, visitors generated \$1.5 billion in taxes, representing an average savings of nearly \$1,400 per household in Cuyahoga County, up from \$983 per household in 2015 (the first year measured)¹.

NEW RESIDENT AND OUT-OF-MARKET PERCEPTION RESEARCH ILLUSTRATES BRAND IMPACT

Strengthening perceptions of Cleveland is a key element of Destination Cleveland's work to attract visitors to the region.

"Ten plus years ago, Cleveland's brand was far from flattering and was inaccurate. It was rooted in problems dating back 40 plus years, and comedians, media and many others perpetuated the

image,” said Gilbert. “Clevelanders weren’t proud of their city. Others had control of our brand. Rather than surrender, we decided it was time to take control.”

To measure progress in this area, Destination Cleveland tracks residents’ willingness to recommend Cleveland as a visitor destination and monitors attitudes toward the Cleveland visitor brand of those who live in key visitor markets. The organization shared research results at the annual meeting that underscore the success of the Cleveland visitor brand, which Destination Cleveland introduced in 2014.

- **Resident recommendation up to 92%:** Clevelanders have been a significant and important contributor to the region’s visitation growth. A recent resident sentiment study, conducted by MMGY Travel Intelligence, found that **92% of locals would recommend Cleveland as a place to visit**ⁱⁱ. This is up from 34% prior to the launch of the Cleveland visitor brand. Resident focus groups underscored residents’ increased pride in the city’s visitor assets, with the arts and culture scene and outdoor assets standing out as the region’s strongest attractions in locals’ eyes.
- **Brand perception strengthening in key visitor markets:** Positive sentiment about Cleveland as a visitor destination was echoed in recent brand perception focus groups conducted with residents in key drive markets (Chicago, Columbus, Pittsburgh and Detroit). These potential visitors named a wide array of attractions and experiences in Cleveland that appealed to them – including well-known places like the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame and Cleveland Metroparks Zoo along with the city’s parks and lakefront and performing arts scene. Focus group participants described Cleveland as a music and sports destination. Their descriptions of Cleveland as “fun,” “energetic” and “creative” mirror elements of the Cleveland visitor brand and demonstrate the success of Destination Cleveland’s advertising in key markets.
- **More meetings choose Cleveland:** The success of the Cleveland brand is also evident in the organization’s efforts to attract meetings and conventions. In 2024, the team delivered record-setting results, booking more than 280,000 hotel room nights for events taking place between 2024 and 2031, a 13% increase over 2023 bookings. The organization’s sales team is currently booking out as far as 10 years in advance for events. The expansion of the Huntington Convention Center has been crucial to this success, allowing Destination Cleveland to bid on events it previously wasn’t able to pursue due to meeting space limitations. The business Destination Cleveland has secured through March 2025 – only because of the new space – will generate more than \$3.1 million in county taxes.

CHANGING THE NARRATIVE: A WATERFRONT CITY

Research indicates that a driving motivator for travel is the chance to unplug, unwind and experience the great outdoors. Destination Cleveland is taking advantage of the area’s natural assets in response to this finding.

With more than \$4.5 billion of infrastructure investment underway or planned for Cleveland’s waterfronts, Destination Cleveland is inviting locals to think differently and see Cleveland as a waterfront city, rather than a city on the water. The organization pointed to development including Irishtown Bend, the CHEERS project and upcoming plans to revitalize Cleveland’s downtown lakefront as core reasons to start talking about the city’s relationship with fresh water.

Destination Cleveland will take the first step in positioning Cleveland as a waterfront city through its 2025 integrated brand marketing [campaign](#), which focuses on Cleveland’s “urban outdoors.” It positions The Land as a desired getaway that offers beautiful and natural scenery, especially along the water. Paid marketing will target key visitor markets such as Columbus, Detroit, Chicago, Indianapolis and Washington, D.C. Campaign creative will launch in visitor markets by the end of April.

Residents are encouraged to be part of the campaign by experiencing and sharing through social media their outdoor adventures. Destination Cleveland is asking locals to transition to #TheLandforLife when posting on social media. The organization is retiring its use of #ThisisCLE.

COMPOUNDING TOURISM’S EFFECT

Destination Cleveland reinforced its commitment to helping residents understand what makes Cleveland a destination and encouraged locals to be active promoters for the city. Resources available include a [toolkit](#) for businesses that provides branded content, imagery and suggested copy for customer-facing communications. Clevelanders can engage with Destination Cleveland’s work in a variety of ways including giving testimonials, sharing on social media or joining the organization’s [Local Advocate Group](#). Residents can find these opportunities and more at [ThisisCleveland.com/getinvolved](https://thisiscleveland.com/getinvolved).

“Compounding tourism’s positive effect can’t only be done by Destination Cleveland,” said Gilbert. “Residents, organizations and companies that call Cleveland home are our best ambassadors. For perceptions to continue to change, we all need to speak more to the core of the Cleveland experience – emphasizing the Cleveland brand’s values of being bold, passionate, unpretentious, determined, creative and always willing to connect.”

Held at [Huntington Convention Center of Cleveland](#), Destination Cleveland’s annual meeting was attended by more than 500 representatives of hospitality businesses and community organizations as well as local government leaders. The event was made possible in part through sponsorship from [Cuyahoga Community College School of Business, Legal Professions and Hospitality](#) and [United for Business](#).

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ABOUT DESTINATION CLEVELAND: Destination Cleveland is Cleveland’s destination marketing and management organization. The private, non-profit organization’s mission is to stimulate economic growth by attracting people and connecting them to experiences that illustrate Cleveland’s diversity, creativity and contagious passion. In 2023, visitation increased for the third straight year to 18.34 million visits. For more information, visit www.thisiscleveland.com.

ⁱ Metrics above sourced from Cuyahoga County’s 2023 Visitor Volume study produced by MMGY Travel Intelligence as well as the 2023 Tourism Economics Cleveland Visitation Report.

ⁱⁱ MMGY Travel Intelligence “Cleveland, OH Community Perspective Study 2025”