

TOURISM REPORT



2024

**ANNUAL
REPORT**

**ROSS-CHILlicothe CONVENTION
& VISITORS BUREAU**

VISITCHILlicotheOHIO.COM

Introduction

The Ross-Chillicothe Convention & Visitors Bureau is a 501(c)(6) organization dedicated to promoting Chillicothe and Ross County, Ohio, as a prime tourism destination. Its operations are entirely funded by lodging tax revenue collected from overnight visitors staying in local hotels, cabins, and short-term rental properties. Ross County imposes a 3% lodging tax on these room nights, which is allocated to the Bureau for marketing and operational purposes. Similarly, the City of Chillicothe also collects a 3% lodging tax on properties that offer 5 rooms or more. The city contributes an annual investment to support the Bureau's initiatives.

Tourism in Ross County bolsters various industries that benefit directly from visitors, including lodging, food and beverage, and entertainment, among others. The broader community also reaps indirect benefits, as these sectors generate demand for suppliers and create job opportunities. Furthermore, residents enjoy an annual tax savings of \$608 per household due to the economic impact of tourism.

Memberships & Affiliations

State

Tourism Ohio - *Ohio, The Heart of it All*
Ohio Association of Convention & Visitors Bureaus
Ohio Travel Association

Local

Adena Mansion & Gardens
Chillicothe Kiwanis Club
Chillicothe Paints
Chillicothe Ross Chamber of Commerce
Convention Facilities Authority
Feast of the Flowering Moon
Friends of Hopewell
Friends of Lucy Hayes Heritage Center

Mission

The mission of the Ross-Chillicothe Convention & Visitors Bureau is the growth and prosperity of area economic development through tourism. The Bureau's primary focus is to assist, attract, and educate residents, travelers, and partners. It will function as an economic driver of the hospitality industry in general through promotion of extended or overnight visits to the areas of Chillicothe and Ross County, Ohio.

Board of Directors 2024

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

President: Brandon Smith (The Scioto Society)
Vice-President: Curt McAllister (CP Management)
Treasurer: Eric Woodworth (Hampton Inn & Suites)
Past-President: Nancy Ames (Community, At-Large)
Patti Cavender (Frankfort Sunflower Festival)
David Polk (Community, At-Large)
Kathy Styer (Adena Mansion & Gardens)

DIRECTORS

Dwight Garrett (Ross County Commissioner)
Chris Alford (Hopewell Culture NHP)
Nancy Schaffer (Hillside Haven)
Mike Throne (Chamber of Commerce)
Bryan Wickline (Chillicothe Paints)
Steph Moore (Willis-James B&B)

CVB Staff

Melody Young, *Executive Director*
Gene Betts, *Communication Assistant*
Christy Simmons, *Office Manager*

State (Cont.)

Ohio History Connection
Ohio Traveler
Ohio Appalachian Country (Appalachian Ohio)
Ohio Has It

Local (Cont.)

Greater Chillicothe & Ross County Development
Majestic Theatre
Pump House Center for the Arts
Ross County Genealogical Society
Ross County Historical Society
Ross County Port Authority
"Tecumseh!" Outdoor Drama

EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW



MELODY YOUNG
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Bureau remained committed to its mission of promoting tourism in Ross County. This was achieved by broadening its marketing efforts through fresh print and digital advertising channels, launching the wayfinding sign program, and enhancing communication with partners, including short-term rental owners. Furthermore, this marked the first full year of Hopewell Culture National Historical Park being designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, which drew in new visitors and increased international awareness of Chillicothe and Ross County.

Once again, weather posed challenges for local attractions. However, instead of rain, the extreme heat during early summer led to a decline in visitation for some outdoor attractions.

Overall, tourism continued to thrive and remained a crucial economic driver for Chillicothe and Ross County.

6%

Lodging Tax received by the Bureau increased in 2024.

25%

Growth of new short-term rental properties in 2024.

43%

Increase in visitation at Hopewell Culture NHP since World Heritage Inscription.

Lodging Tax

Lodging Tax receipts continued to soar in 2024. The Bureau received a total of \$551,104.17 which measured a 6% increase year-over-year. This resulted from \$501,104.17 received from the county's portion and the continued investment of \$50,000 from the City of Chillicothe. This key performance indicator (KPI) is essential in measuring the effectiveness of the marketing efforts and the return on investment that generated overnight tourism in Ross County.

Marketing

In 2024, the Bureau expanded its marketing efforts to reach a broader audience by targeting new geographical areas and building on 2023 successes. A total of \$242,314.21 was invested to promote Ross County/Chillicothe as a premier destination. Campaigns reached audiences in Canada, New England, and an expanded Midwest region, with media placements in *Crossings*, *Reader's Digest*, *Woman's Day*, *Ohio Magazine*, *Long Weekends*, and the *Ohio Travel Guide*.

The Bureau also focused on two key segments: younger families and group tour operators. Digital campaigns targeted families via Google, Facebook, and websites such as *Ohio Traveler* and *Compass Magazine*. Group travel promotions included memberships and advertisements in *Group Tour Magazine* and *Ohio Has It*.

The Bureau maintained visibility through travel shows and the distribution of the *Official Ross County Visitors Guide*.

World Heritage

Following the designation of Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, visitation to Hopewell Culture National Historical Park increased by 43.6% in 2024. Notably, 42.24% of visitors traveled over 100 miles, marking a 43.08% year-over-year rise in long-distance travelers, who contribute more to the local economy through overnight stays. The data highlights the success of awareness campaigns and marketing efforts in enhancing the site's profile.

Community Support

In 2024, the Bureau's Promotional Grant Assistance Program (GAP) provided \$20,000 in financial assistance to twelve organizations, supporting events and initiatives to increase tourism in Ross County. Recipients included: Annual Model T Jamboree, GusMacker, Chillicothe Half Marathon, GPS100 Race, Ohio Jeep Fest, Badapple Classic, the Pump House Center for the Arts, Ross County Historical Society, Bash for Cash, Southern Ohio Forest Rally, The Scioto Society, and the Purple Carpet Film Paw-Miere of *Without Her*.

Wayfinding Sign Project

The Bureau successfully finished the wayfinding project, installing 50 directional signs throughout the city and county to guide travelers to local attractions. However, some signage was unexpectedly denied by the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) along roadways under their authority. Additionally, engineers expressed concerns about the horizontal wind load and denied approval of the installation of the city sign across the pedestrian bridge spanning High Street (SR 104). Although the project did not reach its original completion goals, schematics and designs are now available for the future installation of these signs.



Sample of monuments located along River Road (near US 23) and E. Main Street.

Top Three Demographic Categories for 2024

Family Union

This demographic consisted of middle-income, middle-aged families residing in homes sustained by stable blue-collar jobs. Many of these households include older parents and their children, who have put in significant effort to establish themselves in a comfortable lifestyle.

Autumn Years

This group mainly consisted of couples aged 66 to 75, residing in suburban and rural areas across the nation. They are financially stable, but often look for special discounts. They may not be adventurous, they do appreciate outdoor recreational activities.

Families in Motion

These families consist of parents aged 31 to 45 who have two or more children. They primarily reside in small towns throughout the eastern region of the country and earn moderate incomes. They seek family-friendly activities and enjoy the outdoors.

Attractions

Reporting from a subscription-based location intelligence platform indicated that the majority of attractions in Ross County experienced an uptick in overall visits. Nevertheless, the extreme heat during early summer affected attendance at certain outdoor events including "Tecumseh!" Outdoor Drama and activities in local State Parks. Most attractions saw a rebound later in the summer.

Appalachian Community Grant Program

Governor Mike DeWine allocated \$500 million in funding through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to launch the Appalachian Community Grant Program (ACGP), aimed at driving transformational improvements across Ohio's Appalachian region. Among the projects approved, Ross County was awarded \$45,292,748 to support several key initiatives, including the development of the Yoctangee Project, upgrades to the Hopewell Culture National Historical Park sites to support their World Heritage designation, repairs to the Paint Creek Recreational Trail, and streetscape enhancements in Bainbridge and Frankfort.

A centerpiece of this funding is the Yoctangee Project, which includes the renovation of the Armory, the construction of a campus-style space to house the UNESCO World Heritage Site Visitor Center, along with a newly constructed visitor center and multiuse pavilion. Additionally, the transformation will include construction of an amphitheater bring significant improvements to the recreational fields to create a dynamic space.

These projects are expected to be completed by the end of 2026 to comply with the guidelines of the ACGP program.

Thrive in 2025: Plans & Goals

Marketing

In 2025, the Ross-Chillicothe Convention & Visitors Bureau will amplify its impact by embracing innovative strategies and building on past successes. Key initiatives include expanded digital marketing to engage families and individuals in the "family union" and "families in motion" segments, encouraging them to explore Ross County and Chillicothe.

The Bureau will also invest in targeted print advertising to reach families and mature travelers through magazines and articles, showcasing the region's historical attractions, outdoor recreation, and vibrant charm.

To broaden its reach, the Bureau will partner with travel bloggers and influencers, trusted voices in travel promotion. Highlights include hosting a National Parks-focused blogger in June and collaborating with Warren and Licking Counties to promote the Hopewell Ceremonial Earthworks.

By celebrating the area's rich history and unique experiences, the Bureau is positioning Ross County as a must-visit destination in 2025.

Community & Partner Collaboration

The Bureau will deepen its collaboration with local businesses, attractions, lodging facilities, and restaurants through cross-promotional opportunities aimed at expanding reach and increasing awareness. By working together to showcase the best of what Ross County has to offer, it will create a cohesive and compelling visitor experience.

It's also committed to supporting its partners by presenting educational opportunities, offering valuable insights and tools to enhance their operations. Quarterly updates on travel trends will provide partners with actionable data to help them refine their planning and adapt to evolving visitor preferences. These initiatives aim to foster growth, strengthen relationships, and ensure a thriving economy in Ross County.

On the Horizon

New Hotel

Chillicothe's hospitality market is expanding with Lucid Hotel Group constructing a TownePlace Suites by Marriott, adding 96 modern extended-stay accommodations for travelers. Located off of Bridge Street, the property will provide easy access to restaurants, entertainment, and the area's attractions.

TownePlace Suites by Marriott is known for its focus on comfort and convenience, catering to guests who need a home-like environment during extended stays. It offers spacious suites, fully equipped kitchens, along with other amenities for families, business travelers, and long-term visitors.

*Proposed TownePlace Suites by Marriott
located near Shawnee Lanes & Golden Corral.*



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230 N. PLAZA BLVD.

CHILICOTHE, OH 45601

(740) 702-7677

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