Getting the word out about the more than $2 Billion in tourism-related investment in our region supports the region’s economic development, talent attraction and retention efforts. Erie County invests the least in tourism out of our peers, despite being a targeted growth sector for our region. The benefits of destination promotion extend far beyond tourism dollars. Cities and states that prioritize destination marketing and coordinate these efforts with economic development initiatives have experienced significant site relocations and new investments as a direct result. Central to our economic development efforts, Visit Buffalo Niagara (VBN) needs more funding to match the level other peer metros are investing in their destination marketing organizations.

Bed tax revenue in Erie County set a new record in 2018 of $11,168,456, an increase of 4.4% over the previous year.

Erie County allocates the smallest total amount from bed tax revenue to tourism promotion.

Tourism employment has grown by 10 percent in five years, now supporting 33,000 jobs.

VBN is funded at the lowest total level of any peer metro except for Rochester, NY.

VBN receives nearly half of the bed tax funding from Erie County than the peer-metro average (46% less).

In 2018, VBN generated a return of $98.65 in contracted visitor spending from convention sales, amateur athletic events, and group tours for every $1 it received in funding.

VBN has nearly $500K less spending power than it did in 2004, after adjusting for inflation.

AMONG OUR PEERS

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The region’s tourism sector is healthier than ever, generating record revenues and national attention, including a record amount of out-of-town media coverage about Buffalo, helping place more than 230 stories. With Niagara Falls as the region’s anchor attraction, Buffalo has so much to offer: art and architectural treasures, a rich industrial history, a growing agritourism and local food scene, natural assets ideal for recreation, and billions in public and private investment. Now is the time for Erie County to properly invest in destination promotion to better market our unique assets and to drive visitation and economic growth.

The Growing Gap in Tourism Funding

RANK | METRO | 2017 DESTINATION MARKETING ORGANIZATION BUDGET | 2017 TOTAL HOTEL OCCUPANCY TAX COLLECTED
--- | --- | --- | ---
51 | ROCHESTER, NY | 3,806,795 | 8,161,500
50 | BUFFALO, NY (ERIE COUNTY) | 4,070,750 | 10,696,694
45 | RICHMOND, VA | 5,898,389 | 26,369,539
47 | HARTFORD, CT | 6,400,000 | 6,935,957
55 | TULSA, OK | 7,116,697 | 7,562,000
49 | BIRMINGHAM, AL | 7,269,230 | 7,269,230
53 | TUCSON, AZ | 9,600,000 | 23,499,797
52 | GRAND RAPIDS, MI | 10,432,000 | 9,250,000
48 | SALT LAKE CITY, UT | 19,500,000 | 12,569,226
54 | HONOLULU, HI | 33,593,468 | 71,621,620
46 | NEW ORLEANS, LA | 36,755,041 | 123,830,209

1. BUFFALO BILLION II
2. DESTINATION PROMOTION: AN ENGINE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, OXFORD ECONOMICS, NOV 2014
3. THE “PEER METRO AVERAGE” WAS ARRIVED AT BY AVERAGING EACH DESTINATION MARKETING ORGANIZATION’S ALLOCATION OF HOTEL OCCUPANCY TAX REVENUE ACROSS THE 10 PEER METRO CITIES.
4. $3,300,000 = $2,436,050.84 IN 2004 DOLLARS, CONSUMER PRICE INDEX
5. FIGURE COURTESY VISIT BUFFALO NIAGARA.
7. DMO BUDGETS ARE A COMBINATION OF HOTEL OCCUPANCY TAX ALLOCATIONS, GRANTS, AND FUNDS RAISED BY THE ORGANIZATION ITSELF.
8. DATA FOR ROCHESTER, NY AND GRAND RAPIDS, MI WERE SOURCED FROM THEIR RESPECTIVE 2017 IRS FORM 990, TAX RETURN OF ORGANIZATION EXEMPT FROM INCOME TAX.

WHAT THEY’RE SAYING

#3 America’s Favorite Cities
- Travel and Leisure, 2017

America’s Coolest Summer City
- London Times, 2018

Best U.S. City to Spend a Weekend
- Thrillist, 2019

10 Best U.S. Cities to Visit in 2019
- Smarter Travel, 2019

Top 10 American Cities for Family-Friendly Travel
- Forbes, 2019