

## Ten examples that show trail tourism works

One major benefit of trail tourism is that it is money spent in rural towns and in more economically disadvantaged areas. Many of the people traveling to a trail and spending a night or more in the area are economically well off and have significant discretionary income.

1. The Great Allegheny Passage in Pennsylvania, generates an average of \$18 per day for single-day trail users, and \$124 a day for overnight trail users. This trail sees well over 850,000 users per year.

2. Helena, Montana showed their South Hills trail system generating \$4.3 million in economic impact annually from 63,000 users. Helena itself has a population of around 32,000 residents, so the majority of trail users are tourists.

3. Michigan's Huron River Water Trail is a 104-mile inland paddling trail that generates large economic impacts through trail users. A 2013 economic analysis showed this impact for the 26 municipalities located along the trail.

4. The Appalachian Trail runs over 2,000 miles and through 14 states from Georgia to Maine. Millions of trail users visit the trail every year creating a measurable economic impact in trail adjacent communities.

5. A study from Parks & Trails New York (PTNY), showed huge profits from trail tourism. Overnight stays and other tourism spending had a major impact on the economic contribution to communities along the trail corridor.

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*Photo courtesy of Kentucky Distillers Association.*

## The big business of booze trails

Linking distilleries, wineries, and breweries in a tourist-friendly map or trail raises the bottom line for the producers involved, but also gives local economies a much-needed boost.

Whether visitors are meandering along the backroads of Kentucky between bourbon distilleries or checking directions to an out-of-the-way brewery in Maine, it's no secret that the rise of tourist-driven trails has influenced how people travel—and drink.

For the public, it's as simple as following a boozy treasure map linking up local producers, but establishing a beer, wine, or liquor trail requires a keen understanding of both the industries they serve—tourism and beverage—and the communities around them. This makes the process of creating these lucrative tourist pathways both deeply region-specific and collaboratively driven.

The Kentucky Bourbon Trail is one of the original spirit-focused tourism paths in the United States. But when it was established in 1999, it was a novel concept that raised a lot of eyebrows. Fast forward almost 25 years and booze trails are a tourism stalwart for rural regions across the country, raising the bottom line for the producers involved while giving local economies a much-needed boost. There

are currently 42 unique distillery trails, and dozens upon dozens of beer and wine pathways in the U.S.

### **Booze trails can revive rural counties**

Distillery, wine, and beer trails not only raise the bottom line for the craftspeople behind the beverages, but they are also contributing to a holistic economic outlook in rural America. Across regions of the country where “dry” counties were the norm less than half a century ago, liquor trails now serve as tourism engines, revenue-drivers, and cultural anchors.

“Distillery trails are creating an economic impact on areas that were not as visited,” says Maggie Quinn, the director of public relations for the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States (DISCUS). “We’re seeing in certain towns that local distillers partner with local farmers, so the economic impact isn’t just in tourism dollars; it’s also going into agricultural [spaces] and the bars and restaurants in local areas, too. Its reach is pretty expansive.”

Sean Sullivan, the executive director of the Maine Brewers’ Guild, agrees that the trail system has worked to give breweries located at a wide spot in the road just as much credence, attention, and accessibility as those in major cities.

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6. Equestrian users can have a huge economic impact due to trail spending – The longer the trail and the scenic views, the more they spend.

According to an American Horse Council report, recreation produced \$31.9 billion in economic impact, which was 31.4% of the 101.58 billion in total for the equine industry.

7. Trail tourism can be a huge economic boost for communities in transition due to job loss or industry closures. One example of this would be cycling tourism in Oakridge, Oregon. A study showed significant spending in the community, which helped revitalize the local economy after the loss of timber jobs had devastating effects.

8. Through surveys, bike shop questionnaires, guide service interviews, and literature research, a study concluded that the Teton County trail system in Wyoming generated an estimated \$18,070,123 million in economic activity. Approximately \$1,109,588 million was generated by local trail users and \$16,960,535 million by non-local trail users. Employment and wages relating to the trail system in Teton County totaled \$3.6 million with approximately 213 workers employed.

9. Fruita, Colorado, has earned a reputation as a world-class mountain biking destination, where trail tourism pumps over \$1.5 million a year into the local economy.

10. A five-year study of the Spearhead ATV Trail System in Virginia showed an economic benefit of \$18M – \$21M. The trail system created up to 390 full-time jobs in an economically depressed area.

– American Trails Staff

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“Our breweries are all over the place. They’re not just in the cities; they’re not just in the biggest towns; they’re in random dirt roads in rural towns where your average Mainer couldn’t point to on a map.”

*“... the economic impact isn’t just in tourism dollars; it’s also going into agricultural [spaces] and the bars and restaurants in local areas, too. Its reach is expansive.” – Maggie Quinn, DISCUS*

Hermann Wine Trail has also created a symbiotic and lucrative relationship with the local chamber of commerce.

“We work very closely with the Hermann Chamber of Commerce—they actually sell our tickets for us,” says Patty Held, the president of the Hermann Wine Trail. “Our ticket sales are the largest source of revenue for the Chamber. We couldn’t do what we do without our Chamber of Commerce, and they need our ticket revenue to help do what they do, too.”

“Think about Bardstown: they really do play on the same playing field as Louisville and Lexington in a lot of ways when it comes to bourbon tourism,” says Mandy Ryan, the director of Kentucky Bourbon Trail Experiences. “They are the bourbon capital of the world. They’ve had distilleries 10, 20, 30 years longer than Louisville has. You really cannot undervalue [a trail] ... in a small community like that.”

### Loosening laws boosts sales opportunities

Whether in small towns or big cities, statewide shifts in where and how alcoholic beverages are sold has also helped in the growth of trail tours anchored by distilleries, wineries, and breweries.

In Maine, Sullivan notes that it wasn’t until 2011 that breweries were allowed to sell beer on site. “Once breweries could sell beer where they made it, it became a real driver of tourism and also a real value proposition for being a member of the Maine Brewers’ Guild.”

In Kentucky, the recent legalization of satellite tasting rooms is poised to expand, and rethink, what a “distillery experience” means along the Kentucky Bourbon Trail. “We’re thinking a lot about satellite tasting rooms because we just got that legislation passed last session,” says Ryan. “For me, it’s a challenge of how do I advertise and set the visitor expectation? You might not see a still, but you might have an awesome tasting experience or an awesome cocktail class. I think that’s really going to change the landscape of Kentucky.”

Similarly, in New Mexico, a reciprocity law passed in 2015 allowed their tasting rooms to sell other New Mexico-made beers, wines, and ciders, improving the economic outlook for producers across the state—as well as the experience for visitors.

– Sarah Baird, *Seven Fifty Daily*