

On Wednesday, September 24, Savannah hosted the 2nd meeting of the [Senate Study Committee on Making Georgia the No. 1 State for Tourism](#), chaired by Senator Drew Echols. [This meeting](#) was held inside the newly expanded Savannah Convention Center with an agenda focused on the importance of marketing and where Georgia ranks compared to neighboring states.

The recent expansion of the Savannah Convention Center was cited as a prime example of the state investing in tourism. General Manager Kelvin Moore thanked state leaders for doubling the size of the convention center, noting the \$260 million in economic impact from FY24 events and 202,000 anticipated visitors for 162 events in FY25.

[Visit Savannah](#) President Joe Marinelli proposed a BOLD marketing strategy for the entire state. Compared to the \$40 million [Pure Michigan](#) and \$49 million [Almost Heaven West Virginia](#) campaigns, Georgia's \$12 million tourism budget and marketing spend does not compete. On the upper end, California spends \$186 million and Florida spends \$80 million on tourism marketing. Visit Savannah's direct spend on marketing comes to \$11.7 million. Marinelli emphasized the return on investment seen from those marketing dollars, with 12.9 million visitors annually and 28,000 local jobs tied to tourism. Consumers average 141 touchpoints before purchase, and the media mix for marketing continues to evolve with technology. He asked committee members to consider funding an increased marketing budget for Explore Georgia. You can find his presentation linked [here](#) starting at 54:20.

Michael Owens with the [Tourism Leadership Council](#) also called for a higher marketing budget, suggesting that it should be \$50 million a year. Comparing Georgia to Coca-Cola, Owens pointed out that brands like Sprite, Fanta or Powerade benefit from Coke's marketing the same way that Savannah or Macon or Dahlonega benefit from promoting the state of Georgia. While the state's destinations are promoted individually, Explore Georgia marketing campaigns raise awareness for locations across the state. With a graphic comparing Georgia's marketing spend to other states, Owens touted the instantaneous ROI for tourism marketing. While economic development projects can take years to contribute to the tax base, visitors spend money that goes directly into the pockets of citizens and back to the government through the various taxes levied upon the tourism industry, and that impact is nearly immediate.

After the study committee at the culmination of the Governor's Tourism Conference, Governor Kemp announced the latest industry numbers:

- \$82 billion in total economic impact
- 174.2 million in total visitation
- \$5.1 billion in state and local tax revenues
- 470,570 jobs supported