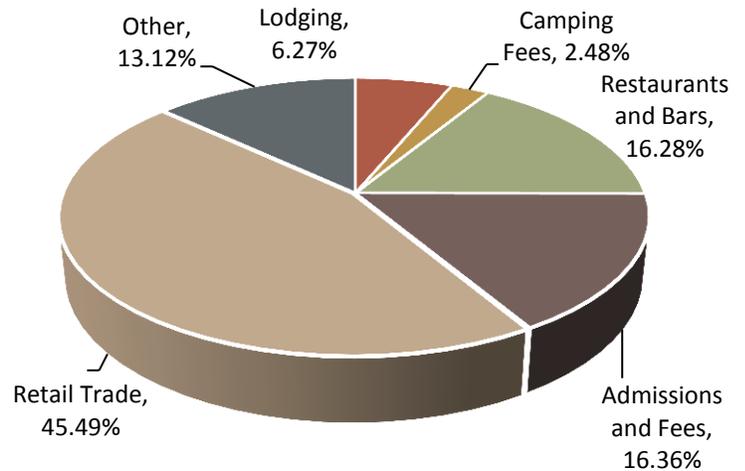


# TOURISM MATTERS

## HENRY COUNTY • MERCER COUNTY • RURAL ROCK ISLAND COUNTY

### A DOLLAR SPENT

It isn't just lodging that profits from tourism. Retail trade is by far the biggest beneficiary of spending by visitors to Henry, Mercer, and rural Rock Island Counties. This is followed by admissions and fees at area attractions and entertainment venues, and spending at bars and restaurants. While room taxes are earmarked for tourism promotion, lodging and camping fees make up less than one out of every ten dollars spent by visitors.



### TOURISM'S ECONOMIC IMPACT

The impact of visitors to the area is measured in both the dollars they spend and the jobs that spending supports. In 2013, an estimated 430,000 visitors spent over \$50.2 million in Henry, Mercer, and rural Rock Island Counties, supporting an estimated 991 jobs. This impact was felt in nearly every sector of the economy and every community within the region.

Tourism provides a big return to local governments through nearly \$1 million in taxes paid on lodging and purchases of retail goods and services.

Henry County .....	\$810,952
Mercer County.....	\$92,861
Rural Rock Island County .....	\$77,653
<b>Total Taxes Generated .....</b>	<b>\$981,466</b>

Visitor spending is especially important in that it is a source of new wealth coming into local communities, where it will recirculate in the local economy as businesses pay employees and purchase goods and services from other businesses in the area.

### VISITOR IMPACT IN HENRY, MERCER, AND RURAL ROCK ISLAND COUNTIES

SPENDING CATEGORY	SALES	JOBS
Lodging	\$3,147,500	56
Camping fees	\$1,246,000	22
Restaurants and bars	\$8,178,800	208
Admissions and fees	\$8,217,300	202
Retail trade	\$22,847,300	470
Other – wholesale trade, local production	\$6,588,400	33
<b>Total direct effects</b>	<b>\$50,225,300</b>	<b>991</b>

### BUILDING COMMUNITIES

Tourism produces another, not-so-obvious benefit to communities. The same attractions that lure visitors to a region help to sustain the quality of life for its citizens, and may even help to attract new residents. In fact, it is becoming more common for places to use quality of life as a tool to attract a skilled workforce, solo professionals, and small business owners.

Every additional 1,000 visitor trips results in \$259,400 in spending and 3.36 new jobs.



## TOP ATTRACTIONS

- Johnson-Sauk Trail State Park
- Bishop Hill
- Hennepin Canal Parkway State Park
- Big River State Forest
- Geneseo / Downtown Geneseo
- Gob Hill / Atkinson Motorsports Park
- Cordova Dragway Park
- Ski Snowstar
- Great River Road
- Great River Trail
- Country Corner Farm Market
- Illiniwek Forest Preserve
- Aledo / Downtown Aledo
- Loud Thunder Forest Preserve
- Kewanee / Downtown Kewanee
- Hampton / Mississippi River
- Wineries: Lavender Crest Winery,  
Backroad Vineyard, Creekside  
Vineyard
- Stone's Apple Barn
- Richmond Hill Park
- Port Louisa National Wildlife Refuge
- Annawan / Howe's Park
- Atkinson
- Colona / Downtown Colona
- Rock River Trail
- Historic Route 6



## WHO IS TRAVELING AND WHAT DO THEY WANT?

The recession, technology, and generational trends are transforming tourism. Overall, business travel has been down since the beginning of the recession and is recovering more slowly than leisure travel. People are taking more trips, yet they are staying closer to home and spending fewer nights away.

More trips are being taken by solo travelers and couples without children, and by people traveling with a pet. The biggest growth in travel is within the older and younger generations. This can be a challenge to plan for very different interests and travel styles. People in their mid 30's to mid 50's are traveling less.

People are searching for something new, opening a door to the possibility of attracting new visitors, but also making it less likely that people will regularly return. To be competitive, a place will offer a distinctive local character, comprised of history, culture, and local food and products sold in stores. Visitors want to interact with people and attractions, taking part in activities.

## COMPETITION

Henry, Mercer, and rural Rock Island Counties compete with other attractions in the broader region. Bishop Hill and the downtowns of area communities compete with Galena and the Amana Colonies, the Quad Cities, and many small towns having specialty shopping districts. The area's outdoor recreation sites compete with places like Morrison-Rockwood, Starved Rock, and Mississippi Palisades State Parks in Illinois, and other parks in Illinois, Wisconsin, or other states.

The demographics of travelers to these better known places are very similar to those attracted to Henry, Mercer, and rural Rock Counties. As much as they are competitors, these places may also present an opportunity to intercept traffic en route, encourage people to make excursions, or present local attractions as alternatives to sites visitors may already know.

## ASSETS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Several core attractions generate the majority of traffic to Henry, Mercer, and rural Rock Island Counties. Lesser attractions contribute some traffic, but usually serve as an opportunity to extend or add to a visit to one of the primary sites. In general, events are not drivers of tourist traffic. Event attendees are mostly drawn from the three counties and their sporadic scheduling does not sustain patronage at local businesses.

Some issues may detract from the visitor experience. These begin even before the visit, when it can be very difficult to get information about some attractions or activities. Once in the area many visitors may be frustrated by the lack of wayfinding or route markings.

Generally speaking, nearly all of the area's attractions can benefit from enhancements such as better interpretation or accessibility improvements. Business hours are another issue within many communities, and funding cuts affecting state-run attractions may have a negative impact on visits..

Many of the area's attractions can be improved and better marketed to attract more visitors. While some strategies are easily implemented, others will take years and sustained commitment from local leaders.

## TRAVEL ITINERARIES

Packaging multiple sites into an itinerary is a strategy that can extend the length of time people stay in the area (increasing the possibility of an overnight trip) and can also help to generate cross traffic to several sites. Four possible itineraries stand out.

- **Outdoor Adventures.** The region’s outdoor recreational assets attract the largest number of visitors and support a great number of popular activities. This itinerary has several potential themes ranging from bird watching to horseback riding.
- **Local Finds – Local Flavor.** Bishop Hill and the downtowns of Aledo, Kewanee, and Geneseo offer unique shopping and dining, while Country Corner Farm Market and the area’s wineries feature local foods.
- **Legendary Auto Tours.** The Great River Road and Historic Route 6 have the potential to bring in visitors, and side trips to complimentary destinations can extend the length of time visitors remain in the area.
- **Geocaching Challenge.** Geocaching is a very popular activity, and a well designed challenge will attract participants who will be exposed to the area’s attractions.

## DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

The study details many actions that can be taken to add to the drawing power of individual attractions. Proposals with a broader scope include the following.

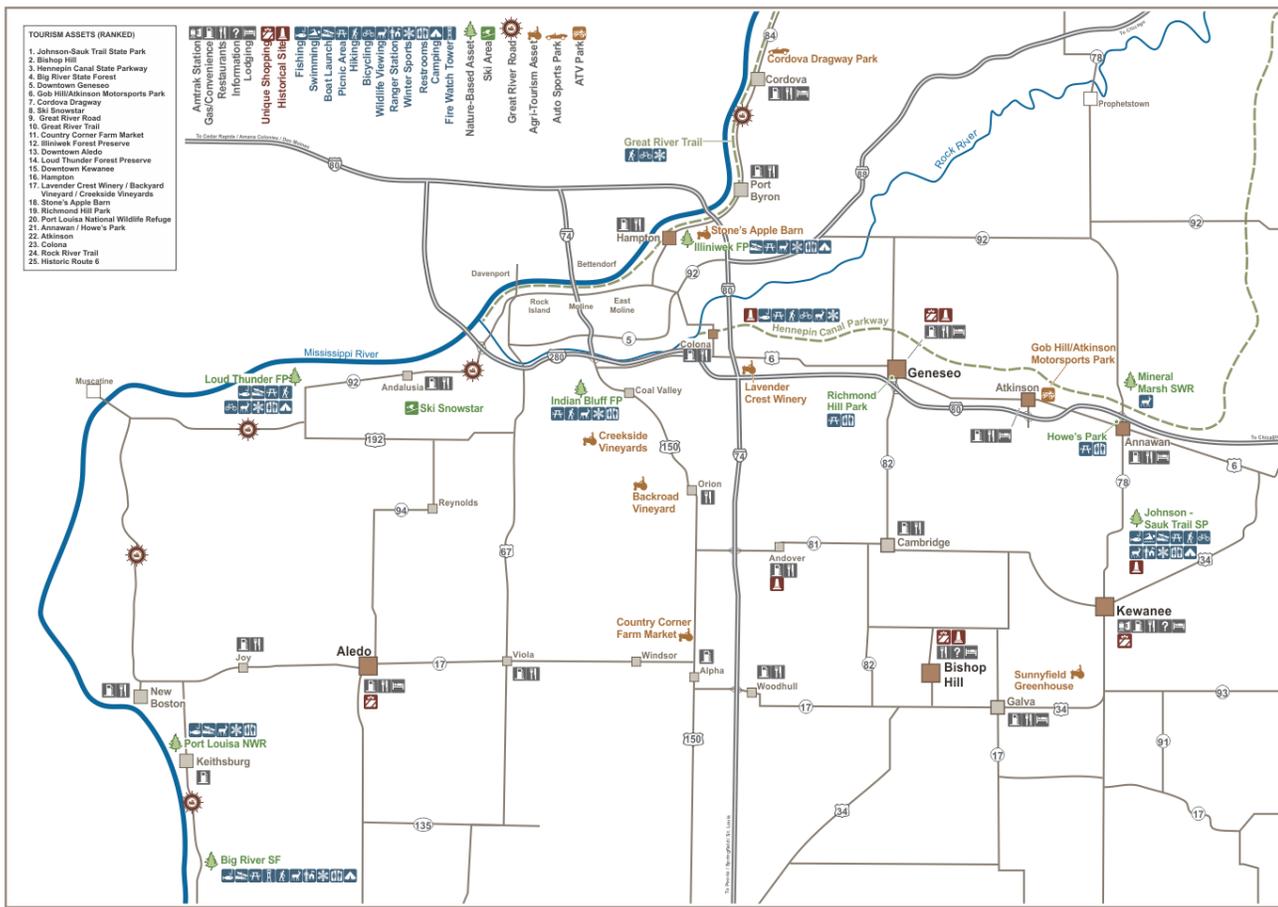
- **Establish a system to collect and report visitor information.** Gathering information about visitors develops understanding of demographics, interests, and travel patterns that can be used to improve attractions and more effectively market for new visits. Several technologies can play a role in data collection.
- **Develop a comprehensive wayfinding and interpretation program.** Wayfinding is a layered approach to guide people to key sites. Phone and mobile application technologies may play a role in interpretation.
- **Create a regional business district vitality program.** Several communities can share resources to create a program focused on bringing vitality to their Main Streets, primarily by providing technical assistance for revitalization activities, attracting new businesses, and helping to grow existing ones.
- **Assess needs for handicapped accessibility.** Handicapped access is a critical concern for visitors as well as the aging local population.
- **Promote local arts, crafts, produce, and foods.** The market for products “local” to an area is rapidly growing. Visitors seek out locally sourced items, whether in shops or restaurants. Helping to match regional producers with businesses will strengthen both the producers and the outlets where their products are sold.
- **Conduct long term planning to develop tourism assets.** Several of the area’s most significant tourism assets are underperforming. Planning initiatives can focus on improving public access to the Mississippi and Rock Rivers, extending the Great River Trail to the south, and establishing byway plans for the Great River Road and Historic Route 6.



## UNDER-DEVELOPED ASSETS

Bishop Hill  
Johnson-Sauk Trail State Park  
Mississippi River  
Big River State Forest  
Port Louisa National Wildlife Refuge  
Great River Road  
Ski Snowstar  
Cordova Dragway Park  
Hennepin Canal Parkway State Park  
Gob Hill / Atkinson Motorsports Park  
Historic Route 6  
Colona / Downtown Colona  
Keithsburg / Downtown Keithsburg  
Rock River Trail  
Geneseo / Downtown Geneseo  
Country Corner Farm Market  
Wineries: Lavender Crest Winery,  
Backroad Vineyard, Creekside  
Vineyard  
Aledo / Downtown Aledo  
Kewanee / Downtown Kewanee  
Cambridge / Downtown Cambridge  
Great River Trail  
Mountain Biking  
Geocaching  
Hunting  
Horse Trails and Camping





# TOURISM ASSET MAP

HENRY - RURAL ROCK ISLAND - MERCER COUNTY TOURISM ASSET MAP

## MARKETING STRATEGIES

While Henry, Mercer, and rural Rock Island Counties may draw visitors from a five hour radius, the majority are originating along an east-west corridor and predominantly from the Chicago region. With limited resources for marketing, this corridor and three competitive regions – Galena, the Quad Cities, and the Amana Colonies – should be targeted.

The most effective marketing materials will minimize advertising in favor of content marketing, such as when information about a restaurant is placed within an article, rather than an ad. The **Back Roads Beckon** tag line can be reinforced with messaging suggesting ideas like “worthwhile detour”, “places less traveled”, “away from the crowd”, “hidden gems”, and an emphasis on local, unique, and handmade products.

The most effective strategies will include the following.

- **Highway marketing.** An effective approach will utilize state programs, wayfinding, and billboard advertising.
- **Onsite marketing.** This approach uses kiosks and literature distribution to make visitors aware of other attractions and businesses in the region.
- **Regional marketing partnerships.** Continue participation in regional efforts to promote tourism.
- **Cross-promotion.** Work with partners to cross-promote attractions, such as encouraging the state park system to promote alternative sites including Johnson-Sauk Trail State Park or Big River State Forest at heavily visited parks like Starved Rock State Park.
- **Collateral material.** Additional printed and online material can focus on specific activities, such as bird watching, hiking and biking trails, and local history.
- **Web and mobile marketing.** There is a need to provide greater trip planning information through tourism and business web sites. A mobile application can help to provide information (such as a map, business information, and interpretation) and can collect data on visitor movements in the area.