



## Monthly News & Updates

January 2026

### 265 Bills and Counting...

As we head into Week 3 of the 101st South Dakota Legislative Session, more than 265 bills have already been introduced — and we expect that number to continue climbing in the weeks ahead. This is when the pace picks up and policy proposals that could impact tourism, hospitality, and local communities really start moving. You'll begin receiving weekly legislative updates from TCS to help you stay informed, along with action alerts when it's important for industry voices to reach out to legislators. When those alerts come, your outreach truly makes a difference in protecting and strengthening South Dakota's visitor industry.

#### 2026 Legislative Bills



### Even in Uncertainty, Tourism Performs

South Dakota's tourism industry continued its strong economic impact in 2025 with historic results. **14.97 million visitors** traveled to and within the state — up slightly from 2024 — and spent a **record \$5.16 billion** in local communities.

Tourism remains a major economic driver, accounting for **4.7% of the state's economy**, supporting **59,145 jobs**, and **generating \$406.1 million in state and local tax revenue** — providing meaningful tax relief for South Dakota households. These numbers reflect the resilience of our industry and underscore the value tourism brings to businesses, communities, and families across the state. As we look ahead to 2026 and upcoming celebrations like America 250, we're reminded that our collaborative efforts — from

### Hats Off to the Ramkota Hotel

Thank you Debi Kessler and the entire staff at the Ramkota during the Governor's Conference on Tourism! You were all awesome!



### Outstanding Award Winners

We are thrilled to congratulate the twelve outstanding individuals and businesses honored at the South Dakota Governor's Conference on Tourism Award Gala.

Please join us in celebrating:

- Phoebe Caldwell, Rising Star Award

- Beth Simonson, Excellence in Tourism Innovation
- Pierre & Fort Pierre, Cacklin' Community Award
- Visit Brookings, Rumbly' Community Award
- Jeff Erickson, A.H. Pankow Award
- Black Hills Visitor Information Center & Experience Sioux Falls, George S. Mickelson Awards
- Laurie Sutterer, Lauren Dietz, Todd Moser, and Noreen Jorgensen, Ruth Ziolkowski Hospitality Awards
- Rollie Noem, Ben Black Elk Award

attractions to small towns — continue to fuel growth and opportunity for every region.



Congratulations to you all!

## Welcome New Members

### THE JOURNEY MUSEUM

#### The Journey Museum

Museum Alliance of Rapid City  
 Conor McMahon - Executive Director  
 222 New York Street  
 Rapid City, SD 57701  
[Journeymuseum.org](http://Journeymuseum.org)  
 (605) 394-2249  
[cmcmahon@journeymuseum.org](mailto:cmcmahon@journeymuseum.org)



#### Dakota Hunts & Labs

Lucas Svartoiien - Owner  
 44238 287th Street  
 Freeman, SD 57029  
[dakotahuntsandlabs.com](http://dakotahuntsandlabs.com)  
 (605) 261-2000  
[Lucas@DakotaHuntsandLabs.com](mailto:Lucas@DakotaHuntsandLabs.com)



#### Murdo Area Chamber of Commerce

Ashley Geigle - Chamber President  
 PO Box 242  
 Murdo, SD 57559  
[Murdosd.com](http://Murdosd.com)  
 (605) 516-9080  
[murdoed@gmail.com](mailto:murdoed@gmail.com)



**Reminder!** Legislative Update on **Friday, January 30th at 10:00AM** via Google Meet (Central Time). Please register using this QR Code.





## Thank You Basket Raffle Donors!

Huge thanks to the amazing businesses and communities that donated raffle baskets for our recent fundraiser! *Because of your generosity — and everyone who purchased tickets — we raised \$10,000 to support advocacy efforts* that protect and strengthen South Dakota's tourism industry. We truly couldn't do this work without partners like you. See the full list of generous donors on our website here: <https://tourismcoalitionsd.com/thank-you/>

## Cheers to our fantastic Wine Sponsors & Conference Attendees!

Because of your generosity, *we raised an additional \$5,000 to support TCSD's advocacy efforts for the tourism industry!*

A special thank you to:

- Ingalls Homestead
- Lewis & Clark Resort
- Ramkota Companies
- Recreational Adventures Company
- Regency Hotel Management
- TownePlace Suites Marriott
- Venerts Hotel Management
- Vermillion Area Chamber & Development Company; and
- Wall Drug

Everyone's support truly makes a difference, and we're so grateful to our partners and members. You can find and support these generous sponsors on our website:

<https://tourismcoalitionsd.com/thankyou/>



## Tourism Day at the Capitol and Tuesday Night Reception



## Keep Your Circle Open & Learn To Tell Engaging Stories

This is only my second year attending the Tourism Conference, and it's already become one of my core memory experiences.

Last year (2025) was my first time attending, and I ended up meeting someone who has the exact same dinosaur tattoo as me. Every Christmas, my family plays a small game where

everyone wins a prize, and one of the gifts I happened to win last year was a pair of dinosaur socks. Knowing I'd see my "tattoo twin" again at this year's conference, I brought the socks with me and wore them when we reconnected.

Thursday, I ended up winning a gift basket from the raffle drawing—and ironically, it turned out to be the dinosaur-themed basket (see photo). The stuffed animal on top happens to be the same dinosaur as our tattoos which makes it even better!

My tattoo originally started as an inside joke between my little sister and me—we got matching ones. Now it's turned into a core memory connected to my experience at the Tourism Conference. You never really know what will spark a connection with someone new! Thank you so much for coming up to talk with me—it was truly a pleasure meeting you. I'm so excited to continue being part of the Tourism Conference and look forward to it every year!

*(Thank you Paige Oleson for sharing your fun story and memories!)*



## New Xanterra Leadership

### Welcome New General Manager

Please join us in welcoming Carl Dittmaier as the new General Manager at Mount Rushmore National Memorial. Carl brings more than 25 years of hospitality leadership and multi-unit operations experience, with an impressive career spanning Disney, Hilton, Station Casinos, and most recently Xanterra. He has a proven track record in operations management, financial performance, employee training and coaching, and exceptional guest service. His diverse background and consistent results position him well for success in this important role at one of South Dakota's most iconic destinations.

Keith Cook has transitioned to General Manager at Rocky Mountain National Park.

Please join us in welcoming Carl and wish Keith success in his new role.



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Tourism Coalition of South Dakota | P.O. Box 237 | Yankton, SD 57078 US

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