

The Humanities in Our Lives

THE VALUE OF HUMANITIES TOURISM

Humanities centers and institutions can be important drivers of economic growth. In 1997, the Bilbao Guggenheim Museum opened its doors in Spain, and it single-handedly revitalized economically depressed Bilbao, Spain. As one reporter observed, “It has given its name to the ‘Bilbao effect’—a phenomenon whereby cultural investment plus showy architecture is supposed to equal economic uplift for cities down on their luck.”

HUMANITIES TOURISM

In 2017, tourism contributed \$500 billion directly and over \$1.5 trillion indirectly to U.S. GDP. This made the U.S. the global leader in total gains from tourism. While shopping and business were major drivers of tourism, visits to humanities-related institutions—historic locations, museums, monuments, and other sites—were among the top reasons for tourism to the U.S. And many U.S. tourists travel within the country to visit historical sites or monuments as part of family and personal trips.

KEY FACTS

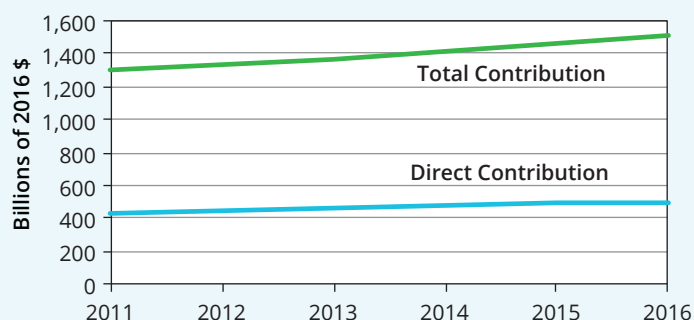
- In 2015, 35% of international travelers to the U.S. visited national parks/monuments, 28.7% art galleries/museums, and 26.7% historic locations.
- In 2015, 40% of U.S. travelers abroad visited historic locations, 32% art galleries/museums, and 30% national parks/monuments.

INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS

One example of a humanities institution driving economic growth is in Seattle, Washington. The creation of the Rem Koolhaas’s architecturally innovative **Seattle Central Public Library** brought in \$16 million in spending associated with visitors to Seattle who said a visit to the library was the primary or important reason they visited downtown Seattle. Seattle tourists that came specifically to see the library spent \$31 on their visit, while non-Seattle tourists spent \$90 on average.

A report from the American Library Association credited the new institution with expanding the identity of the system, “building community character,” and increasing economic vitality in the area. While the net effects vary, the evidence shows that institutions devoted to the humanities in all its forms can be both direct and indirect drivers in local and national economies.

Contribution of Travel & Tourism to U.S. GDP



The Humanities in Our Lives series (#HumInOurLives) highlights the many and diverse forms of humanities activities in the nation, and key facts about the health of the field.

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For more on the broad trends that mark American engagement with various forms of the humanities, visit humanitiesindicators.org or email humanitiesindicators@amacad.org.

 **HUMANITIES INDICATORS**
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