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PLAY BALL!

THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF SPRING TRAINING IN ARIZONA

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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ABOUT COMMON SENSE INSTITUTE

Common Sense Institute is a non-partisan research organization dedicated to the protection and promotion of Arizona's economy. CSI is at the forefront of important discussions concerning the future of free enterprise and aims to have an impact on the issues that matter most to Arizonans. CSI's mission is to examine the fiscal impacts of policies, initiatives, and proposed laws so that Arizonans are educated and informed on issues impacting their lives. CSI employs rigorous research techniques and dynamic modeling to evaluate the potential impact of these measures on the Arizona economy and individual opportunity.

TEAMS & FELLOWS STATEMENT

CSI is committed to independent, in-depth research that examines the impacts of policies, initiatives, and proposed laws so that Arizonans are educated and informed on issues impacting their lives. CSI's commitment to institutional independence is rooted in the individual independence of our researchers, economists, and fellows. At the core of CSI's mission is a belief in the power of the free enterprise system. Our work explores ideas that protect and promote jobs and the economy, and the CSI team and fellows take part in this pursuit with academic freedom. Our team's work is informed by data-driven research and evidence. The views and opinions of fellows do not reflect the institutional views of CSI. CSI operates independently of any political party and does not take positions.

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INTRODUCTION

This month, Arizona welcomes the Cactus League as fifteen Major League Baseball teams take the field across ten stadiums in the Greater Phoenix area, competing for spring training bragging rights. The annual tradition brings a surge of seasonal tourism, boosting activity for local restaurants, retailers, hotels, and ground transportation providers throughout the region – joining the WM Phoenix Open and other ongoing events in supporting Arizona’s massive sports and tourism industry between major events.

Beginning February 20th, the 2026 Cactus League continues a legacy that dates back to 1947, when the Cleveland Indians (now the Cleveland Guardians) faced the New York Giants (now the San Francisco Giants). This year, an estimated 1.8 million fans are expected to attend games and take part in the festivities, along with:

- 1,050 players¹,
- 120 uniformed coaches and managers²,
- 600 administrative/field staff (40 per team)³,
- 35,000 event/facility staff worker-shifts⁴.

Of the teams, only one – the Arizona Diamondbacks – are headquartered in the state, meaning that most of the additional economic activity generated by the games is coming from outside of the state. This report evaluates how much of an impact the Cactus League will have on Arizona’s economy.

FIGURE 1.



Photo courtesy of Major League Baseball

¹Assumes 70 players for 15 teams, which comprises the 40 player roster, non-roster invitees, and prospects.

²This assumes 1 manager per team and 7 uniformed coaches per team (1x15 + 7x15 = 120).

³For each of the 15 teams, this comprises team travel/operations (4), clubhouse/equipment managers (9), medical/athletic training/rehab (9), strength/conditioning/performance/nutrition (5), video/baseball technology/analysis support (5), PR/media relations/content (4), and security/player services/miscellaneous operations (4).

⁴This assumes a mid-range estimate of 1 staff/crew member shift per 70 attendees based upon the expected attendance at each stadium based on the stadium's capacity and assumed filled capacity of 67%. See Appendix A for a table of the breakdown.

KEY FINDINGS

- Over the coming six weeks, the Cactus League will include:
 - › 1.8 million spectators,
 - › 1,050 players,
 - › 120 uniformed coaches and managers,
 - › 600 administrative/field staff (40 per team),
 - › 35,000 event/facility staff worker-shifts.
- CSI estimates that out-of-state visitors – be they spectators, family members, players, coaches, administrative staff – will spend approximately \$210-\$590 million directly on hotels, restaurants, groceries, transportation, and game tickets.
- This injection of spending from out-of-state residents is expected to boost GDP by up to \$953 million, and result in an up to \$486 million boost to disposable personal incomes in Arizona.
- For the first time, in terms of gross output, CSI estimates the economic impact of spring training will reach \$1 billion this year.
- Overall, the Cactus League supports approximately 5,200 seasonal, part-time, and full-time jobs in the state, largely among the state's accommodation, food and beverage service, transportation, and amusements industries.

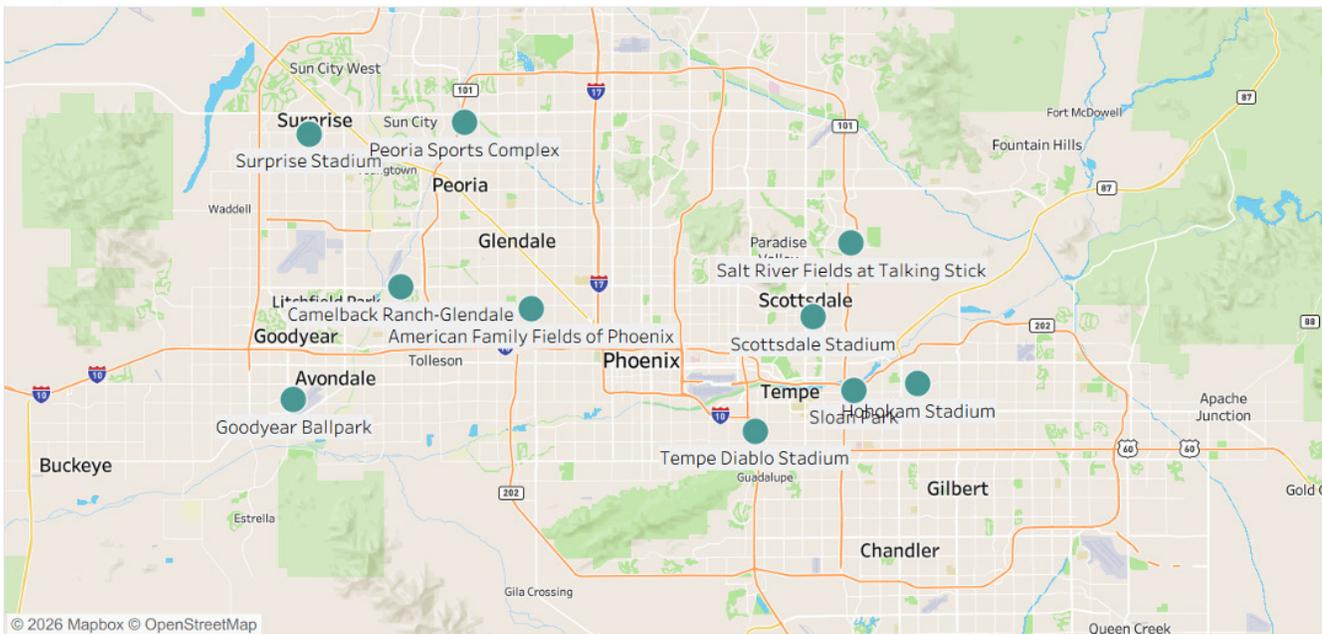
LOCATIONS AND NUMBER OF GAMES

Visitors will come to 10 stadiums, including Surprise Stadium, Peoria Sports Complex, Camelback Ranch-Glendale, American Family Fields of Phoenix, Goodyear Ballpark, Tempe Diablo Stadium, Sloan Park, Hohokam Stadium, Scottsdale Stadium, and Salt River Fields at Talking Stick. All of the locations are within a 50-mile radius of each other within the greater Phoenix metro area.

Overall, from February 20 through March 24, 225 scheduled games will take place in the state, with the 15 teams each playing 30 games.ⁱⁱ

FIGURE 2.

Map of 10 Stadiums



FANS, PLAYERS, COACHES, AND LOCATION STAFF

Spectator Attendance

In 2025, nearly 1.7 million attended spring training games across the valley.ⁱⁱⁱ Of these, around 65% of ballpark attendees came from outside of Arizona.^{iv}

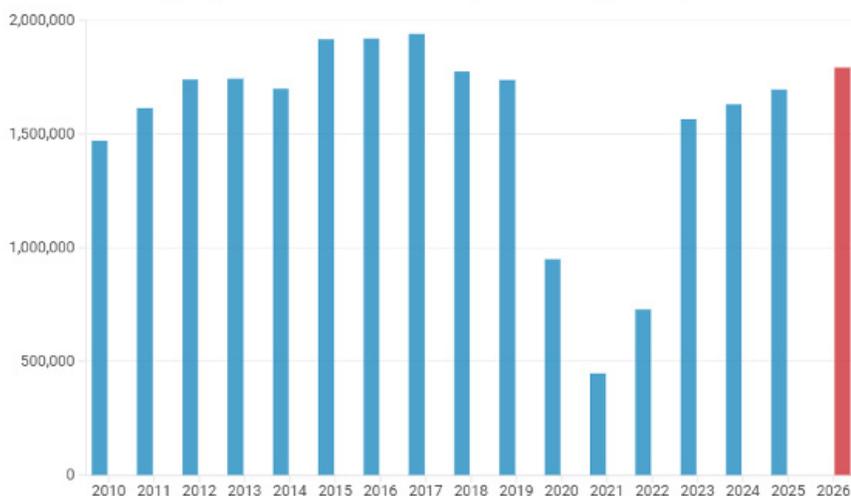
Projecting to 2026, and assuming approximately 65% of this year’s attendees come from out of state, 1.2 million “attendees” will travel to Arizona from other places to enjoy spring training in 2026.

In this context, one attendee does not necessarily translate to one person, as the same individual typically attends multiple spring training events in a single trip. To account for this in estimating true *individual spend*, CSI assumed a range of between 2 and 3 games attended. This gave a range between 388,900 and 583,300 individual visitors.

Additionally, although it is common for people to attend games without a party, it is more common for people to attend with friends, family, and other party members. CSI employed an average range of between 1.5 and 3 people per party and assumed the party members share on certain expense categories like travel and lodging.

FIGURE 3.

Cactus League, Attendance History and Projected, 2010-2026



Source: Cactus League, CSI

In addition to the fans, approximately 1,050 players and 120 coaches/managers will be staying six weeks in the state. Of these, all but 70 players and 8 coaches/managers will be visitors to the state. Additionally, teams arrive to state with an estimated 600 administrative/field staff, or 40 per team. Of the 600, we assume almost all – 560 staff – will come from outside of the state. The makeup of the staff comprises:

- Team travel/operations (4),
- Clubhouse/equipment managers (9),
- Medical/athletic training/rehab (9),
- Strength/conditioning/performance/nutrition (5),
- Video/baseball technology/analysis support (5),
- PR/media relations/content (4), and
- Security/player services/miscellaneous operations (4).

Beyond the fans and team personnel in attendance, each game also requires substantial behind-the-scenes staffing to operate the facilities efficiently and safely. Stadiums must be supported by event personnel, security, concessions workers, and other facility staff. Assuming roughly one event or facility staff member for every 70 attendees, the full slate of games over the six-week season would generate an estimated 35,000 event and facility staff worker-shifts.

OUT-OF-STATE SPENDING

With the number of people coming to the state established, the next relevant factor is level of spending from visitors. According to BudgetYourTrip.com, travelers to the Phoenix area spend around \$90 per day on meals, \$39 per day on transportation, and \$287 on hotels.^v Additionally, based on pricing information for the various ballparks in Arizona, CSI assumes an average ticket value of \$45. Figure 3 illustrates the total spending by all out-of-state visitors. Overall, the largest spending category is expected to be on hotels, followed by restaurants, groceries, game tickets, and transportation.

Beyond fan spending, players, coaches, and team staff will reside in the state for approximately six weeks. Whether expenses are paid directly or reimbursed through the league, their lodging, dining, transportation, and day-to-day purchases will further contribute to revenues for local hotels, restaurants, and other businesses throughout the region.

FIGURE 4.

Spending per Person for the Games

Category	Share of Spend	Dollars per Person per Trip (\$720 total)
Hotels / lodging	42%	\$300
Restaurants & bars	22%	\$161
Groceries	3%	\$23
Transportation (in AZ)	14%	\$102
Game tickets	6%	\$45
Other entertainment	6%	\$46
Souvenirs & gifts	6%	\$42
Total	100%	\$720

Source: CSI Research, Cactus League reporting

OVERALL ECONOMIC IMPACT

To estimate the dynamic economic impacts of annual visitor spending on the broader Arizona economy, CSI utilized an econometric input-output model from Regional Economic Models Inc.^{vi} Visitor spending was modeled as an increase in Retail Trade, Transportation, Amusements, Accommodations, and Food & Beverage Services industry output variables. Effort was made to account for existing in-state spending, exclude certain investment effects where appropriate, and otherwise ensure the estimate did not double-count unrelated infrastructure or visitor spend.

Given this background, the overall economic impact combines the number of expected visitors with the spending brought into the state. From the initial direct spending from out-of-state individuals between \$210 million and \$590 million, Arizona will see (Figure 5):

- An overall increase in business sales (output) of between \$341 million and \$1.6 billion.
- A boost to GDP of between \$210 million and \$953 million.
- An increase to personal income of between \$46 million and \$556 million.
- Between 668 and 9,697 jobs associated with the games – depending on the precise estimate use, the seasonal vs. ongoing nature of related employment, and other factors.

In addition to the economic benefits cited above, the increased expenditures will contribute to a windfall in state and local Transaction Privilege Tax (TPT) revenues – effectively Arizona’s form of a sales tax – in the coming months.

Using the aforementioned additional expenditures, out-of-state attendees at the Cactus League games could generate between \$12 and \$33 million in additional State TPT revenues alone over the coming months.^{vii}

FIGURE 5.

The Cactus League - Overall Economic Impact

From direct spending of approximately \$840 million from out-of-state visitors, Arizona will see approximately \$2.8 billion in business sales, a \$1.7 billion boost to GDP, and about \$1.0 billion in increased personal income.

Category	2026
Total Employment	18,487
Gross Domestic Product	\$1,671,460,298
Output	\$2,818,781,075
Personal Income	\$1,025,230,785
Disposable Personal Income	\$896,747,845

Source: CSI Research, Cactus League reporting

THE BOTTOM LINE

Each year, spring training in Arizona signals more than just the return of baseball — it marks the arrival of one of the state’s largest recurring tourism-related events. Beyond the excitement on the field, spring training delivers a substantial economic boost, filling hotels, restaurants, and retail centers and generating between \$341 million and \$1.6 billion in economic activity, while also generating significant tax revenue and supporting thousands of local jobs. For Arizonans, it is again a reminder that the tourism sector is an important economic contributor, even between major events.

APPENDIX A

The following table presents the assumptions behind the assumed event staff/crew for each of the 10 stadiums.

FIGURE 6.

Event Staff per Game and Stadium Capacity

Stadium	Capacity	Expected attendance per game	Staff per game (Low)	Staff per game (Mid)	Staff per game (High)
Sloan Park	15,000	10,142	148	190	239
Camelback Ranch-Glendale	13,000	8,789	133	171	215
Peoria Sports Complex	12,399	8,383	128	165	207
Scottsdale Stadium	12,000	8,113	125	161	203
Salt River Fields at Talking Stick	11,000	7,437	118	151	190
Surprise Stadium	10,500	7,099	114	146	184
Hohokam Stadium	10,500	7,099	114	146	184
American Family Fields of Phoenix	10,000	6,761	110	142	178
Tempe Diablo Stadium	9,558	6,462	107	137	172
Goodyear Ballpark	9,500	6,423	106	137	172

Source: CSI Research, Cactus League reporting

REFERENCES

- i. Cactus League, "About the Cactus League," accessed February 19, 2026,
- ii. Cactus League, "2026 Spring Training Schedule," accessed February 19, 2026,
- iii. Cactus League, "About the Cactus League," accessed February 19, 2026,
- iv. Cactus League, "About the Cactus League," accessed February 19, 2026,
- v. "Travel Budget for Phoenix," Budgetyourtrip.com, accessed February 19, 2026
- vi. REMI
- vii. The State TPT rate applicable to most spending categories is 5.6%.