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Airing of the Quilts generates significant economic benefit for Alabama's Black Belt

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (Feb. 2, 2026) – The [2025 Airing of the Quilts Festival](#) in Gee's Bend generated more than \$700,000 in visitor spending and drew attendees from more than 25 states and several countries to the annual event in rural Wilcox County.

Those are key findings from a survey of 182 festivalgoers conducted by Gray Research Solutions and commissioned by the [Alabama Black Belt Adventures Association \(ALBBAA\)](#), Souls Grown Deep and the [Freedom Quilting Bee Legacy](#). The survey was designed to develop a profile of festival attendees at the fourth annual Airing of the Quilts Festival and gauge the event's economic impact on Alabama's Black Belt.

The festival, which was named to [Garden & Gun magazine's 2025 Bucket List](#), drew approximately 2,500 people in 2025, the largest crowd in the event's history.

"The Gee's Bend quilt-makers have garnered international acclaim for their unique artistry, and that's why the Airing of the Quilts has grown year after year," said ALBBAA director Pam Swanner. "We also understand that we need to know where festivalgoers are coming from, where they're staying and for how long, and how much money they're spending in the Black Belt.

"That information allows everyone to better market the festival and help it to continue to grow and attract visitors from all over the globe."

Other key survey findings include:

- All 182 respondents indicated the festival matched their expectations.
- More than half of the respondents (58%) came from Alabama, but visitors from 26 states participated in the survey and one was from France.
- Post-festival quilt sales to artists totaled more than \$191,000.

- 97% purchased something at the festival and 42% took advantage of the festival’s hop-on/hop-off tour bus, which provided an intimate experience of the homes and spaces of legacy quilters.
- A huge majority of attendees travelled to the festival by car (86%) and were there for the first time (84%).
- Nearly half of festivalgoers (42%) stayed overnight, with an average stay of 2.9 days. The other 58 percent were day-trippers.
- Most of the festival attendees came from within a four-hour commuting radius – 36% travelled from 0-2 hours and another 33% travelled 2-4 hours.
- Of the more than \$700,000 in spending, visitors spent the most in Wilcox, Dallas and Montgomery counties.
- Nearly half of the respondents (48%) remembered seeing an ad for the festival on social media.
- Nearly a third of respondents (30%) said they would “probably” or “definitely” purchase a quilt after the festival, expecting to spend an average of \$850.
- Nearly two-thirds (62%) said they are very likely to return to the festival in the future and another 23 percent said they are somewhat likely to return.

“Virtually everyone who took part in the survey raved about the hospitality they received in Gee’s Bend,” said Kim V. Kelly, executive director of the Freedom Quilting Bee Legacy. “The local community truly embraces this event, and it’s exciting for us to know more about the people who are visiting for the festival. Every person who visits the Airing of the Quilts can immerse themselves in the area’s incredible cultural significance. That’s a unique experience.”

[The 2026 Airing of the Quilts](#), set for Oct. 3, 2026, will again honor the living history of Gee’s Bend and teach about the area’s significant role in the American Civil Rights Movement, while also showcasing one of America’s most renowned artist communities. Visitors can again expect interactive programming featuring the community’s quilters, dozens of vendors, food trucks, music and storytelling from the descendants of generations of Gee’s Bend quilters.

“I urge anyone who hasn’t been to the festival to go ahead and book your travel plans now,” Swanner said. “You won’t be disappointed. Whether you want to learn from quilt-makers themselves, shop the festival’s vendors, listen to amazing music or simply visit a unique place in the heart of Alabama’s Black Belt, this is a festival that you don’t want to miss.”

The Black Belt includes the following 23 counties: Barbour, Bullock, Butler, Choctaw, Clarke, Conecuh, Crenshaw, Dallas, Greene, Hale, Lee, Lowndes, Macon, Marengo, Monroe, Montgomery, Perry, Pickens, Pike, Russell, Sumter, Tuscaloosa and Wilcox.

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The Alabama Black Belt Adventures Association is committed to promoting and enhancing outdoor recreation and tourism opportunities in the Black Belt in a manner that provides economic and ecological benefits to the region and its citizens. For information, go to <https://alabamablackbeltadventures.org/>