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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**DIVISION OF TOURISM CELEBRATES NATIONAL TOURISM WEEK**

The Mississippi Development Authority's (MDA) Division of Tourism, along with convention and visitors' bureaus and tourism councils statewide, will celebrate the 19<sup>th</sup> Annual National Tourism Week in Mississippi from May 4 to May 12, 2002.

National Tourism Week was established to offer communities and the tourism industry the opportunity to emphasize the economic impact of travel and tourism and to express appreciation for both the travelers and employees who work in the industry.

"Tourism is a vital part of Mississippi's character and economic prosperity," said Robert J. Rohrlack, Jr., Executive Director of MDA. "Recognizing the men and women who work tirelessly to promote our state and increasing awareness about the industry are crucial to our continued success and growth."

Throughout the week, tourism industry volunteers will provide food, drink and entertainment at many of the state's 11 Welcome Centers. The Division of Tourism's Jackson staff members will also be on hand to assist and greet visitors. Last year, over 2.9 million people were serviced at Mississippi Welcome Centers, a 2.8 percent increase over 2000 figures.

Division of Tourism staff members will serve complimentary breakfast refreshments in the lobby of the Woolfolk State Office Building in Jackson from 7:30 to 9:30 a.m. on Wednesday, May 8, in observance of National Tourism Awareness Day. May 8 is also designated as "Wear Red Day" to acknowledge the industry's 19 million jobs nationwide.

"The tourism industry creates so many opportunities in our state – jobs, business growth and a better quality of life. We are delighted to have the opportunity to give a little back to the people who support us in our day-to-day efforts," commented Darienne Wilson, Director, Division of Tourism.

Tourism is a \$6 billion industry in Mississippi, contributing nearly \$500 million to the state's General Fund. Tourism is responsible for over 94,000 jobs in the state.

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