

How IS Summer Going?

According to the forecast prepared for the Division of Travel and Tourism Development (DTTD) by the Institute for New Hampshire Studies, more than 13 million visitors were predicted to travel to New Hampshire this summer, an increase of two percent over levels seen in 2006. "Total visitor spending was projected to be about four percent above last summer's levels, reaching more than \$1.6 billion and setting a new spending record," explains DTTD Director Alice DeSouza. "but it's still too early to know if we are meeting those predictions." Going into August, through informal discussions with and emails from industry members around the state, we compiled the following...

"August is the busiest summer month here in the Lakes Region, " wrote Amy Landers, "but overall June was very good for businesses with two major events, Motorcycle Week and Winston Cup. July business was quite mixed. We had businesses that reported to be down, others to be up, and most equal to or close to equal to last year.

During Motorcycle Week we found the two weekends' occupancy was very high. Mid-week was a bit slower. A lot more day-trippers during the first weekend of the event. Repeat business was about 30% to 40%, where several years ago this would have 60% or higher during the event. Visitors and vendors were more spread throughout the state this year."

Attractions in the mountains reported a good start to the season through June, but a soft July, according to WMAA President Jayne O'Connor, who went on to write, "They are looking forward to August. I have heard several of them say that it is an okay year – but they won't set any records. Day-trippers seem to be prevalent, as the attractions get busy around 11:00 a.m. not when the doors first open.

For lodging in the mountains, "No Vacancy" signs were pretty scarce until just this week (*last week of July*) all around the mountains. Advance reservations still seem a bit soft. On a good note, attractions and retailers are reporting that per capita spending is up, mostly in retail merchandise."

Jayne reported that her members are seeing their second strong season of Canadian visits, with the best exchange rate since 1976. Canadians and International travelers also like our gas prices, since their gas is nearly \$4/gallon.

Reports from the Seacoast Region indicate that summer occupancy for area hotels is about the same as last year, though some are reporting increases of 8-10%. Because of the increase in room inventory in the region over the last few years, the number of rooms actually sold has increased even though individual properties may be reporting flat or possibly decreased sales. Jay McSherry, who owns five restaurants in the seacoast area reports that business is slightly up, due to both tourist and business diners alike. (*Many thanks to Tom Cocchario of the Portsmouth Chamber and Bill McDonald of the Port Inn for helping to compile information from the Seacoast Region!*)

Denise Meadows wrote on behalf of the Monadnock Region: "This is the general feel: Bookings are being made on a much shorter notice, business & leisure. B & B's are seeing folks from farther away: GA, FL, CA, AR, WI, for example. Visitors in general are coming from MA, CT, NY, PA, NJ. Not many visitors from overseas.

Smaller properties (B & B's) seem to be having a banner season, while some of the larger facilities (hotels/Inns) are reporting a flat season. However one of our larger inns reports that this week (*last week of July*) will be their best of the season. Hillsborough reports that their properties are about the same as last year following a slow start in June. The week of the 4th was at 100% occupancy. Their events/festivals are drawing well. Walpole properties report more family gatherings/reunions than years past and wedding bookings are down a bit from last year.

Keene properties have been battling construction with both the State and City building roundabouts and other usual summer road work. Getting into and around the city has been trying at best. (*Keene, North Conway feels your pain.....Editor.*) Less spontaneous leisure business than past (a direct result of the construction). EF Lane Hotel occupancy has been down this summer from past summers about 5%. Keene downtown restaurants have been much slower, again due to construction. After an initial downturn in businesses after Main Street construction started - 2 businesses closed their doors - most retailers are reporting banner summer seasons. There has been a tremendous effort and outreach by the City of Keene to assist the business in downtown affected by the construction."

From Robin Comstock at the Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce, came word that things in Manchester and surrounding communities are hopping. She reports numerous requests for meetings and small conventions and said that her office is providing a high level of telephone and electronic support in response to visitor inquiries. "The venues offered by the Palace Theater and NH Philharmonic, the excitement about the Currier re-opening, combined with the Mill Yard Museum all are generating lots of inquiries. Add to that the entertainment options provided by the NH Fisher Cats, the Arena, and small venues around the area.....summer in the city is good, the night life lively, and we're feeling lots of enthusiasm for the season here in Southern New Hampshire!"