

Southern Delaware Tourism Facts



Winter 1999

Southern Delaware Tourism Facts is designed to provide objective, research-based information on tourism in Southern Delaware. The information is intended to inform and educate individuals who have an interest in tourism and the contributions it makes to the local economy. The fact sheet is a joint effort of the Sussex County Convention and Tourism Commission (SCCTC) and the University of Delaware Sea Grant Marine Advisory Service. For additional information on any material presented in the fact sheet, contact SCCTC at (302) 856-1818.

1998 Southern Delaware Travelers Differ from 1997 Travelers

Visitor response to the 1997 Southern Delaware Visitor Guide survey was profiled in the first issue of this fact sheet (Summer, 1998). A follow-up survey appeared in the 1998 visitor guide and responses revealed some interesting differences.

- ◆ Pennsylvania visitation showed an increase from 23% to 31% and New York visitors increased from 10% to 14%. Maryland (19% vs. 12%), New Jersey (18% vs. 15%) and Virginia (7% vs. 4%) visitation decreased.
- ◆ Travel group size was relatively constant; 51% of visitors traveled in groups of 2 (vs. 54% in 1997); 8% traveled in groups of 3; down from 16% the previous year, but group sizes of 4 increased from 18% to 25%. Groups of 5 or greater increased from 11% (in 1997) to 15% in 1998.
- ◆ Some of the more interesting revelations appear when month of visit is examined. Visitors traveling to Southern Delaware between January and April increased from 10% to 18%. May and June visitation was down slightly (51% vs. 48%) and July and August visits were up slightly (70% vs. 67%). The months of September and October revealed the most striking changes. Visitation during these months increased from 34% to 45% and November and December visitation was also up slightly (9% in 1997 vs. 13% in 1998). *Visitor responses could reflect multiple months visited during both years.*
- ◆ Interestingly, SCCTC began an initiative 3 years ago to heavily market spring travel packages and to publicize September through December as a "Hollydays" travel promotion.
- ◆ Southern Delaware travelers' source of information to visit was nearly identical for both years; (1) Family and Friends, (2) newspapers and magazines, (3) Southern Delaware Visitors Guide. The types of activities that visitors engaged in was also fairly consistent. One subtle change showed fewer people looking at real estate (25% vs. 32%).
- ◆ Visitors' age distribution revealed noticeable changes. Overall, 1998 visitors appeared younger than the 1997 visitors. Most noticeably, 19% of 1998 visitors were over 60 years of age, compared with 32% in 1997. Visitors between the ages of 40 and 59 increased from 47% to 56%.
- ◆ Visitor incomes showed modest increases. Those earning \$75,000 or more increased from 7% to 20%, whereas visitors reporting incomes between \$30,000 and \$50,000 decreased from 36% to 29% and visitor incomes in the \$50,000 to \$75,000 range remained relatively steady (42% in 1997 vs. 38% in 1998).
- ◆ Visitors both years mentioned they especially liked the following Southern Delaware amenities: (1) beaches, (2) people, and (3) shopping (especially tax-free). Traffic and parking were most-often mentioned as things needing improvements.

The comparisons in these two years of data must be interpreted cautiously. Since surveys were returned on a voluntary basis and not through a random selection sampling process, other visitor information must also be reviewed to verify the accuracy of these findings. Travel trends, however, do begin to emerge as yearly data sets are collected.

Delaware "Green Hotels" Employ Environmentally-Sound Practices

A statewide survey of Delaware hotels and motels was conducted in the summer of 1998 to identify water and energy conservation practices.

- ◆ 84% of accommodations indicated that they had undertaken water conservation projects such as reduced-flow shower heads or low-flow toilets. Another 77% say they initiated energy conservation projects such as installing energy-saving lighting.
- ◆ 63% of hotels and motels mentioned that they regularly purchase reusable or recyclable products for their establishments; 47% indicated that they recycle products, with cardboard, paper and aluminum being mentioned most often.
- ◆ 41% of the responding properties indicated that they regularly train their staff on how to be "environmentally-friendly". About one-third of the responding hotels/motels indicated that they promote their waste reduction and energy conservation practices to their guests.
- ◆ Overall, 61% indicated that they were aware of the potential cost-savings that could be realized by practicing waste-reduction and energy conservation; 26% reported that they had limited knowledge and would like more information.
- ◆ More than three-quarters of the hotel/motel respondents indicated that they would benefit from a one-half day seminar to learn more about these topics. SCCTC and the University of Delaware Sea Grant Program are working with other partners to sponsor a seminar titled, *Inn-Keeping with the Environment* to be held March 16, 1999 in Dover, DE. For more information contact SCCTC.

Nature-Based Travelers Important for Southern Delaware's Economy

After 3 years of marketing and developing ecotourism opportunities throughout the state, SCCTC was interested in profiling DE eco-travelers. A one-page survey was developed and mailed to 1,000 individuals who had requested a copy of the *1997 Delaware Eco-Discovery Guide*.

- ◆ 86% of respondents who vacationed in DE in 1997 reported they visited a natural attraction and 66% indicated *Delaware Eco-Discoveries* was "very useful"

to help them identify many of the state's natural attractions.

- ◆ 48% of travelers indicated they had taken a vacation or day-trip that could be considered an ecotour (e.g. hiking, birdwatching, biking, etc.); 33% reported that they had attended a festival or special event in the past year that focused on nature or the environment.
- ◆ When given the opportunity to plan an ultimate adventure travel vacation, the following activities were mentioned most often: touring historical/cultural sites (61%), hiking/backpacking (37%), camping (23%), biking (22%), rafting/canoeing/kayaking (22%) and birdwatching (18%).
- ◆ 34% of the respondents were between the ages of 40 and 49, 22% were between 50 and 59; and 25% were 60 years of age or older. 47% were employed in professional/management positions and 22% were retirees. 54% reported having college degrees.
- ◆ 32% of travelers reported incomes of between \$30,000 and \$50,000 and 53% reported incomes over \$50,000.
- ◆ 78% overall reported that when they travel, they enjoy being outdoors and getting exercise and taking the time to enjoy nature on their vacations.

These findings have implications for the growing nature-based travel industry in Southern Delaware and for how private businesses can market their services to these eco-travelers.

For a complete copy of the 1997 Nature-Based Tourism Survey results contact DE Sea Grant at (302) 645-4235.

SCCTC Joins Travel and Tourism Research Association

SCCTC recently joined the Travel and Tourism Research Association (TTRA), a national organization of more than 800 travel and tourism research and marketing professionals. This membership will help provide access to information to augment our local tourism research efforts, to learn valuable techniques and methods from others, and to help us find ways to better use our research in making sound strategic, tactical, and marketing decisions. For more information, contact SCCTC.



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