

## Tourism up and down

TIANS reports overall increase but 'shrinkage in international markets'

By BRUCE ERSKINE Business Reporter

Nova Scotia's tourism numbers for the first nine months of the year are up slightly, but declining international visits remains a concern, says the president of the Tourism Industry Association of Nova Scotia.

"Marginally, it's up, which is good news, but there's some shrinkage in international markets," Darlene Grant Fiander said in an interview Thursday.

Provincial Tourism Department numbers released Thursday show that Nova Scotia had 1.7 million visitors in the first nine months of the year, up two per cent from the same period 2009.

Domestic travel to the province increased by two per cent with visits from Atlantic Canada, Quebec and Ontario each increasing three per cent, while visitors from the West dropped seven per cent.

Internationally, visits from Germany increased five per cent in the nine-month period.

But visits from the United Kingdom fell eight per cent in that period, matching the overall eight per cent drop in overseas visits.

Visits from America have dropped two per cent to date this year.

Grant Fiander said the loss of the Cat high-speed ferry connecting Yarmouth and Maine, cited as a key factor in a 61 per cent drop in New England visitors to southwestern Nova Scotia tourist bureaus this summer, played a role in the decline in American visits.

But she said the loss of that transportation link is only one piece of a larger puzzle.

"Americans are travelling, but they're not coming here."

Overall visits to the province in September were down two per cent from September 2009, Grant Fiander said.

She said Nova Scotia has to do more to attract visitors to the province in an intensely competitive global tourism marketplace.

"We have to grow the export market. We need to find a way to resonate."

More definitive numbers for the year will be released at the association's annual conference at the end of November, where Grant Fiander said the issue of declining international visits to Nova Scotia will be a hot topic.

Road travel to Nova Scotia increased three per cent in the first nine months of the year but fell four per cent in September. Air travel dropped two per cent year to date and was down one per cent when comparing this September to September 2009.

Cruise ship passenger visits, which aren't included in overall visitor numbers, were up significantly, with Halifax seeing a 22 per cent increase over last year, while Cape Breton was up 15 per cent.

Dennis Campbell, president of Halifax's Ambassadors Gray Line, said he was pleasantly surprised by the increased year-to-date visitor numbers in still uncertain economic times.

Campbell said he understood that some parts of the province were doing better than others and said his motor-coach company benefited by focusing on cruise ships.

"Our business is up. But if we weren't as diversified, we'd be down."

Nova Scotia campgrounds reported a two per cent increase in total site nights sold year to date, while visitors arriving in recreational vehicles were up 13 per cent to the end of September.

Nova Scotia calculates monthly tourism statistics by counting non-resident overnight visitors at all entry points to the province and gathering the number of room nights sold from licensed accommodation operators.

The province's tourism industry, according to 2008 figures, employs more than 31,000 people and generates \$1.82 billion in revenues.

Tourism Minister Percy Paris said in a news release the higher overall visitor numbers reflected the hard work of tourism operators in every region.

( [berskine@herald.ca](mailto:berskine@herald.ca) )