

TOURISM, CULTURE AND HERITAGE--July Tourism Statistics Available

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Global and national factors affecting the tourism industry are having an effect on Nova Scotia's peak tourism season. Visitation to the province, while up one per cent year-to-date, is down 12 per cent for the month of July.

The total number of room nights sold across the province was down one per cent for July, with regional results ranging from a two per cent increase in the Annapolis Valley, to no change in Cape Breton, to a seven per cent decrease on the Eastern Shore.

Issues such as high fuel prices, security concerns, passport requirements, the rising Canadian dollar, and weather are affecting travel from the United States to Canada. The number of total visits to Canada from the United States for the first half of the year has dropped by 36 per cent since 2001.

"Everyone in the country is facing these same challenges and there's no doubt that we're feeling it here, especially in June and July," said Len Goucher, Minister of Tourism, Culture and Heritage. "We're continuing to work hard to implement our marketing plan and everyone -- government, industry groups and operators -- is looking at what they can do to bring more visitors here into the fall."

The fall advertising campaign targeting Atlantic Canadians will begin to roll out next week, highlighting fall festivals, events and experiences such as the Celtic Colours International Festival, Drum!, and the Wines of Nova Scotia Tour. This year's fall campaign will be enhanced to include more television, print and direct-to-consumer advertising. The recent success of special promotions like the Milwaukee Irish Fest should also help attract people with an interest in Celtic culture to events like fall's Celtic Colours.

The Tourism Partnership Council, the joint government-industry group that develops Nova Scotia's tourism plans, is working on the new tourism plan for 2007. Planning will take into account the results for 2005 and 2006, factors affecting the industry, and emerging trends in consumer preferences.

"We'll be taking a close look at everything to see what's working, and what we can do differently to make Nova Scotia more competitive and to tap into new markets," said Mr. Goucher.

The latest tourism statistics reflect what the Tourism Industry Association of Nova Scotia heard in its recent industry survey, in particular that rural operators have noticed a decrease in leisure travel.

"As well as continuing to evaluate and strengthen marketing efforts, all stakeholders need to look at the tourism infrastructure, transportation access points and product and service quality," said Darlene Grant-Fiander, acting president of the association.

"There's a shared responsibility to ensure that Nova Scotia can compete in a very competitive and demanding global tourism industry. Travel preferences and customer demands are changing and we must be confident that at every level, we consistently deliver a unique and high quality Nova Scotia experience," she said.

In addition to tracking actual visitors, the Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage closely monitors the number of people seeking travel information online. Visits to novascotia.com increased 21 per cent in July.

"Website visits are up and our industry representatives say that more and more people are booking at the last minute so we'll keep working hard and see how the season finishes," said Mr. Goucher.

Nova Scotia's comprehensive system for reporting tourism statistics includes counting visitors, while excluding Nova Scotia residents, at all entry points to the province, and gathering the number of room nights sold from all licensed accommodation operators around the province.

Detailed tourism statistics can be found on Tourism Culture and Heritage website at www.gov.ns.ca/dtc/pubs/insights .

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FOR BROADCAST USE:

The number of tourists visiting Nova Scotia -- though up one

per cent year-to-date -- was down 12 per cent in July.

Accommodation activity -- measured by the number of room

nights sold -- was down one per cent in July. Results from the various regions varied, from a two per cent increase in the Annapolis Valley to a seven per cent decrease on the Eastern Shore.

The tourism industry is facing challenges such as high fuel prices and security concerns. Visits to Canada from the United states are reaching record lows.

Tourism, Culture and Heritage Minister Len Goucher says Nova Scotia is feeling the effects, especially during the peak summer months.

He says everyone, including operators, industry groups and government, is working hard to bring more tourists here in the fall.

They are also working on the tourism plan for 2007 which will take into account results from the last few years as well as factors and trends affecting the tourism industry.

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Media Contact: Wendy Barnable
Tourism, Culture and Heritage
902-424-1593
E-mail: barnabwm@gov.ns.ca