

Office of the Governor

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NEWS RELEASE

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GOVERNOR SAYS STRONG SUMMER TOURISM SEASON EXPECTED; UNVEILS NEW TOURISM WEBSITE

The summer season has begun, the beaches are beckoning and New Jersey's resorts are prepared for a tourism season that should be stronger than last year, Gov. Christie Whitman said today as she officially kicked off the season during a visit to Wildwood. The Governor also unveiled the state's new tourism website.

"The Wildwoods are a great example of how our state's stunning coastline and robust economy combine to make the Jersey Shore the ideal summer vacation destination," the Governor said. "Our beaches are in great shape - some have been replenished but most came through the winter unharmed by storms. Now, all we need is some of that picture perfect weather that New Jersey summers are so famous for and we are on our way."

The Governor noted that the annual Pre-Memorial Day survey conducted by the New Jersey Commerce and Economic Growth Commission found that the outlook for this summer is excellent, with summer bookings for rental properties, hotels and campgrounds strong and, in most cases, surpassing last year's figures.

The informal survey found that the summer tourism outlook is excellent, showing optimism from the business community to be high for another robust season of activity, she said.

"The Travel Industry Association of America has predicted a 4 percent increase in U. S. summer vacation travel this year," said Gualberto Medina, Secretary of the New Jersey Commerce and Economic Growth Commission. "That's good news for New Jersey and our own tourism industry because with our strong economy and our low unemployment rate, prosperity at our beaches, resorts, attractions and campgrounds should prevail this summer."

New Jersey tourism generated \$26.1 billion in expenditures in 1998. Comprised of Monmouth, Ocean, Cape May, Cumberland and Atlantic counties, the Jersey Shore region alone generated more than half of all tourism-related expenditures in 1998.

Gov. Whitman said that the promotion of New Jersey as a top tourism destination will be better served by the more user- friendly, visually impressive and fun Internet site.

"With more and more people looking to the Internet before making their travel and weekend plans, our state will be better able to showcase its variety of destinations and attractions, sightseeing opportunities and special events for our own residents and visitors. This upgrade will further attract visitors to our home

page, even more than the thousands of hits that we're currently getting monthly," she said.

By connecting to <http://www.visitnj.org>, visitors are now able to easily access more New Jersey travel information than ever before, according to Secretary Medina. The site is organized into informational sections, such as New Jersey & You . Perfect Tours (a sampling of siteseeing itineraries; New Jersey & You . Perfect Places (attractions) and Hot Tickets (outstanding monthly events). Also, visitors will be able to link to hundreds of other sites for further information. They'll also be treated to a viewing of the state's most recent television commercial and the opportunity to take a virtual reality tour of Barnegat Lighthouse.

The enhancements to the tourism website represents the first phase of the Governor's pledge to upgrade New Jersey's website. The second phase should be ready for the July 4th weekend.

"We want to make sure visitors see all of New Jersey," Medina said. "That's why we're also displaying new signage at toll booths on the New Jersey Turnpike. Starting this weekend, there will be scenic shots of Barnegat Lighthouse enticing motorists to 'See the Rest of New Jersey and call 1-800-VISIT NJ, extension 9954' for a free travel guide."

But whether tourists travel by car or the Internet, they'll find more to do in New Jersey than ever before. Among this year's new attractions at the Jersey Shore are the \$45 million expansion of Six Flags Great Adventure and Wild Animal Safari in Jackson (which consists of 25 new rides and attractions); the new Ocean Life Center at Gardner's Basin in Atlantic City; new rides on the Wildwood boardwalk and a downtown revitalization in Seaside Heights consisting of more dining and entertainment opportunities for visitors.

"Summertime is the perfect time to discover what makes New Jersey a unique vacation destination," concluded Governor Whitman. "Hike the Pine barrens, balloon in the Skylands, walk in the footsteps of Revolutionary War heroes, or swim in our beautiful ocean. Whatever your interest, you will truly discover why New Jersey and You are Perfect Together."

NEW JERSEY COMMERCE AND ECONOMIC GROWTH COMMISSION PRE-MEMORIAL DAY BAROMETER FOR SUMMER 1999

The New Jersey Commerce and Economic Growth Commission conducted its annual informal survey of the tourism industry outlook for Summer 1999 from Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day. Among those surveyed were realtors, hotels, beaches, campgrounds and New Jersey's transportation network. The results of the survey follow:

REALTORS:

Summer rentals at the Jersey Shore have been brisk with realtors noting busier booking periods during this past winter. Although many properties have been rented, realtors indicate that there is availability and stress that prospective renters will have to be flexible when it comes to beach proximity. Realtors report that trends are moving from renting to purchasing properties.

HOTELS:

Hotels, motels and bed and breakfast establishments from Cape May to the northern shores of Monmouth County are looking forward to a strong season. Many establishments reported a fairly active Spring. While the lodging sector is more dependent on good weather than rental properties, many report solid bookings from Memorial Day to Labor Day. Advance reservations are vigorous. Establishments are reporting an increase in weekday business due to weekends already being booked.

BEACHES:

"Picture perfect" weather is what beach officials are hoping for this summer. New Jersey's beaches are thriving - some have been replenished and most were unharmed by winter storms. Beach badge sales have been "superb" thus far, with anticipation for a surge in sales on Memorial Day weekend, usually the largest selling period. Beach officials expect a strong season.

CAMPGROUNDS:

Campground officials are looking forward to a busier than normal summer. Many areas are booked for Memorial Day and report steady reservations throughout the summer. It was noted that Canadians were still reserving campground space, despite a poor Canadian economy. Officials also note a trend back to families and children at the campsites.