

# Summer tourism outlook for NJ: Good, not great

BRUCE SHIPKOWSKI

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TRENTON, N.J. - If the slow economy keeps people closer to home this summer, that's fine with New Jersey tourism promoters.

With the summer tourism season just around the corner, state tourism officials are targeting about 30 million people who live within 300 miles of the Jersey shore.

Officials hope to draw these visitors to the shore by promoting family friendly , and wallet friendly , fare such as beach concerts, big band dances, museums, library events, childrens' shows and boat parades.

"We're looking toward a good summer season , we are not talking 'banner' but good," said Diane Wieland, tourism director for Cape May County. She said summer rentals in the area appear to be up slightly in some areas from last year, while markets remain stable in other spots.

Some real estate agents had expressed concern over the winter that many visitors who in the past would stay for a week or longer would instead consider shorter trips , three or four days , this season as they dealt with financial uncertainty surrounding the sluggish economy.

However, that appears to be less of a concern now, as prices for many summer rentals remain around the same levels as last year and interest in them remains stable.

Wieland also noted that a survey her department conducted of people who sought information from its Web site found a majority of respondents don't plan to let gas prices or other economic factors impact their travel plans , especially trips to the Jersey Shore.

"They're looking for places they can go on a tank of gas," she said.

Another reason for optimism is that surging gas prices forced many travelers to reconsider their plans last year. This year, gas prices are lower and appear to be more stable.

"The relative stability and low price of gas, which we believe will likely last through the summer months, is a potential boon for travel within the state to our beaches and other summer destinations," said David Weinstein, a spokesman for AAA Mid-Atlantic. "Federal data shows that New Jerseyans are driving more recently, and we're optimistic this will become a trend and that our industry will benefit."