

**SUMMARY OF FINDINGS – 2009 TRAVEL PLANNING STUDY  
MYRTLE BEACH AREA VISITATION OUTLOOK  
Presented Feb. 11, 2009**

**BACKGROUND**

Anticipating a reduction in its 2009 promotional budget, the Myrtle Beach Area Chamber of Commerce commissioned Equation Research to conduct a study on destination metrics and travel planning trends. An online survey was conducted Jan. 14-18 in the Top 10 visitor states outside the Carolinas. Respondents were 25-54 years of age who traveled last year and plan to travel this year. The survey was divided evenly among travelers who had visited in the past two years (“Myrtle Beach Visitors”) and those who had not visited in the past two years (“Non-Visitors”).

**DESTINATION INFORMATION/METRICS**

- Desirability of the destination is increasing (43 percent, Myrtle Beach visitors; 26 percent, non-visitors) and ranks favorably with key competitor destinations\*:

	<u>MB Visitors</u>	<u>MB Non-Visitors</u>
Myrtle Beach, S.C.	43%	26%
Orlando, Fla.	33%	28%
Virginia Beach, Va.	17%	16%
Gatlinburg-Pigeon Forge, Tenn.	10%	13%
Daytona Beach, Fla.	16%	14%

\*Those who travel to Myrtle Beach also typically consider these four other destinations.

When first measured in fall 2006, the average rating for the Myrtle Beach area was 16 percent. In two+ years, this measurement has risen steadily for both Myrtle Beach visitors and non-visitors.

- Awareness has grown largely due to additional advertising in 2007 and 2008. Sixty-two percent of visitors and 36 percent of non-visitors report seeing advertisements promoting the destination. This compares favorably to most destinations, except Orlando:

	<u>MB Visitors</u>	<u>MB Non-Visitors</u>
Myrtle Beach, S.C.	62%	36%
Orlando, Fla.	79%	72%
Virginia Beach, Va.	34%	29%
Gatlinburg-Pigeon Forge, Tenn.	35%	28%
Daytona Beach, Fla.	35%	22%

When first measured in fall 2006, the average rating for the Myrtle Beach area was roughly 12 percent for visitors/non-visitors. However, the 2009 promotional budget is roughly half of what the Myrtle Beach Area Chamber of Commerce averaged in 2007 and 2008, so it is likely this awareness level will fall.

- The primary vehicles for advertising seen by Myrtle Beach visitors and non-visitors are TV, Internet, e-mail and magazine ads and articles.
- Ninety-two percent of Myrtle Beach visitors report being either “very satisfied” or “somewhat satisfied.”
- Ninety-one percent of Myrtle Beach visitors and 65 percent of non-visitors report being interested in visiting the Myrtle Beach area. Those who are extremely or very interested are 65 percent and 24 percent, respectively.

- Marketing of the shoulder seasons has apparently boosted the recognition of the destination as a great “weekend getaway.” Favorable rankings of the destination as a “weekend getaway” are very similar to the rankings of “annual family vacation” and “golf vacation.”
- Seventy-six percent of Myrtle Beach visitors believe the Myrtle Beach area is an “affordable vacation destination,” and 74 percent believe the destination offers “good value.”

## **2009 TRAVEL PLANNING TRENDS**

- Thirty-one percent of Myrtle Beach visitors plan to take fewer trips, and 50 percent plan to spend less on leisure travel in 2009. The comparable percentages for non-visitors are 29 percent and 44 percent, respectively. These figures are unprecedented and indicate that Myrtle Beach visitors are somewhat more likely to cut back in 2009.
- The key factors that will negatively impact travel planning in 2009 are uncertainty about the economy (52 percent) and reduced disposable income (39 percent).
- For those Myrtle Beach visitors planning to cut back:
  - 46 percent will cut back on shopping
  - 39 percent will spend less on souvenirs
  - 32 percent will vacation closer to home
  - 32 percent will plan fewer trips
  - 32 percent will look for a more affordable hotel
  - 32 percent will see fewer shows or spend less on entertainment
  - 30 percent will visit fewer attractions
  - 27 percent will reduce the number of nights they travel
  - 23 percent will prepare more meals instead of eating out
  - 13 percent will consider taking a staycation
- When asked if they will consider visiting a different destination in 2009, as compared to 2008:
  - 67 percent of Myrtle Beach visitors said “yes” (only 8 percent said “no”)
  - 68 percent of non-visitors said “yes” (only 8 percent said “no”)
- Forty-eight percent of Myrtle Beach visitors and 51 percent of non-visitors have not chosen their destination for 2009.
- The most powerful incentives are a free night stay, discounted travel packages and discounted airfare.

## **ECONOMIC IMPACTS ON LOCAL TOURISM INDUSTRY**

- Current trends could lead to a potential loss of more than \$400 million in tourism revenues in 2009 if market share remains consistent. That figure could decrease if the destination gains market share or increase if the destination loses market share. Total tourism demand nets the Palmetto state roughly \$16 billion annually, with the economic impact of tourism expenditures in the Myrtle Beach area around \$5.8 billion.

## **SUMMARY**

- Awareness and desirability are growing, largely due to increased advertising.
- Visibility due to advertising is very competitive but will likely decline in 2009 due to fewer marketing dollars, both at the state and local levels.
- Past visitors to the area report high levels of satisfaction and tend to view the area as affordable.
- Regardless of affordability and satisfaction, consumers are looking for savings and value.
- Most visitors are willing to change destinations in 2009 if it leads to savings.
- Many visitors plan to cut back on travel and travel expenditures in 2009, largely due to the economy.
- Reduction in travel expenses will hit lodging, retail and entertainment very hard.