

Businesses Say Bad Weather Is Main Cause of Slow First Half of Tourist Season

By Ryan Schlehuber

With the summer tourist season passing the halfway point at the end of July, businesses on Mackinac Island are reporting the expected drop in traffic, although hotels are saying occupancy is similar to last year, which was a good year for most businesses.

Michigan State University predicted this spring that tourist traffic would be down 2% and traveling costs would rise 4%.

On top of the anemic state economy, mortgage crisis, high unemployment, and lack of foreign visa workers available, many Island businesses have been struggling to adjust to the city's amended sign and window display ordinances, which many owners say has hindered business.

Businesses that depend on good weather, such as golf courses, bicycle rentals, and horse and carriage liveries, were hit the hardest with this season's slow start, however, hotels, retail shops, and restaurants, for the most part, have been able to make up for the sluggish beginning. Bad weather, rather than high fuel prices, is blamed by many Island businesses as the main cause of the slow first half of the season.

"If we would have had a normal May, we'd have probably been pretty good," said Peter Marabel, who operates Birkenstock shoe store and Peace Frogs clothing store. "The first six weeks were lousy because of bad weather, but we're staying afloat."

The cold and rainy weather in the first two months of the season impacted Inn at Stonecliffe, too.

"The weather was difficult at first," said Stonecliffe General Manager Alan Sehoan, "but we're doing well now."

Stonecliffe opened a new restaurant, Saddle and Sirloin Steakhouse,



Daily traffic on Mackinac Island's busy Main Street has been down this year, say many downtown businesses, however, hotels are reporting good turnouts for overnight guests. Many businesses blame bad weather for a slow first half of the Island's summer tourism season, which extends from May through October.

that was scheduled to be open only until October 9, however, Mr. Sehoan said Stonecliffe has decided to keep it open another two weeks to "capture more business," now that the restaurant is doing well.

Grand Hotel General Manager John Hulett also says bad weather affected his hotel's additional businesses outside the hotel, although he reports occupancy is as strong as last year.

"The first part of the season for occupancy, we've done pretty good, all things considered," said Mr. Hulett, who said the bad weather stifled business from the time the hotel opened May 2 until almost the end of June. "Our golfing was down probably 20% because of bad weather."

Conference bookings for the Grand are as strong as ever, and bicycle rentals are now recovering, added Mr. Hulett.

For the rest of the summer, the Grand is almost booked for August, and is 75% booked for September and 80% booked for October.

"If Mother Nature stays on our side until Labor Day or beyond, we should be okay," he said. "We can still salvage a good season."

Overnight guests have kept this season satisfactory for Chippewa Hotel Waterfront and Lilac Tree Hotel, said General Manager Brian Bailey.

"We're hanging in there, especially with our overnight guests," he said. "Because of that, it's helping our dining room and bar, the Pink Pony."

Small bed and breakfast places, like Bogan Lane Inn, have managed to keep busy, too, said owner Trish Martin.

"I've talked to other B-and-Bs and they've said the same thing," said Ms. Martin, who offers four rooms.

Lilac House's LoriAnn Thompson said her bed and breakfast has been just as good as last year. She is in her second year of operating the business.

"Being that I went by the seat of my pants last year, from what I can see, we're holding our own," she said. "I raised my rates a bit and that has helped."

Lilac House, which has eight rooms, opened Mother's Day weekend in May and struggled a bit through a cold June, but has since flourished.

"July was excellent and August is picking up," said Mrs. Thompson.

Lower daily traffic has dampened the mood for downtown retail shops, and although the higher end retail stores are faring better than others, some say adjustments have had to be made.

"We've added more items in the mid-range prices," said Urvana Morse, manager of Scrimshanders, a gift store that offers quality artistic

items. "We are down 14% from last year."

Mrs. Morse said the company is advertising more this year and saved some money by cutting down the number of people on staff.

"We've cut down on payroll because we don't need the extra help with the slower season," she said.

Although his second-year Victorian Summer art gallery is doing well, owner Jack Landres has seen more customers seeking a better deal on items such as paintings.

"I've definitely had more people bargain for a price than usual this year," said Mr. Landres. "It indicates to me that people may be willing to purchase something, but they're going to look for the best deals."

Sites at Mackinac State Historic Parks (MSHP) have also struggled with daily customers. Fort Mackinac is down 9% from last year, according to Greg Hokans, chief of development and marketing.

Its off-island sites in Mackinac City, Colonial Michilmackinac and the Old Mackinac Point Lighthouse, are down 9% and 15%, respectively, however, its revamped Historic Mill Creek Discovery Park, that now includes interactive activities, has jumped 25% in attendance from last year. New activities at that park include an aerial cable ride, extended nature trail, and climbing wall and lookout tower.

Mr. Hokans said MSHP is hoping to build on marketing interactive programs in the future, as existing interactive programs at all sites have been popular.

"We offer a competitive value, not just with the Parks, but the entire Straits region," said Mr. Hokans. "It's going to take awhile to build up the number of visitors who come to this area again, but being able to offer a great monetary and experience value, and one that is truly unique, that's what will sustain us."

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Regional Non-motorized Trail Summit Is Sept. 10

The Eastern U.P. Regional Planning and Development Commission will present an E.U.P. Regional Non-motorized Trails Summit Wednesday, September 10, from noon to 5 p.m. at Lake Superior State University Cisl Center in Sault Ste. Marie.

The purpose of the summit is to begin the planning effort in Chippewa, Luce, and Mackinac counties, in the development of a comprehensive, regional non-motorized transportation plan and investment strategy and to gather information and develop partnerships with local groups. The summit is sponsored by Michigan Department of Transportation.

This investment strategy can be used by the department and local officials to prioritize projects, identify funding sources, and guide investment in the region's non-motorized transportation system. It

will focus on bicycle and pedestrian facilities and is designed to complement other statewide trails initiatives.

Presentations will include the department's on-road non-motorized connections, Michigan Trails and Greenways Alliance trail development process, potential funding sources, accomplishments in other regions, and presentation

of local survey results.

A light lunch will be included.

For reservations, call (800) 562-4963 or (906) 635-1581 by Tuesday, September 2. Reservations can also be e-mailed to ebenoit@lighthouse.net or forms can be downloaded at www.eup-planning.org. Mail forms to P.O. Box 520, Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan 49783.

Community Calendar

Calendar: From page 4

•Wednesday, September 17: **Chippewa County Genealogical Society Annual Meeting**, 7 p.m., Bayliss Public Library.

•Saturday, September 20: **Family Movie with "Jungle Book" (1967)**, 1 p.m., Bayliss Public Library.

•Tuesday, September 23: **Tween Readers** (book club for eight to 12 year olds), 4 p.m., Bayliss Public Library.

•Tuesday, September 23: **"Make Your Home Energy Efficient"** presentation, 7 p.m., Bayliss Public Library. Sponsored by Sierra Club Three Lakes Group.

•Sundays: **Alcoholics Anonymous Shewadin Group Meetings**, noon, Shewadin Building, 2154 Shunk Road.

•Mondays and Tuesdays: **Alcoholics Anonymous Central Group Meetings**, 7:30 p.m., Community of Christ Church, Room 101.

•Wednesdays: **Preschool Story Time**, 10 a.m., for children ages three to five, Bayliss Public Library.

•Thursdays: **Preschool Story Time**, 1 p.m., for children ages three to five, Bayliss Public Library.

•Saturdays: **Alcoholics Anonymous Lock City Group Meetings**, 7 p.m., Presbyterian Church, 555 Bingham Avenue.

•Engadine, Naubinway
•Saturday, August 23: **Engadine Area Farmers' Market**, 9 a.m. to noon, Mill Pond Park Pavilion.

•Wednesdays: **Catch the Reading Bug children's program**, 3 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., Engadine Library. Meets every Wednesday.

•Fourth Wednesday every month: **Free Community Meal**, 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m., Engadine United Methodist Church. Open to all.

•Saturdays: **Preschool Story Time**, 10:30 a.m., for children ages three to five, Engadine Library.

•Curtis, Gould City
•Saturday, August 30: **Art on the Lake 9th Annual Art & Music Festival**, 10 a.m., Curtis Park.

•Tuesday, September 9: **Master Gardener Class**, 6 p.m. to 9 p.m., Erickson Cultural Center. Class takes place every Tuesday night through November 11. Registration deadline is Tuesday, August 26. Contact MSU Extension for registration at (906) 293-3203.

•Mondays: **Curtis Play Group**, noon, Curtis Public Library. Sponsored by Intermediate School

District Great Start.

Cheboygan

•Wednesday, August 20: **Surf's Up: A Tribute to the Beach Boys**, 7:30 p.m., The Opera House. Tickets are \$20 for members and \$23 for non-members.

•Friday, August 22 through Sunday, August 24: **Human Society Greatest Garage Sale**, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Friday and Saturday, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sunday, Cheboygan County Fair Grounds. Proceeds benefit the Cheboygan Humane Society.

•Tuesday, August 26: **American Red Cross Blood Drive**, 10 a.m. to 3:45 p.m., St. Thomas Lutheran Church.



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The Rocker [PG-13] Daily at 1:00, 3:15, 7:00, & 9:15	The House Bunny [PG-13] Daily at 2:00, 4:00, 7:00, & 9:00
Death Race [R] Daily at 1:00, 3:15, & 7:00, & 9:15	The Longshots [PG] Daily at 2:00, 4:15, 7:00, & 9:15
Pineapple Express [R] Daily at 1:00, 3:15, 7:00, & 9:15	The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants 2 [PG] Daily at 2:00, 4:15, 7:00, & 9:15
Tropic Thunder [R] Daily at 1:00, 3:00, 7:00, & 9:00	Mamma Mia [PG-13] Daily at 2:00, 4:15, 7:00, & 9:15
Mamma Mia [PG-13] Daily at 1:00, 3:15, 7:00, & 9:15	Star Wars: The Clone Wars [PG] Daily at 2:00, 4:00, 7:00, & 9:00

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