

DECLINE IN FLORIDA TOURISM



The sunny beaches of Florida in the United States have always been a popular destination for tourists worldwide. However, in 2023, tourism professionals have noticed a significant decrease in visitors compared to the previous year.

Dana Young, president, and CEO of Visit Florida, acknowledged the fierce competition the state faces from other U.S. states and international destinations that have reopened their attractions after pandemic-related restrictions. Despite this, Young also shared that Florida has seen an increase in international tourists choosing the state as their vacation destination this year. "We're competing globally, not just domestically," told Young. In the second quarter of 2023, Florida welcomed just over 33.092 million visitors, a 1.2% decrease compared to the same time in 2022 when the state saw 33.4 million tourists.

The Impacts of Low Tourism in Florida

The decrease in Florida's tourism has directly impacted the public finances of Hillsborough County, which boasts stunning beaches along Tampa Bay. The Tourism Development Council reported a drop in tax collection on hotel accommodations in May and June. In May, tax collection was 2.3% lower than the previous year, and in June, it was 5.5% lower than in 2022.

Disney reported decreased profits in the second quarter at its Orlando theme parks. The CEO, Bob Iger, recognized this was due to a general decline in Florida tourism. Despite this, Walt Disney World is still operating at levels well above what it was before the Covid pandemic.

The DeSantis Impact on Tourism in Florida

Another aspect to consider is the disputed policies introduced by Governor Ron DeSantis. These policies include instruction on African-American history and limiting diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. As a result, certain groups have issued travel advisories. These include organizations such as the NAACP, Equality Florida (an advocate for LGBT civil rights), and the League of United Latin American Citizens, urging people to avoid traveling to Florida.

The return of international tourists to Florida

It has been observed that while tourism overall has declined year-over-year, Florida has seen an increase in international visitors in recent months. According to Dana Young, approximately 1.9 million foreign visitors entered Florida during the second quarter of 2023, compared to 1.7 million who arrived during the same period in 2022. Young explained that international destinations are reopening and using saved funds to attract visitors.

Considering the impact of DeSantis' controversial laws on tourism in Florida, Young stated that there was no evidence of a decline in the travel industry. Many travelers still visit Florida and contribute to the state's economy by spending money. The tourism industry appreciates all visitors and encourages people to come.

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