

'Best Ever' Tourist Season Is Reported For Fort Walton

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FORT WALTON BEACH —

Most family tourists have gone with Labor Day but the gay tinkle of cash registers ringing up their dollars lingers on.

Persons catering to summer tourists estimated that the season just ended was the best yet in Fort Walton Beach.

Typical of the reports of a spending summer was that by Holton Hudson, manager of the area's largest motel.

"I turned away just as many people this summer as last year, despite the opening of an additional 37 units," Hudson stated.

He believed that all motels in the city and on Santa Rosa Island were just as busy.

Also indicative of the largest trampling of sand by summer visitors was the 13 per cent jump in business from 1965 by the Gulfarium.

The porpoise playhouse reported its busiest summer since it was opened in 1956.

If the balance of the year shows steady attendance, the Gulfarium could easily break its record of business established in 1956-57.

The owner of one of the city's most popular restaurants stated his business in the summer season just over was up at least 10 per cent from 1965.

He said it was the best summer tourist season in his 19 years of operation.

Although head counts were not kept at the state's two public beaches on the Gulf of Mexico, area residents believed they had never been more popular.

On any sunny afternoon, parking space on the beach and in the paved area for cars was

at a premium all summer.

The same was true at the free public fishing pier at wayside park on the island.

Also adding to the available beach space was a facility opened after the summer season was well under way.

Equally busy was the city's Garnier's Beach, which was expected to have less crowds with start of the city beach on the island.

Two major complaints were noted by Hudson and the restaurateur.

Hudson said his complaints from tourists concerned the lack of amusement here for children 12 to 20.

"That seemed to be the big void, the failure of a provision for entertainment and amusement for teenagers," Hudson related.

The restaurant owner said his complaints from tourists were about the kiddy-land amusement facility the Okaloosa Island Authority built on Santa Rosa Island.

"That park was supposed to provide family entertainment," he said, "but all I heard were complaints of its costly prices and failure to have anything for any person older than 10."

The park was opened Easter and never reached its expected popularity. The Authority invested about \$95,000 in facilities alone.

Hudson checked his guest registration cards and showed that Alabama furnished 25.3 per cent of the tourists which stayed at his motel.

Louisiana was next with 12 per cent, followed by Florida, 9.3 per cent; Georgia, 6.5 per cent; Mississippi, 5.5 per cent; Texas, 4.5, and Tennessee, 3.6 per cent.

Of his Alabama guests, Birmingham contributed 27.5 per cent; Montgomery, 15; Mobile, 14.5; and Huntsville, 13.

Of his Florida guests, 17.5 per cent came from Pensacola; 8 per cent from Panama City, and 6 per cent from Tallahassee.

Hudson figured the area lost a quarter of a million dollars in tourist trade last week because of school openings in Alabama, Louisiana, Tennessee and Kentucky in advance of Labor Day.

He attributed the huge influx of tourists here this summer to an attitude of hospitality.

"I remember just a few years ago when there wasn't anything such as hospitality," Hudson declared. "Now, though, the attitude has changed and visitors are made to feel as if they really are welcomed."