

FLORIDA V.F. Ft. Walton Beach

Spending More Money Than Ever

Tourism Is Booming In Playground Area

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News-Journal Bureau

FORT WALTON BEACH — Enough tourists were in the Playground area Independence Day to scuff up a goodly chunk of its built-in sandbox.

But the influx of tourists on the Fourth of July reportedly was nothing new this year, which may see more visitors spending more money than ever before.

The operator of a leading motel on Santa Rosa Island opposite Choctawhatchee Bay from Fort Walton Beach said he was in his largest tourist season.

His motel recorded a total of 19,504 guest days from April through June 30.

"The tourist business is here in unprecedented numbers," that motel operator claimed, "and those who aren't getting their share didn't go after it."

Just-published Florida Development Commission statistics on the impact of tourism in 1967 estimated the total of tourists last year at 19,492,503.

And they spent \$4,962,011,564.

Of the overall number of tourists, 1,270,618 were credited to the Miracle Strip, along which they toured to

the tune of \$323,448,430.

Neither total for the Miracle Strip included everybody, nor every dollar, because figures were based only on destinations of incoming auto tourists given at welcome stations.

Only 13,016,966 of tourists arriving by auto gave destinations, which left 6,475,537 arriving by bus, plane and train, and coming in with no stop in mind.

A man in the tourist catering business in Fort Walton Beach estimates that untold numbers of those 6,475,537 ended up on the Miracle Strip.

"A statistician can add thousands of tourists and many millions of dollars to the Florida Development Commission figures for the Miracle Strip," he declared.

The same thing, he added, is happening among outsiders spending money along the Miracle Strip this year.

"I've had any number of persons tell me they entered Florida with a destination in mind," he also said, "but stopped in Pensacola, Fort Walton Beach or Destin."

To keep the Development Commission happy, however, its just-out Florida tourist study for 1967 listed Miracle

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Strip tourists numerically as:

Escambia County, 382,292, including 326,832 for Pensacola and 64,741 for Pensacola Beach, for an overall hike of 12,663 from 1966.

Santa Rosa, 6,745, a decrease of 2,444.

Okaloosa, 203,200, with 111,306 for Fort Walton Beach and 80,026 for Destin, for an overall increase of 14,620.

Walton, 15,243, down 267.

Holmes, 2,893, a boost of 1,079.

Washington, 5,559, a jump of 1,312.

Bay, 654,684, up 18,650.

The Florida Development Commission tourist study also put the average expenditure for each person on each stay at \$254.56.

Multiplying that by the number of destination-given tourists for Miracle Strip counties produced the amounts they spent while here in 1967 as:

Escambia, \$97,316,251;

Santa Rosa, \$1,716,997;

Okaloosa, \$51,728,592;

Walton, \$3,880,258;

Holmes, \$738,950;

Washington, \$1,415,043;

Bay, \$166,656,339;

Odds were big on the Fourth of July that even the Development Commission would produce many, many more tourists spending many, many more dollars along the Miracle Strip in 1968.