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Summer travel and tourism not slowing

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CLEMSON — Summer is the time for vacationing. No matter the area, when summer arrives, families tend to hit the road.

And even though last year's gas prices soared to more than $4 in some places, plans to stay closer to home were certainly executed successfully with local trips to state parks and nearby campsites.

But this year, despite the sour economy, summer vacationing is up.

Nearly 50 percent of Americans have no reservations about spending money on time away from home preferably in the sun.

Following an ongoing study being conducted by Clemson University and Virginia Tech, research shows that because prices of package deals to resorts and theme parks are at all-time lows and gas prices are down, the conditions are perfect for more summer pick-up-and-go travel.

In fact, only 35 percent of those polled said the current economic situation compels them to curtail plans for vacation travel, according to the study.

"This really illustrates how important the vacation is to Americans," said Jeffrey Hallo, assistant professor in the Clemson University parks, recreation and tourism (PRT) management department. "People told us that they would sacrifice other luxuries rather than give up their travel plans."

Hallo was part of the multidisciplinary team that conducted the survey to see how the economy may impact tourism. Other officials from Clemson were William Norman from the PRT management department and Cari Goetcheus of the planning and landscape architecture department. Virginia Tech's John McGee and Nancy Gard McGehee, who led the study, were part of the team that conducted the survey for the National Park Service and Blue Ridge Heritage Inc.

"By the end of this study, this will really benefit the tourism side of our area," Norman said. "While vacationing stays up, it will only mean more money and stability for our areas. We want to focus on this trend and see it help our area like we know it will help western Virginia's area."