

# Tourism spending up \$1B in SC

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CHARLESTON — Tourism spending increased about \$1 billion as visitors spent \$15 billion in South Carolina during 2010 as the state emerged from the depths of the Great Recession, according to figures released Friday.

Figures from the state Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism compiled by the U.S. Travel Association show that tourism was up almost 8 percent as the state recovered from 2009, once of the worst tourism seasons in years.

The figures lag for a year or so as data is collected and analyzed.

"Remember, 2009 was a pretty bad year for the economy and tourism. In 2010, it came back pretty well," said Dudley Jackson, who heads the research department for the tourism agency.

"I would say there was pent up demand and recovering consumer spending, and also just rising travel prices, and hotels felt confident to raise their rates a little bit," he said.

He said the size of the increase was a bit of a surprise, as he was expecting an increase closer to 5 percent.

He expects the industry will con-

tinue to show yearly increases in that range now that the recession has ebbed.

Early indicators are the trend is continuing. Last year, hotel occupancy in the state rose about 2 percent.

It's already up more than 6 percent this year, compared with nearly 4 percent nationwide.

PRT spokesman Marion Edmonds said the relatively mild winter and recent warm weather has meant more people are traveling.

The tourism numbers for 2010 showed that 1 in 10 jobs in the state, more than 170,000, is tied to the tourism industry.

The industry also produces about \$1.2 billion in state and local tax revenue.

During the year, there was \$517 million in capital investment in the industry.

South Carolinians spent \$2.7 billion on travel, about 18 percent of the total, while international visitors accounted for nearly \$770 million.

The research also found that nearly a third of what was spent in the state on food and beverages was spent by tourists, while half the money spent on amusements and recreation came from tourists.