

## Tourism Grows As Economic Driver For Downtown

Recently, the Pensacola Downtown Improvement Board (DIB) conducted an extensive count of the tourists visiting and patronizing Downtown Pensacola. As part of that process during a five day period in late March, intercept surveys were also done with most of the individuals in downtown who identified themselves as hailing from somewhere other than Escambia County, Santa Rosa County or the eastern slither of Baldwin County. In all, over 3600 people were interviewed at various locations throughout the downtown each day between the hours of 11:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m.

The findings reveal that 20.14% of those that made purchases of products, food, or beverage in the downtown during the week long survey period were from somewhere other than “Pensacola” – as defined above. Saturdays had the highest percentage (24.77%) of tourists walking the streets of downtown followed by Wednesdays (21.24%) and Tuesdays (21.08%). If we extrapolate the results to any day of the year ( which statistically we can), somewhere between one in four and one in five customers ( i.e. those that made a purchase while in the downtown) are non-locals visiting the area.

The findings of where the tourists that visit downtown come from were just as interesting. 13.61% were from somewhere in Alabama other than the eastern slither of Baldwin County. Only 1.78% were from Mississippi. 27.07% were from the other states bordering the Gulf of Mexico other than Alabama and Mississippi. 11.51% were from states along the I-65 corridor other than Alabama. Tourists with a passport from somewhere other than the United States comprise 6.97% of those visiting downtown Pensacola.

The extensive survey work also identified where the visitors were staying while in “Pensacola”. The top four answers were: 1) with local family or friends, (2) at a condo, hotel, or beach house on Pensacola Beach, 3.) at one of the downtown lodging properties, or 4.) at a condo, hotel, or beach house on Perdido Key. Close to 60% were staying in a commercial lodging property of some variety. The average length of stay was 9.58 days. That number was probably somewhat skewed by the large number of snowbirds still in the area and visitors here for a week during their Spring Break. The annual average according to the CVB is currently 4.8 days.

Tourists visiting downtown most often (61.46%) heard about the offerings, attractions, and happenings found in the downtown by word of mouth from friends or family in the area. Information about Downtown Pensacola found on the Visit Pensacola or Downtown Pensacola, or Visit Florida websites or from one of the downtown social media accounts was how 6.64% of the visitors discovered and/or researched downtown and its offerings.

In addition to shopping and/or dining and /or seeing the attractions in Downtown Pensacola, tourists visiting Downtown Pensacola are also likely to also do the following during their stay here: go to the beach (22.26%), visit the Naval Aviation Museum (7.22%), just relax/do nothing (7.21%), conduct some business (6.47%), and/or attend or participate in a sporting event (6.32%).

These strong and positive findings from this recent comprehensive count bode extremely well for Downtown Pensacola. Just as the DIB's retail consultants prescribed, more of the 4.6 million tourists coming through or into Downtown Pensacola annually will stop and spend their money here if we make it physically easier for them to do so; AND we tell them about what we have to offer in historic downtown Pensacola. Much progress on implementation of the Downtown Retail Strategy (December 2007) to address these prescriptive actions has been made as seen in the results of this recent count and survey. However, more remains to be done for Downtown Pensacola to reach the levels of tourist patronage that our retail consultants believe is possible. With encouraging and positive results like the ones just garnered, we should all be proud of our collaborative efforts so far to welcome more visitors to the most unique and interesting part of our region – Downtown Pensacola.

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