



## Alabama beach tourism on record-breaking pace; lodging revenue expected to hit \$320 million (updated)

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Beachgoers to enjoy the beaches at Gulf Shores public beach during the start of spring break on Sunday, March 25, 2012. Baldwin County's beach cities are on pace to break tourism records this year, according to figures released by tourism officials. (Press-Register file photo)

**GULF SHORES, Alabama** -- Tourists flocked to the Alabama Gulf Coast like never before during the summer months and the trend has already set an all-time record with taxable lodging revenue surpassing \$300 million for the first time, according to a figures released by Gulf Shores Orange Beach Tourism this week.

"We only have 2 months of the year left and what we've collected so far in business revenue is in excess of what we made last year," said Herb Malone, president and CEO of Gulf Shores Orange Beach Tourism. "Last year was a record year, so we've set back-to-back records two years in a row in 2011 and 2012."

Through September, lodging revenue was up 17 percent compare to the same time last year and retail sales saw a nearly 8 percent jump, according to tourism numbers presented by Malone on Friday during the Alabama Gulf Coast Chamber of Commerce's monthly First Friday Forum at LuLu's in Gulf Shores.

"We've had double-digit growth for 2 years in a row and that's absolutely phenomenal," Malone said during an interview Monday.

The tourism statistics show that in 2011 Baldwin County's beaches attracted 4.9 million guests, produced \$2.6 billion in visitor spending, 40,000 travel-related jobs and \$906 million in wages and salary.

### Taxable Lodging Revenue

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Malone said he has projected the 2012 taxable lodging revenue to reach \$320 million, an all-time high. In 2011 that revenue was \$280 million, which at the time was a record. After the Deepwater Horizon disaster in 2010 lodging revenue topped out at \$176 million.

Malone credits a strong, truthful post oil-spill marketing campaign and cooperation between the cities, chambers of commerce and the business community for the success over the past 2 years.

"We promised our visitors that we would always give them factual information and we did," Malone said. "We got a lot of accolades about that so they were able to trust us."

Malone's Tourism Outlook presentation also highlighted one of the fastest growing areas of revenue -- sporting events.

So far this year, the beach area has hosted 80 events, creating 59,755 room nights in local lodging and \$21.5 million in visitor spending. Overall in 2011 the area hosted 77 events and produced \$16.3 million in visitor spending.

The total for 2012 are poised to increase further as Orange Beach hosts the **SEC Women's Soccer Championship** and Alabama Soccer Festival this weekend. Other upcoming events include the United State Tennis Association's Southern Combo Doubles Adult Championship, Nov. 8-11; Kaiser Coastal Half-Marathon and 5K Run, Nov. 24; and National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics' Women's Soccer National Championship, Nov. 26-Dec. 1.

**2012:** \$320 million  
(projected)  
**2011:** \$280 million  
**2010:** \$176 million  
(post BP oil spill)  
**2009:** \$236 million  
**2008:** \$238 million  
**2007:** \$238 million  
**2006:** \$198 million  
**2005:** \$143 million  
(post Hurricane Ivan)  
**2004:** \$200 million  
**2003:** \$201 million

**Source:** *Gulf Shores  
Orange Beach Tourism  
with figures covering  
Gulf Shores, Orange  
Beach and Fort Morgan*

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*Updated at 12:15 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 6, 2012, to include comments and information from Herb Malone.*

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