

## Study: Vt. Tourism Stagnant



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Shelburne Museum is one of Vermont's top tourist attractions.

Upwards of 110,000 people visit every year from states across the country.

But only half of all visitors to the museum are out of staters.

"And that has shifted in the last 20 years dramatically," said Leslie Wright of the Shelburne Museum. "We used to have our visitor base much more out of state."

And Shelburne Museum isn't alone.

Vermont is seeing little growth when it comes to the number of tourists visiting the state.

The Department of Labor has been tracking attendance at the state's top tourist sites for the past 17 years and visits to those sites have flat-lined this decade.

"So this is a concern again. The lack of growth in this industry," said Herb Kessel, an economics professor at St. Michael's College.

1.2 million people visited Vermont's top tourist sites in 2007-- down from 1.5 million in 1997.

Hotels and inns have also noticed the trend. Between 1999 and 2007 tax receipts from lodging increased by just 17 percent, not adjusted for inflation. That-- compared to the 1990s-- when receipts increased by nearly 50 percent.

"Many of the measures we look at suggest tourism has now been flat for the last 6 or 7 years, and that's an important source of income," Kessel said.

No one is sure why the numbers are stagnant. The skiing industry tends to drive tourism during the winter months and some visitors say that may be part of the problem.

"It's a little rural, yeah. If you're a skier, there's not much to do at our resort," said Debbie Sychra, a visitor from Long Island, N.Y.

For businesses like Dakin Farms, a lack of growth is reason for concern, especially given the current state of the economy.

"It's definitely a concern. We've got to sell and there's a lot of people who work here who depend on the business doing well," said Sam Cutting of Dakin Farms. "Back in the 60s we were going up 30-40 percent a year."

The Council on the Future of Vermont hopes its findings will help shape public policy and generate new ideas on how to entice more people to visit Vermont.

"I hope we can market the state as a tank away from metropolitan areas," Wright said.

Cutting agreed, "We gotta promote. The state has to promote."

Anything to soften the blow of the faltering economy.

And tourism is just one trend the council examined. The nonpartisan group also studied education, agriculture, crime, energy, and a variety of other topic. [Click here to view the research.](#)

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