

VISITNC

# newslink

A Publication of the North Carolina Department of Commerce - Division of Tourism, Film and Sports Development

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## 1. U.S. HOUSE OVERWHELMINGLY APPROVES TRAVEL PROMOTION ACT

The Travel Promotion Act moved closer to becoming law last week when the U.S. House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed the bipartisan, common sense

legislation by a vote of 358-66. The Senate last month passed, by a vote of 79-19, an identical bill, which would create a public-private partnership to promote the United States as a premier international travel destination and communicate U.S. security and entry policies. Because the legislation creates "revenue" for the federal government, the U.S. Constitution requires that the bill originate in the House, hence the need for the Senate to pass the House version of the bill. That vote is expected soon, and President Obama is expected to sign the bill into law.

The Travel Promotion Act will for the first time create a U.S. promotion and communications program to send a more welcoming message to international travelers. Estimates by Oxford Economics suggest a well-executed travel promotion program could result in up to \$4 billion in additional travel spending and 1.6 million new visitors.

During a news briefing to call attention to last week's House vote, U.S. Rep. Heath Shuler (11th District) said western North Carolina should benefit from the legislation. He said international tourists appreciate the area's natural beauty, including the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. "The people who visit the mountains always return," Shuler said.

For more information about the Travel Promotion Act, [click here](#).

## **2. CHILDRESS & CYPRESS BEND VINEYARDS TAKE HOME TOP HONORS AT N.C. STATE WINE COMPETITION**

The 10th Annual N.C. State Fair Wine Competition, held Oct. 7-8 in Raleigh, had 416 wines submitted by 51 N.C. wineries. Childress Vineyards, in Lexington, took home the N.C. Winegrowers Cup and Best of Show honors with its 2006 Cabernet Franc. Cypress Bend Vineyards, in Wagram, took the N.C. Muscadine Cup for best Muscadine wine for its Campbell. Biltmore Winery, in Asheville, led the medal count with 42 awards. Three panels of professional judges evaluated the wines and awarded 289 medals – 26 double gold, 39 gold, 102 silver and 122 bronze. Double gold medals are awarded for unanimous decisions from the judges. Best of Show in the amateur competition was awarded to Daisy King of Pinnacle. To find out more, visit <http://www.nccommerce.com/en/TourismServices/NurtureWineAndGrapeIndustry/NewsAndEvents/AwardsAndCompetitions.htm>.

## **3. DIVISION LAUNCHES SPORTSNC.COM IN PARTNERSHIP WITH NCSA & NCAS**

The Division's collaboration with the N.C. Sports Association (NCSA) and N.C. Amateur Sports has resulted in the recent addition of sportsnc.com to the visitnc.com family of Web sites. Sports travel continues to grow in importance across the state and is a sector of the travel industry that has proven resilient during the economic downturn. The new site is an important tool for promoting North Carolina's appeal as an attractive destination for sporting events of all kinds and provides sports-event rights holders and planners an easy connection to NCSA's 24-member destinations and organizations. Sportsnc.com was launched in advance of the 2009 TEAMS (Travel, Events And Management in Sports) Conference and Expo being held in New Orleans October 13-17. More than 30 North Carolina representatives are meeting with hundreds of event

rights holders, suppliers, planners and other sports industry leaders to promote the state as the perfect venue for their next event. See how North Carolina is positioned to win at [www.sportsnc.com](http://www.sportsnc.com).

For more information on how your area may explore partnership opportunities with sportsnc.com and the Division's other sports development efforts, contact Frank Jernigan at (919) 733-7413 or via [fjernigan@nccommerce.com](mailto:fjernigan@nccommerce.com).

#### **4. SEARCH ENHANCEMENT HELPS DRIVE VISITNC.COM TRAFFIC TO PARTNER DESTINATIONS**

The Division's commitment to continuous improvement across all its programs is reflected most recently by an important enhancement to the keyword search on VisitNC.com. To improve prospective visitors' experience on VisitNC and further grow downstream traffic for partners, now whenever users type in city or town names in the keyword search, the appropriate local visitor bureaus (CVB/chamber/TDA) are now highlighted at the top of the search results, giving visitors an immediate option to get local information in addition to driving traffic to partner sites.

#### **5. DIVISION RENEWS AGREEMENT WITH ADVERTISING PARTNERS**

The Division hosted a press conference today (Wednesday) at Fairway Advertising in Raleigh to announce the renewal of partnerships with the N.C. Press Foundation, the N.C. Association of Broadcasters and the N.C. Outdoor Advertising Association. These partnerships allow the Division to share billboard, online, print, radio and TV messaging promoting resident travel and visitnc.com with media outlets across the state. The media value of the exposure generated annually through this partnership is more than \$3 million.

#### **6. WEATHER CHANNEL FEATURES N.C. FALL COLOR THIS THURSDAY**

The Division's PR Team is working with the Weather Channel, in partnership with Transylvania County, on a live broadcast from the area that will air this Thursday (Oct. 15). The Weather Channel selected the location for the broadcasts after the Division invited the network to visit for a feature on fall color. Segments are planned for the early morning and evening. Tapings from two weeks ago are tentatively scheduled to air that will highlight Transylvania waterfalls, a local zipline and Gorges State Park. Dr. Howard Neufeld, the Division's fall leaf reporter from western North Carolina on VisitNC.com, will also be interviewed live at the morning and evening live segments.

#### **7. LEAF AND FISHING REPORTS UPDATE**

All leaf and coastal fishing reporters are reminded to offer their reports by following [www.Twitter.com/visitnc](https://www.twitter.com/visitnc) and posting on [www.facebook.com/northcarolina](https://www.facebook.com/northcarolina). You can update your report as often as you like. Please mention your events and fall things to do. Upload your area's fall color and fishing images on the Facebook page or at VisitNC.com. <http://www.visitnc.com/falluploads>.

#### **8. DIVISION LAUNCHES LATEST U.K. AD CAMPAIGN**

The Division's U.K. office has launched its latest campaign to entice British travelers to come to North Carolina in the fourth quarter of this year. With late bookings now becoming the norm, this campaign aims to target those who feel like they've missed out on the summer and are in need of a holiday before the onset of the British winter. The U.K. office has partnered with seven key tour operators who sell fly-drive, group and golf holidays to North Carolina to develop packages that feature "the best of North Carolina." The promotion was driven by two e-blasts to a total of one million consumers segmented against demographic and psychographic data (e.g. life stage, postcode, lifestyle preferences). Banners are also featured on the Classic FM and Trip Advisor Web sites, as well as on the Adconion & U-target networks, all driving consumers to the specially created offers page on the U.K. Web site, <http://uk.visitnc.com/bestoffers>.

## **9. DIVERSIFICATION IMPORTANT FOR RECOVERY, APPALACHIAN EXPERTS SAY**

Tourism is a \$29 billion a year industry in Appalachia, according to the Appalachian Regional Commission. But too much of that tourism is concentrated in a handful of areas, said its co-chair Anne Pope. "Communities that are moving forward ... have a diversified economic base that incorporates a number of economic development strategies," Pope said. "One of those, we hope, will be looking at the assets that you have — whether they are natural, whether they are cultural."

The more than 420 counties that make up the Appalachian region of the United States have been hit especially hard by the recession, according to the Associated Press Economic Stress Index, which measures unemployment, bankruptcies and foreclosures at the county level. Counties in the 205,000-square-mile area have seen a steeper decline than the nation as a whole. The counties had an average Stress Index score of 6.0 in November 2007, the last month before America slid into the recession, compared to a nationwide average of 5.4. In August 2009, Appalachian counties had an average Stress score of 12.46, compared to a nationwide average of 10.32.

Dana Clark, who teaches hospitality and tourism management at Appalachian State University in Boone said, "Our economy is a stool held up by a number of legs. We want one of those legs to be tourism – but we don't want the only leg to be tourism." Clark encourages Appalachian communities to see potential income in everything from cultivating new wineries to promoting their lush countryside as the ideal venue for destination weddings.

Southern cities are averaging a 12 to 20 percent drop in both hotel occupancy and travel spending since July 2008, according to Clark. "If the economy turns around, travel and tourism will start to turn around six months after that," he said. "I would think the earliest we're going to see any real relief is probably the summer of 2010." For more details, visit [http://www.usatoday.com/travel/destinations/2009-10-07-appalachian-tourism\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/travel/destinations/2009-10-07-appalachian-tourism_N.htm).

## **10. ECONOMIC ROUNDUP**

As the economy begins to shift gears from dismal to slightly improved, the travel industry sees some reason for hope, but not much, according to The New York Times. The U.S. Travel Association expects travel spending in the U.S. to decline by nearly 9 percent this year, to \$705 billion, which includes domestic business and leisure travel and spending by international visitors. Spending is expected to increase by 6 percent in 2010, but that does not make up for the large dip in 2009.

"I describe these numbers as being less bad – but they're certainly not good," said Suzanne Cook, senior vice president for research at the U.S. Travel Association. While some parts of the travel industry have survived the downturn fairly well, the industry is bracing for more modest spending on travel for years to come.

One factor keeping optimism in check is tight controls on business travel. The National Business Travel Association (NBTA) calculates that American companies spent \$261 billion on business travel, both domestic and international, in 2008, a \$44 billion increase since 1998. But the group expects that amount to increase by only \$4 billion from 2008 to 2013, creating challenges for an industry that has relied heavily on American expense accounts in the past. To read The New York Times article, [click here](#).

Few things seem normal in a year when the travel industry has been turned upside down by companies severely cutting back on business travel, according to USA Today. A survey by the Association of Corporate Travel Executives (ACTE) underscores the caution prevalent in the industry. Only a quarter of respondents said they will spend more on corporate travel next year, while about half will operate at 2009 levels. To read the article from USA Today, [click here](#).

## **11. NATIONAL BRIEFING FROM U.S. TRAVEL ASSOCIATION**

**Homeland Security Budget** – Last Wednesday, Senate and House Appropriators agreed to a final conference report approving nearly \$43 billion in spending for the U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security in FY 2010. Funding was included for several programs related to travel: \$145 million to continue implementation of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative; \$373.7 million for the US-VISIT program, including \$50 million directed toward creation of a biometric air exit capability at U.S. airports; and \$778.3 million for Transportation Security Administration to purchase explosive detection systems at airports.

**H1N1** – Top officials from the U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security (DHS) met last week with their counterparts from Canada and Mexico with an eye toward closer cooperation on “our ongoing collaborative efforts to prevent and respond to the spread of H1N1 within our nations and across our shared borders,” said DHS Deputy Secretary Jane Holl Lute. The U.S. Travel Association has developed a two-page document that outlines both what U.S. Travel will do to prepare for and respond to H1N1, and what it expects from the federal government as well. This document is being shared with key officials within the Obama Administration and relevant committee staff in Congress.

**This Week** – Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources holds a hearing today (Wednesday) on the economic effects of climate legislation. The House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee also holds a hearing today regarding high-speed rail in the United States.

#### **12. N.C. GREEN TRAVEL: AS AUTUMN LEAVES FALL, BICYCLE WHEELS SPIN**

One of the newest green travel trends is offering bicycles to tourists ([www.travelandleisure.com/blogs/carry-on/2009/8/10/two-wheel-trend-city-hotels-offering-bikes#](http://www.travelandleisure.com/blogs/carry-on/2009/8/10/two-wheel-trend-city-hotels-offering-bikes#), [www.hotelworldnetwork.com/day89](http://www.hotelworldnetwork.com/day89), [www.thestar.com/article/675423#](http://www.thestar.com/article/675423#), and [www.luxist.com/2009/04/22/hotels-offer-bikes-to-guests/](http://www.luxist.com/2009/04/22/hotels-offer-bikes-to-guests/)). Although bicycles are a tradition at many North Carolina vacation spots, some of the accommodations now offering bikes are in urban city centers, such as the new Ritz-Carlton in Charlotte ([http://corporate.ritzcarlton.com/en/Press/Properties/Charlotte/Releases/valet\\_service.htm](http://corporate.ritzcarlton.com/en/Press/Properties/Charlotte/Releases/valet_service.htm)). With travelers becoming increasingly interested not only in environmental health but their personal health as well, offering bicycles is one relatively low-cost way to differentiate your product while helping travelers reduce their carbon footprint. For more green ideas, visit [www.ecu.edu/cs-acad/sustainabletourism/Business-Resources-Checklists.cfm](http://www.ecu.edu/cs-acad/sustainabletourism/Business-Resources-Checklists.cfm). For more information on implementing sustainable practices, contact Tom Rhodes at [tom.rhodes@ncdenr.gov](mailto:tom.rhodes@ncdenr.gov) or Alex Naar at (252) 737-1346 or via [anaar@nccommerce.com](mailto:anaar@nccommerce.com).

#### **13. THE SPA AT GROVE PARK INN AMONG FROMMERS SPAS FOR MEN**

Between the rise of the metrosexual and the fall in the economy, more and more men found their way to the spa, making up 31 percent of 2008's spa-goers, according to the International Spa Association. Frommers.com suggests The Spa at Grove Park Inn Resort in Asheville in its list of places where boys can be boys and still be men. The article notes The Spa's Spa Finders Readers' Choice Award in 2007 for the best men's spa was as much for its design as for its treatments. To find out more, visit <http://www.frommers.com/articles/6367.html#ixzz0TpxCxZJB>.

#### **14. CARL SANDBURG HOME FEATURED IN CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

In its Sunday Travel section, the Chicago Tribune featured Connemara, the Flat Rock home of Illinois native-son Carl Sandburg and his wife, Lilian. The article noted, "Visiting Connemara, now a National Historic Site managed by the National Park Service, it's immediately apparent why Sandburg felt so strongly about living there. Its setting is 264 acres of diverse and beautiful land, filled with more than 500 types of plants and 14 ecosystems. Sandburg described 'the creative hush' of Connemara, and if you listen carefully, you can hear and feel it all around... The enchantment of Flat Rock and the western North Carolina mountain landscape comes from its variety and ever-evolving nature." To find out more, visit <http://www.chicagotribune.com/travel/chi-1011-sandburgoct11,0,1435964.story>.

#### **15. SPORTING NEWS INCLUDES SEVERAL N.C. TOWNS AMONG BEST SPORTS CITIES**

In its Oct. 12 edition, the Sporting News offered its list of the Best Sports Cities. While Pittsburgh topped the list, North Carolina had several among the list of 400.

Raleigh/Durham/Chapel Hill ranked the highest at #17 with Charlotte close at #23. Also on the list were Winston-Salem (#83), Greenville (#100), Cullowhee (#199), Boiling Springs (#211), Asheville (#214), Boone (#225), Buies Creek (#226), Wilmington (#238), Elon (#239), Greensboro (#245), High Point (#255), Zebulon (#333), Kannapolis (#338), Kinston (#359), Hickory (#373), and Burlington (#393). Sporting News' Best Sports City rankings, which looked at the 12 months from roughly October 2008 to October 2009, are based on point values assigned to various categories, including but not limited to won-lost records, postseason appearances, applicable power ratings, number of teams and attendance. To view the complete list, visit <http://www.sportingnews.com/general/article/2009-10-06/best-sports-city-list>.

## **16. SURVEYS, INDUSTRY, MARKETING & TRAVEL TRENDS**

**Travel Sector Takes Steps to Resist Flu** – The travel industry was hard hit after the first reports of swine flu emerged from Mexico in the spring. Trips were canceled, destination weddings were moved elsewhere and flights were grounded as traveler demand plummeted. So the industry, already reeling from the effects of the recession, has reason to be cautious as the autumn flu season gets under way. Still, because the H1N1 pandemic strain has generally not been more virulent than ordinary seasonal flu, airports, hotels and airlines are trying to find a balance between showing that they are taking substantive steps and not acting so aggressively that they set off a panic among travelers. Their actions can best be described as preventive. So instead of cutting back on high-traffic services like buffet dining in areas affected by the virus, as they did in the spring, hotel representatives say they are focusing on day-to-day measures. To find out more, visit

<http://timespeople.nytimes.com/getstarted?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.nytimes.com%2F2009%2F10%2F08%2Fbusiness%2Fglobal%2F08swine.html%3Fscp%3D1%26sq%3DMarriott%2520Marquis%2520%26st%3Dcse>. For official information about the flu, visit <http://www.flu.gov> or <http://www.immunizenc.org/images/PDFs/H1N1%20Flier%20English.pdf>.

**Hotels, Restaurants Prepare to Keep Out Unwelcome Flu Visitor** -- As if the hospitality and tourism industries don't have enough to worry about these days, they must also prepare for the potential escalation of the H1N1 virus. So far, there are no travel restrictions in place regarding swine flu, according to the World Health Organization. But hoteliers and other industries associated with tourism must also find a delicate balance between informing their employees and guests about the risks without discouraging travel. Travelers will most likely see a lot more bottles of antibacterial hand gel in hotels these days. In the back of the house, employees are seeing a lot more posters with tips on handwashing and other recommendations for keeping the virus at bay, including symptoms and admonitions to stay home when feeling ill. To find out more, visit [http://albuquerque.bizjournals.com/albuquerque/stories/2009/10/12/story4.html?b=1255320000^2235181&ana=e\\_bjtt](http://albuquerque.bizjournals.com/albuquerque/stories/2009/10/12/story4.html?b=1255320000^2235181&ana=e_bjtt).

**Airlines Add Surcharge For Travel Around Holidays** -- The number of days passengers must pay extra for flying during busy holiday periods has jumped. Several

airlines are now charging a \$10 "peak-travel" surcharge per flight on 13 days around Thanksgiving, Christmas and other holidays. It's not all bad news for travelers, though. Ticket prices for Thanksgiving and Christmas are 12-15 percent lower than last year because of decreased demand and cheaper jet fuel. To find out more, visit [http://www.usatoday.com/travel/flights/2009-10-07-peak-air-travel-surcharges\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/travel/flights/2009-10-07-peak-air-travel-surcharges_N.htm).

## **17. MEDIA LEADS**

**Spectacular Holiday Light Displays** -- Freelance writer Jim Twardowski is working on a round-up of the most dazzling Christmas light displays in the United States for a magazine with a national circulation. Send information to [thewritetwardowski@gmail.com](mailto:thewritetwardowski@gmail.com). Make sure to include "Lights" and the city and state where the display is located in the e-mail's subject line. **Deadline: Oct. 15.**

**Pet-Friendly Hotels (Hotels Only)** – Richard Carlson, a freelance travel blogger with Examiner.com, would like to talk to GMs or PR folks who represent pet-friendly hotels or hotel chains that have a policy in place where pets are restricted to certain rooms or floors, and guests are notified when they are in a room that may have had a pet in it at one time. Send information to [rich@richcarlson.com](mailto:rich@richcarlson.com) or call Carlson at (831) 479-7788. **Deadline: Oct. 15.**

**Blue Ridge Events for 2010** – Blue Ridge Country is seeking regional events for the entire 2010 year -- festivals, exhibits, workshops and other special events as far ahead as they're scheduled. The magazine needs the name of event, specific date(s) a brief description, specific location of event, contact phone number and Web site. High-resolution photography (.jpg or .tif format, minimum file size 2 MB) may be submitted for consideration. Send the information to Editor Cara Ellen Modisett at [cmodisett@leisurepublishing.com](mailto:cmodisett@leisurepublishing.com). **Deadline: Oct. 16.**

## **18. BARBEE RETURNS TO HIGH COUNTRY HOST AS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Millie Barbee has returned to High Country Host as executive director, a post she held from 1994-2000. She can be contacted at (828) 264-1299 or via [millie@highcountryhost.com](mailto:millie@highcountryhost.com).

## **19. NORTHWEST N.C. VISITORS CENTER NOW OPEN**

The Northwest N.C. Visitors Center is now open. Located between exits 82 and 85 in Wilkesboro. The address is 2501 East U.S. Hwy 421, Wilkesboro, N.C. 28659. Phone is (336) 667-1259 and e-mail is [northwestNCvc@embarqmail.com](mailto:northwestNCvc@embarqmail.com). This is the state's first environmentally-friendly rest station, featuring solar panels, geothermal wells for heating and cooling, and a rain-water collection system, which N.C. Dept. of Transportation officials hope will collect enough to operate the on-site lavatories. To find out more, visit <http://www.wral.com/news/local/story/6183420/>. People can even monitor the center's energy usage via <http://ncdot.technology-view.com/wilkes>. For a map of N.C. Welcome Centers, Visitors Centers and Rest Areas across the state, visit <http://www.ncdot.gov/travel/restareas/>.

## **20. "NORTH CAROLINA WEEKEND"**

For the week of Oct. 15 on UNC-TV's "North Carolina Weekend," take in the sights and sounds of the East Coast Drag Times Hall of Fame in Henderson. Enjoy a profile of the N.C. Theatre in Raleigh. Experience the wonders of nature at the N.C. Aquarium at Pine Knoll Shores. Visit the world's largest open-face granite quarry in Mount Airy. And the "House Special" samples the fare at Bridges Barbecue Lodge in Shelby. (*Please note: listings are subject to change.*) Exclusively underwritten by the N.C. Division of Tourism, "North Carolina Weekend" airs Thursdays at 9:00 p.m. with repeats on Fridays and Saturdays (*please check local listings*) on UNC-TV. In addition, UNC-TV has made recent editions of "North Carolina Weekend" available online. For more information or to download a podcast, visit <http://www.unctv.org/ncweekend>.

## **21. UPCOMING INDUSTRY MEETINGS & EVENTS**

**Oct. 26-28** – Marketing Outlook Forum, Little Rock, Ark.

**Nov. 12-13** – NCTIA Annual Tourism Leadership Conference, Greensboro

**Nov. 13** – Piedmont Triad Host Group Meeting, Greensboro

**Nov. 19-20** – MPI-CC Meeting, Raleigh

**Dec. 15** – N.C. Travel & Tourism Board Meeting, Raleigh

## **SHARE THE "NEWSLINK"**

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## **FEEDBACK WELCOME**

The N.C. Division of Tourism, Film & Sports Development is committed to serving North Carolina's tourism industry. If you have feedback regarding any of the Division's programs, let your voice be heard at [visitnc@nccommerce.com](mailto:visitnc@nccommerce.com).