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Poll: Most regular Jersey Shore visitors returning this summer

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A solitary reader on the sand in Point Pleasant Beach last summer.

Nearly all state residents who regularly visit the Jersey Shore plan to return this summer, although some will spend less time there than usual because of the lingering effects of superstorm Sandy, according to a poll released Monday by the Eagleton Institute of Politics

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The poll found that 97 percent of regulars intend to go to the shore at some point this summer and that 77 percent will spend at least as much time as in previous years, a result that could mean only a moderate loss of income for shore businesses, said the director of the poll, David Relawsk.

"In-state tourism might decline, but not as much as might be expected after Sandy," he said.

The poll was released three days after pilings were driven into the sand as construction crews began to rebuild the boardwalk at Seaside Heights, a project that is scheduled to be completed by Memorial Day.

"That boardwalk is going to be done, and then there's no reason they won't come," said Maureen Stankowitz, president of the Toms River-Ocean County Chamber of Commerce, which represents an area that includes Seaside Heights.

She added that she expects some decline in tourism, saying businesses at the shore anticipate making about 15 percent less than during a typical summer.

Many of the most famous boardwalk amusement rides in Seaside Heights, including the roller coaster, are not expected to be repaired anytime soon, she said. And many people who own second homes at the shore and rent them out for much of the summer have been slow to rebuild because of uncertainty about flood insurance regulations that require foundations to be raised, she said.

The Eagleton poll found that people directly affected by the storm, such as those whose shore homes were damaged, are twice as likely as others to stay away from the shore this summer.

Relawsk said the poll, which was conducted earlier this month, found that nearly 60 percent of all state residents, excluding those who live at the shore, spend at least some time there during the summer. About a third of regulars take day trips while the remainder stay overnight, about 25 percent for a week or more.

About 20 percent of those who plan shore trips this summer said they would spend less time there, Relawsk said, but that was partially offset by 13 percent who said they would stay longer than usual. Of those who said they would cut back on time at the shore, he said, about two-thirds cited the impact of superstorm Sandy.

The poll identified the top destinations as Atlantic City, which gets 11 percent of shore visitors, and Seaside Heights, which gets 10 percent.

The percentage of regulars planning shore trips this summer was slightly lower in North Jersey, where 67 percent said they would spend as much time as in previous years, according to the poll.

Relawsk said 56 percent of people living in Bergen, Passaic, Hudson and Essex counties are shore regulars. About 30 percent of them said they would spend less time there this summer, he said, including a small but unspecified percentage who said they would not go at all. Another 22 percent said they would spend more time at the shore, while 43 percent said their plans would be similar to last year.

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