

# Delaware Beaches Tourist Information Center Visitor Profile

Summer 1984



December 1984

Delaware Sea Grant College Program  
College of Marine Studies  
University of Delaware

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DELAWARE BEACHES TOURIST INFORMATION CENTER

VISITOR PROFILE

Summer 1984

by

James M. Falk  
Marine Recreation and Tourism Specialist  
Marine Advisory Service  
Delaware Sea Grant College Program  
Lewes, DE 19958

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## INTRODUCTION

The Delaware Beaches Tourist Information Center, in Lewes, opened its doors for the first time on 1 June 1984. It served as a focal point for tourist information for visitors to the Delaware beach area throughout the summer of 1984. The center was supported by the coastal Chambers of Commerce (Lewes, Rehoboth Beach, Bethany/Fenwick Island), Sussex County, and the Delaware Development Office, State Travel Service. By summer's end, approximately 6,750 visitors visited the Information Center (Stone, 1984).

## OBJECTIVE

The primary objective of this study is to describe general characteristics, activities, and spending patterns of out-of-state visitors who visited the Delaware Beaches Tourist Information Center during its first summer of operation.

## METHODS

In early June 1984, the University of Delaware Sea Grant Marine Advisory Service suggested to Coastal Chamber of Commerce officials that a survey of out-of-state visitors to the Delaware Beaches Tourist Information Center would provide beneficial results. Since this was the first year of operation, information generated through a survey could provide valuable documentation on those visitors who used the facility.

A one-page mail survey with a postage-paid return envelope was selected as the survey instrument that would provide the best results. When a consensus was reached by all parties on the type questions to ask, a guest register

was placed in the lobby of the center and guests were encouraged to provide their names and complete mailing addresses.

Surveying of visitors began in earnest on 1 July 1984 and continued through 5 September 1984 (Table 1). Each week the guest register was checked and names and addresses were examined for mailing accuracy. Through the course of the summer, nine mailings took place on consecutive weeks. The number of questionnaires mailed out varied each week depending on the number of discernable names and addresses from the register. If completed questionnaires were not received after three weeks, a second questionnaire was mailed to each identified visitor.

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Table 1. Week-by-Week Results of Mailed Survey Questionnaires

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<u>Initial Mailing Date</u>	<u>Number of Questionnaires Mailed</u>	<u>% Response</u>
July 12, 1984	51	68.6
July 20, 1984	17	58.8
July 27, 1984	27	70.4
Aug. 3, 1984	43	69.8
Aug. 10, 1984	46	69.6
Aug. 17, 1984	75	68.0
Aug. 22, 1984	45	66.7
Aug. 31, 1984	58	70.7
Sept. 7, 1984	20	60.0
	<u>382</u>	

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Six hundred and sixty-nine guests signed the register over the course of the survey period. Of this number, 23 were Delaware residents. These visitors were not included as part of the survey sample and were dropped. This left a total of 646 out-of-state visitors who signed the guest register. However, after a closer examination of the names and addresses, only 382 could

be legibly identified. This number constituted our original sample size. Sixteen questionnaires were returned undeliverable by the U.S. Postal Service or returned incomplete by recipients. This reduced our effective sample size to 366. Of this number, 264 usable questionnaires were received from visitors for a 72% response rate (Table 2).

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Table 2. Questionnaire Response

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	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Total Visitors Signing Guest Register (July 1-Sept. 5, 1984)	669	
Delaware Visitors Signing Guest Register	<u>23</u>	
Out-of-State Visitors Signing Guest Register	646	
Legible Names and Complete Mailing Addresses	382	
Questionnaires Returned by Visitors or Undeliverable by USPS	16	
Effective Sample Size	366	100.0
Usable Questionnaires Received	264	72.1

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RESULTS

General Visitor Characteristics

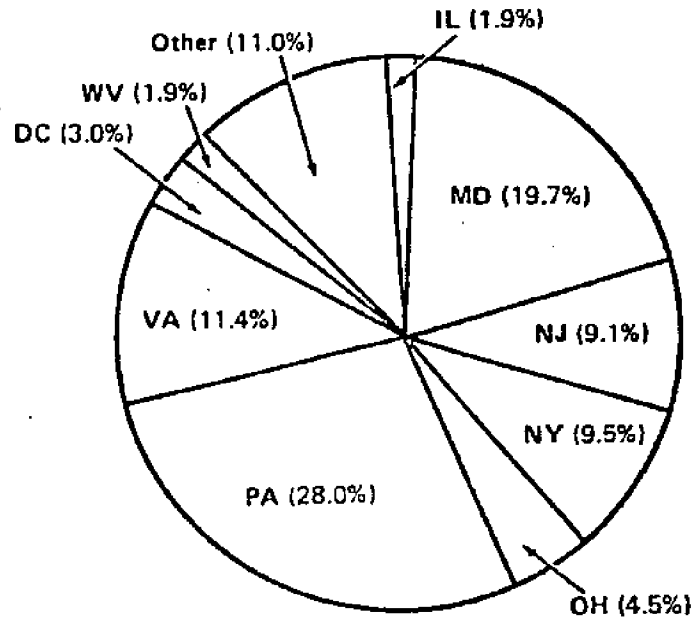


Figure 1. Residence of out-of-state visitors

Of the visitors responding to the survey questionnaire, 28% were residents of Pennsylvania. Almost 20% came from Maryland, and approximately 11% resided in Virginia. Even though only 3.0% of the respondents reported they came from the metropolitan Washington, DC area, a large percentage of the Virginia and Maryland respondents were also residents of Washington, DC suburban areas.

When visitors were asked if this was their first visit to the Delaware beach area, almost 56% responded that they were first-time visitors. This percentage might appear high, but first-time visitors to the area might be more apt to utilize the Visitor Center services than visitors who have been in the area before.

When visitors were questioned as to where they first heard about the Delaware beach area as a place to visit, most responded from "friends" (42.2%). "Family and relatives" was the second most popular response, with more than 24% of the visitors stating this was their source of information. No other individual response was mentioned by more than 6% of the visitors except "been there before" which was mentioned by 6.1% of the visitors (Table 3).

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Table 3. Hear of Delaware Beach Area as a Place to Visit

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<u>Source of Information</u>	<u>Total Responses</u>	<u>Percent Response</u>
Friends	128	42.2
Family/Relatives	72	24.3
Been There Before	18	6.1
Sent for Information	14	4.7
Map	11	3.7
Newspaper	10	3.4
By Chance	9	3.0
Campground Directory/Travel Guide	7	2.4
AAA	6	2.0
Magazine	6	2.0
Looked for Quiet Place	3	1.0
Delaware Information Center	3	1.0
Television	2	*
Church Retreat	2	*
Never Heard Before	2	*
Radio	1	*
Travel Agent	1	*
Outdoor/Travel Show	1	*

\*Less than 1.0% responding.

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For repeat visitors, "family and relatives" were a greater source of information about Delaware (34.1%) than for first-time visitors (14.1%). First-time visitors heard more often about Delaware from "friends" (47.8%) as compared to repeat visitors (37.3%). In addition, 5.0% of the first-timers

responded they heard of Delaware "by chance" as compared with 0.7% of repeat visitors.

As would be expected, over 87% of the visitors arrived to the area in private automobiles. Recreational vehicles (RVs) accounted for 8.2% of the visitors' transportation mode.

Another question sought to obtain information on how many adults and children were traveling with each party who stopped at the Visitor Center. In more than 76% of the groups, two adults were included in the traveling party. The average was 2.26 adults per group.

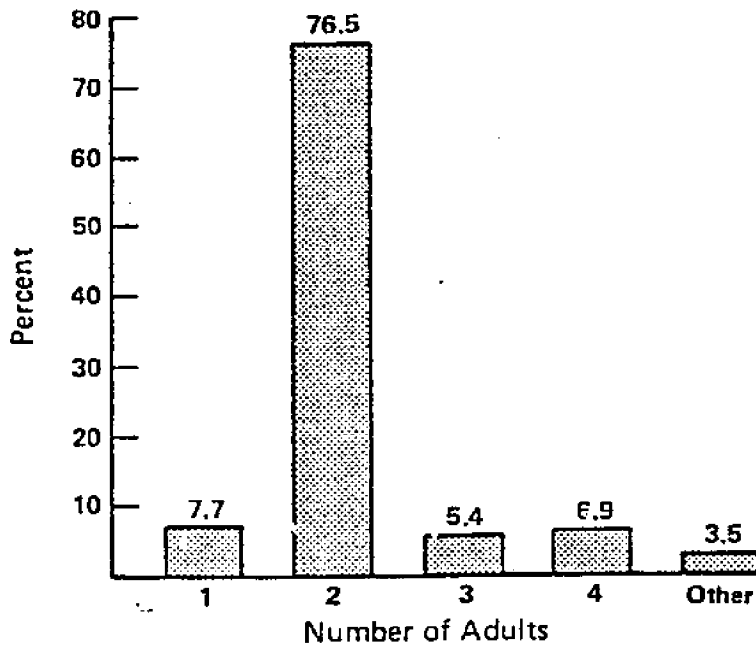


Figure 2. Number of adults in group

Two children were traveling with about 25% of the "family-type" groups. The average number of children per group was only 1.05. Of particular note is the fact that more than 50% of the groups were comprised of adults traveling without children ("non-family-type" groups).

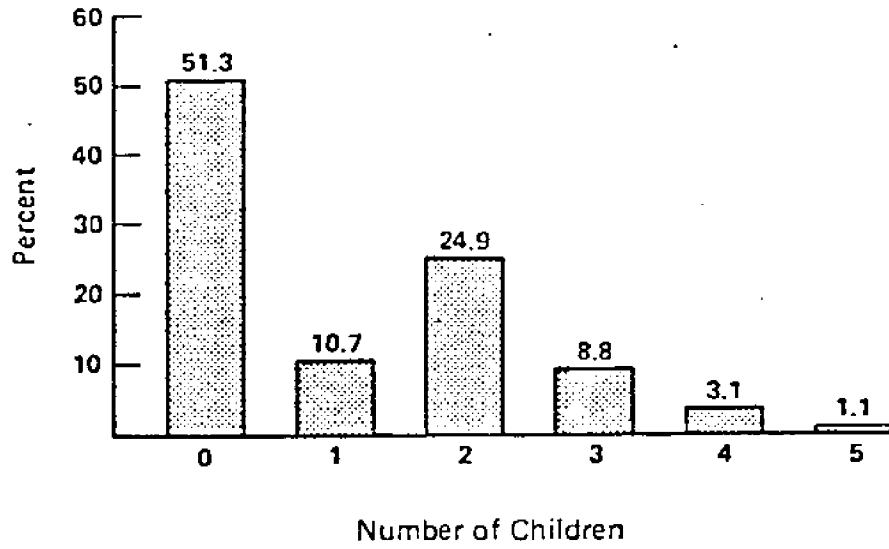


Figure 3. Number of children in group

Visitor Center guests also appeared to be predominantly middle to upper-middle class when income categories were analyzed. Eighty-three percent of the visitors reported incomes greater than \$20,000. Only 4.5% reported earning less than \$10,000 (Figure 4).

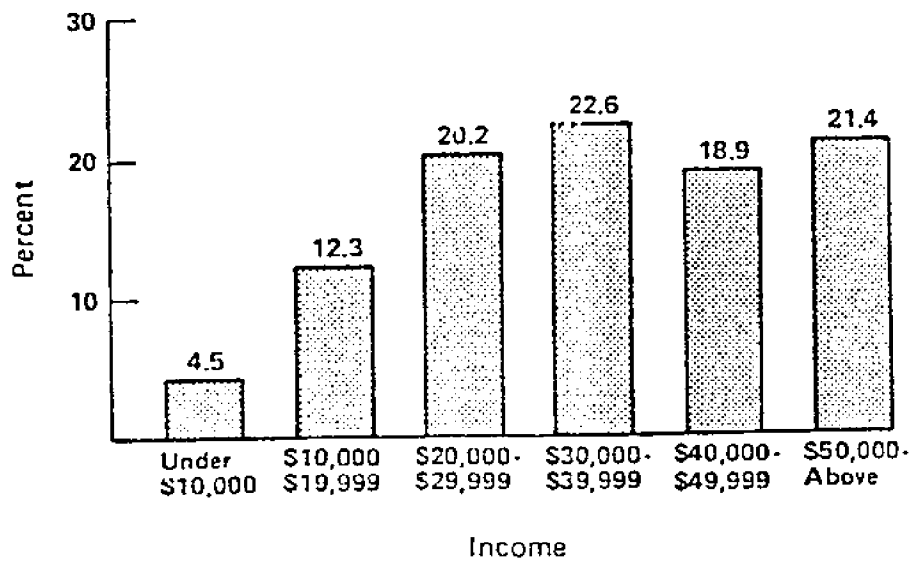


Figure 4. Income levels

Only 10.1% of the "family-type" groups and almost 24% of the "non-family type" groups had incomes of less than \$20,000.

#### Activities of Visitors to the Delaware Beach Area

Visitors were also asked what their destination was in the Delaware beach area. Almost one-half of the respondents provided more than one answer to this question. Since this was the case, a maximum of two responses was accepted from each respondent. The two choices were added together to arrive at the percentages presented in Figure 5. More than 47% of the respondents noted that Rehoboth Beach was their destination, followed by Lewes with 19.6%. The "other" response category (14%) included destinations such as another northern or southern state or another town in Delaware.

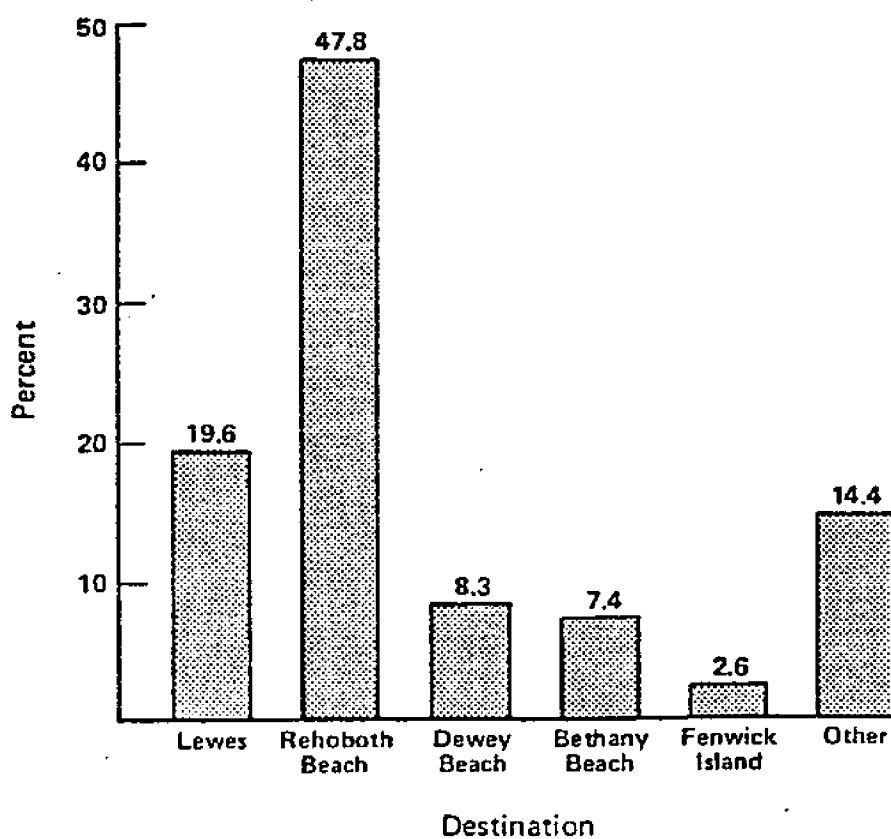


Figure 5. Destination of beach visitors

Length of time spent in the Delaware beach area was also asked of visitors, both in terms of number of days and number of nights. The average number of days spent in the area was four and one-half days (Figure 6).

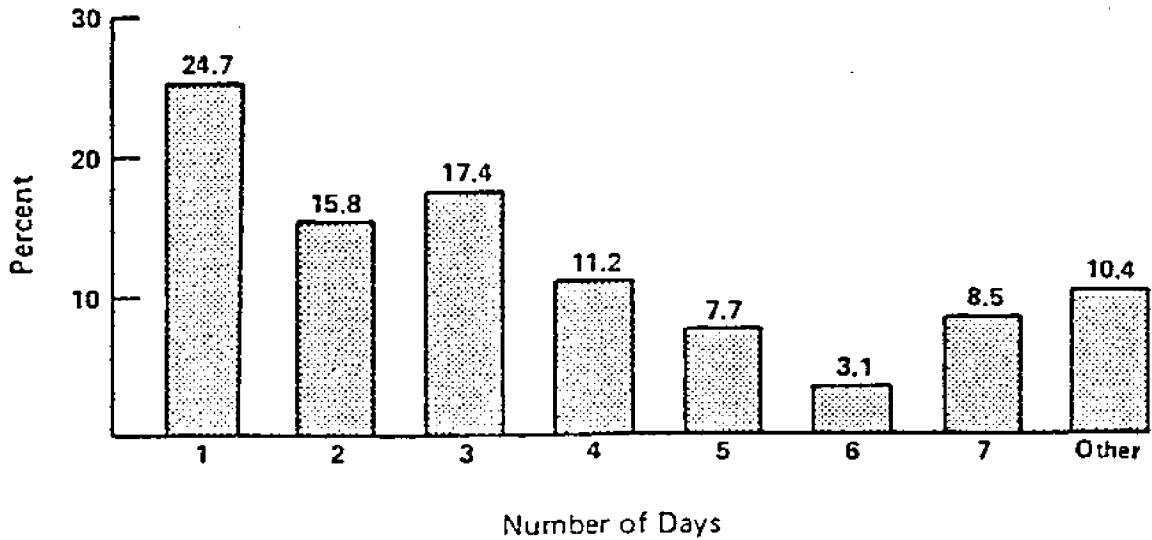


Figure 6. Number of days spent in beach area  
(average = 4.51 days)

When first-time visitors were compared against repeat visitors, the length of stay varied significantly. First-time visitors spent an average of 3.4 days in the Delaware beach area, whereas repeat visitors responded that they spent an average of approximately six days.

Approximately 18% of the total visitors were day visitors who did not spend a night in the beach area (22%, first-time visitors; 12%, repeat visitors). For those visitors who spent at least one night in the area, the average stay was 4.24 nights (Figure 7).

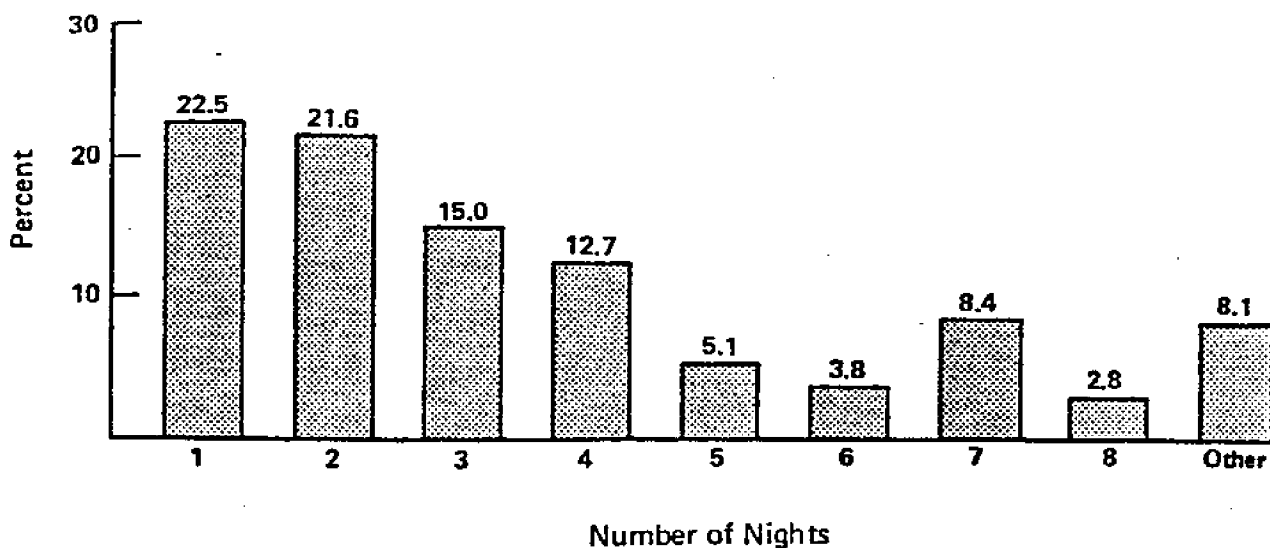


Figure 7. Number of nights spent in beach area  
(average = 4.24 nights; 17.8 spent 0 nights)

Besides spending fewer days in the beach area, first-time visitors also spent fewer nights than did repeat visitors. First-timers spent an average of 2.7 nights and repeat visitors spent an average of 5.4 nights.

Overnight visitors to the Delaware beach area utilized a variety of lodging types. Hotels and motels were the most frequently listed type of lodging, with almost 36% mentioning this type. Private campgrounds were mentioned next with more than 20% of the visitors lodging there. State campgrounds and "staying with friends and relatives" followed next with 12.6% and 12.1% of the visitors reporting these lodging accommodations.

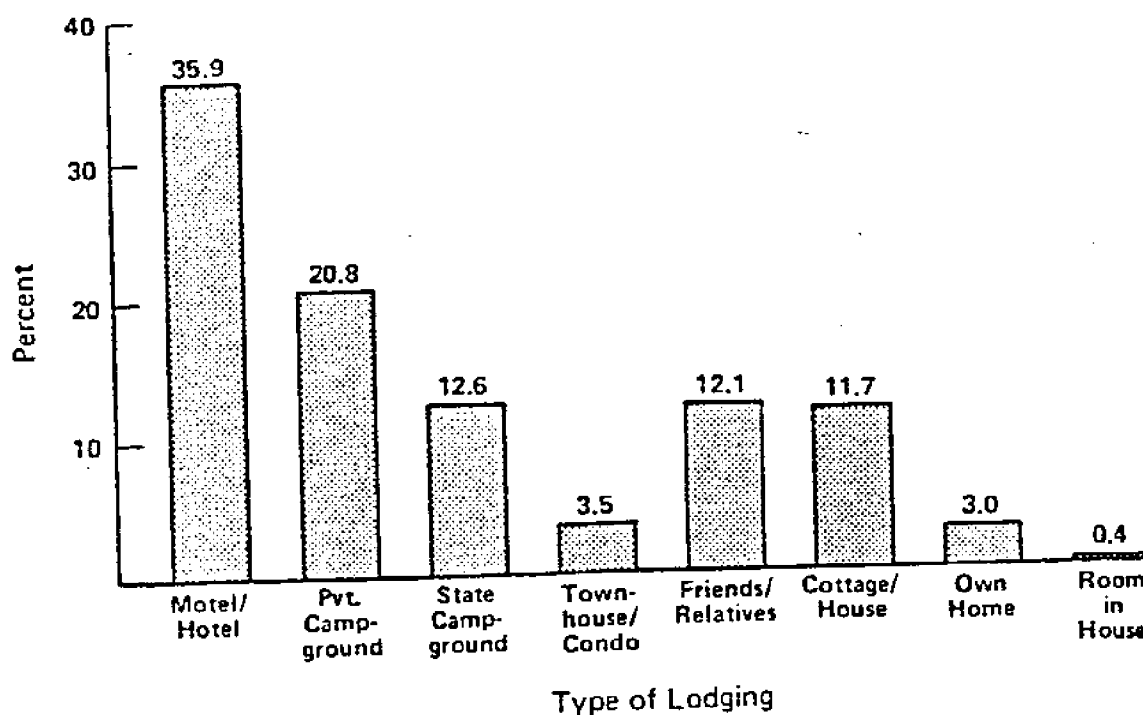


Figure 8. Type of lodging while in beach area

Approximately 37% of the first-time visitors selected hotels and motels for their stay compared to 25% of the repeat visitors. Repeat visitors stayed with friends and relatives (13%) more often than first-time visitors (5.5%). They also rented a cottage or house (17.2%) more often than first-timers (3.4%).

Visitors were also asked if they had their lodging reservations confirmed before they arrived in the beach area. Surprisingly, only 38% responded that they did have their reservations confirmed. This was even more pronounced between repeat visitors and first-time visitors. Only 22% of the first-time overnight visitors confirmed their reservations, whereas approximately 56% of the repeat overnight visitors confirmed theirs.

Visitors were requested to list the primary reasons for visiting the Delaware beach area. They had the opportunity to list their top three reasons.



Since it was difficult to ascertain from some returned questionnaires which reasons were primary and which were secondary, they were added together to arrive at the total responses presented in Table 4. The most popular activity mentioned was swimming and visiting the beach; the second most-mentioned activity was sightseeing; and the third most listed reason for visiting the area was "passing through."

Table 4. Primary Reasons for Visiting Delaware Beach Area

<u>Reasons</u>	<u>Total Responses</u>	<u>Percent Response</u>
Swim/Beach	207	34.7
Sightsee	106	17.8
Passing Through	48	8.1
Fishing	43	7.2
Camp/Hike	38	6.4
Shop	35	5.9
Historical Sights	29	4.9
General Relaxation	24	4.0
Boating	13	2.2
Visit Family/Friends	11	1.8
Want to Move to Delaware	8	1.3
Business	7	1.2
General Outdoor Recreation (Bike, Tennis, etc.)	7	1.2
Ride Cape May-Lewes Ferry	3	*
Other Family Matters in Area	3	*
See East Coast	2	*
Visit Boardwalk	2	*
Eat Beach Food	2	*
Church Retreat	1	*
Free Lodging	1	*
Surfing	1	*
Sailing	1	*
Honeymoon	1	*
Visit Dover Air Force Base	1	*
Job Search	1	*
Family Atmosphere	1	*
*Less than 1.0% responding		

The most obvious difference between first-time visitors and repeat visitors for visiting the area was "passing-through," where 12.0% of the first-timers and only 3.3% of the repeat visitors mentioned this as a reason. In addition, more first-time visitors mentioned "sightseeing" as a reason for visiting (21.2%) as compared to repeaters (13.7%).

More than 95% of the total respondents were satisfied with their visit to the beach area and responded they would visit again. The most popular response to when they would visit again was summer. As would be expected, more than 54% responded this season. Other popular seasons mentioned were summer and fall by 10.4% of the visitors, and any season (spring, summer, fall, and winter) by more than 8% of the respondents (Figure 9).

When first-time visitors' responses were compared to repeat visitors, 92% of first-timers responded "yes" they would visit again and 100% of the repeat visitors responded they would visit again. Family-type groups responded "summer" as a time to visit again in 66% of the cases. Non-family type groups mentioned "summer" in 40% of the cases. This suggests that family-type groups are more "fixed" into visiting the Delaware beach area during the summer months because children are in school the rest of the year. Non-family-type groups have more flexibility and can visit the beach area in a number of different seasons.

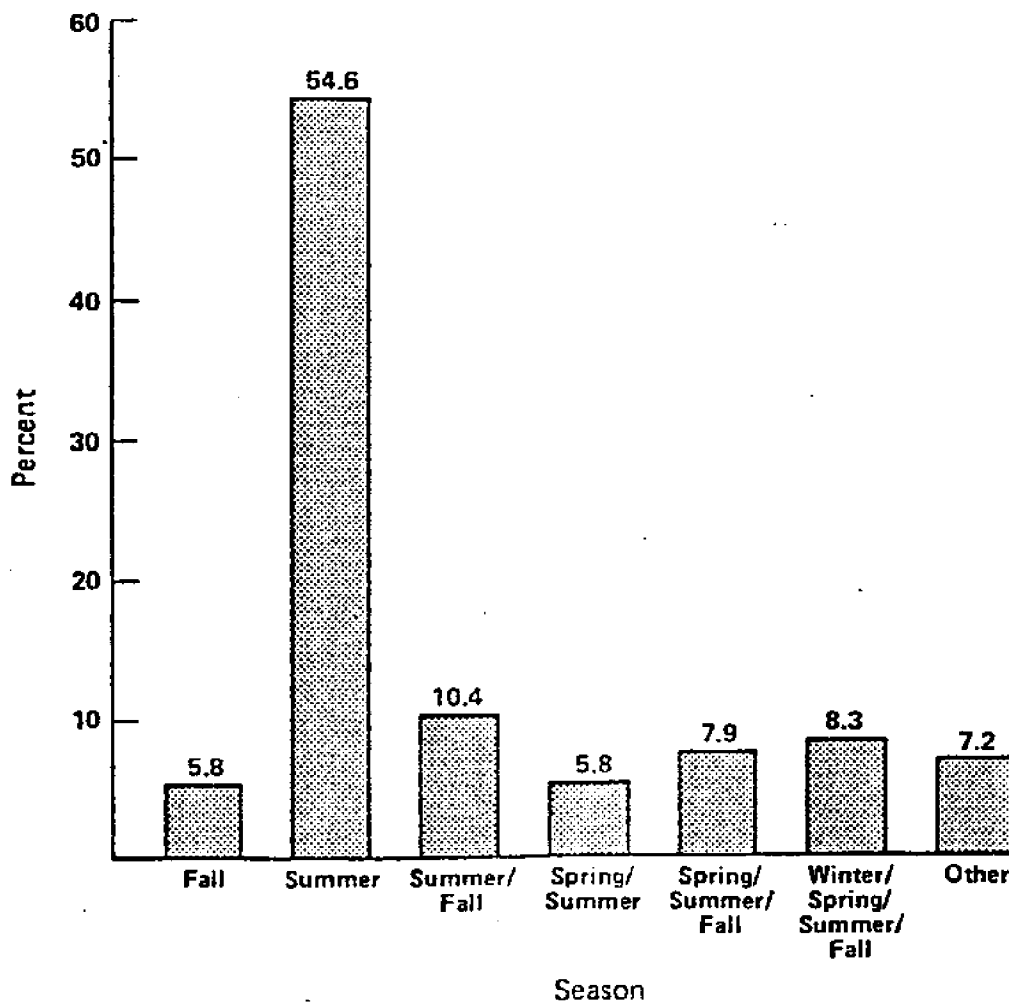


Figure 9. When visit beach area again

#### Visitor Spending Patterns

Visitors were also asked to respond how much they spent for various purchases while in the beach area. The four expenditure items that were requested were for lodging, food, transportation, and other beach-related expenditures. Repeat visitors outspent first-time visitors in all categories. "Family-type" groups also spent more than "non-family type" groups in all categories. The following figures (Figures 10-13) present the various spending by visitors to the Delaware beach area.

The largest response for lodging (28.5%) was "no dollars spent." These respondents included day-visitors and those who received free accommodations from friends or relatives while in the area. The average lodging expenses were \$121 for the various lengths of stay in the area for each visiting group. This average figure includes both camping fees which were only a few dollars a night to charges for hotel stays which were significantly higher. It must be noted that some visitors spent only one night and others spent longer periods. This accounts for some of the wide range of lodging expenditures by visitors. The remaining spending patterns for lodging are listed in Figure 10.

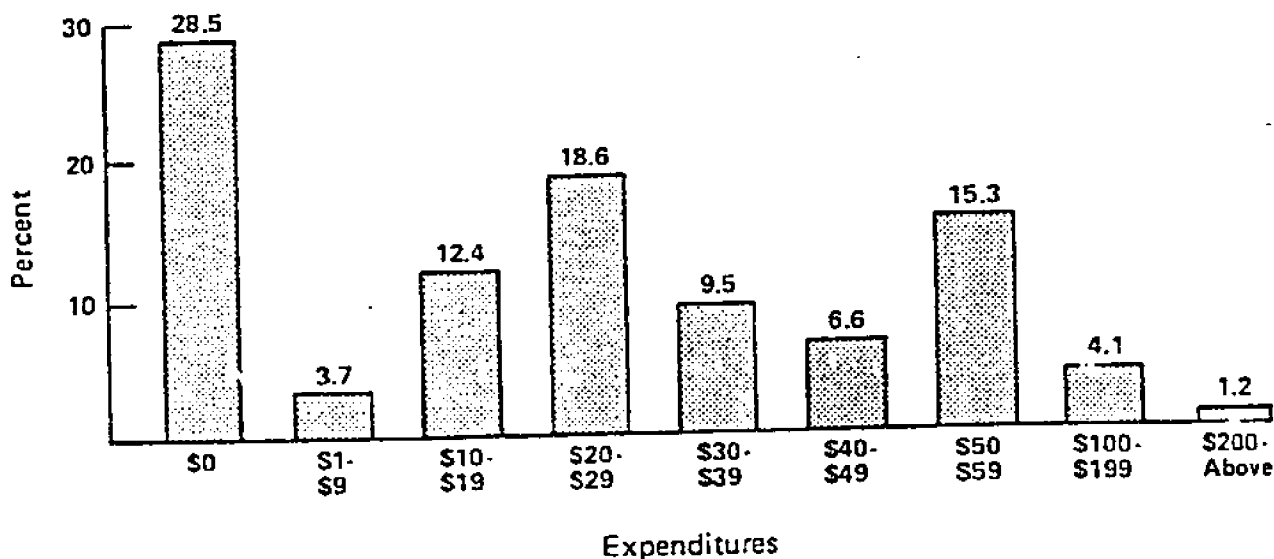


Figure 10. Lodging expenditures  
(average = \$121)

Spending for food items averaged \$134. This could include food purchased in restaurants and food stands, as well as food purchased in local grocery stores or food markets. Twenty-nine percent of the visitors spent between

\$1-50 for food items; 23% spent between \$50-100; and about one-quarter of the respondents spent between \$100-200 on food items.

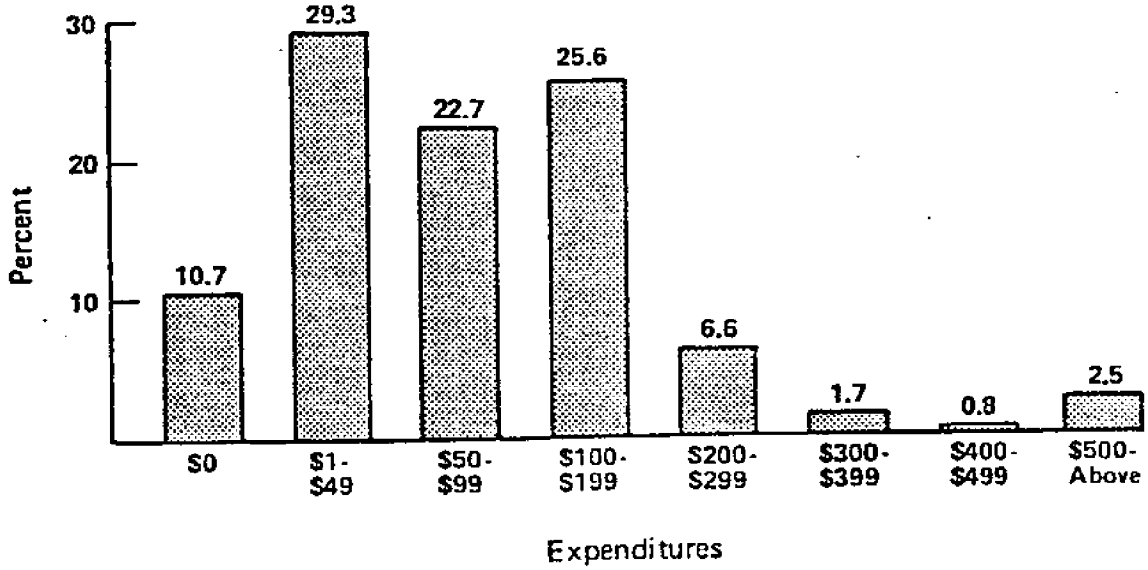


Figure 11. Food expenditures  
(average = \$134)

Transportation expenditures primarily included gasoline expenditures for the visitors' automobiles. Depending upon the duration of their stay and the distance they traveled, these expenses varied greatly. The average spending for transportation amounted to \$30. More than 28% responded that they spent nothing for travel, suggesting that they were able to drive to the area and back home without having to purchase additional fuel.

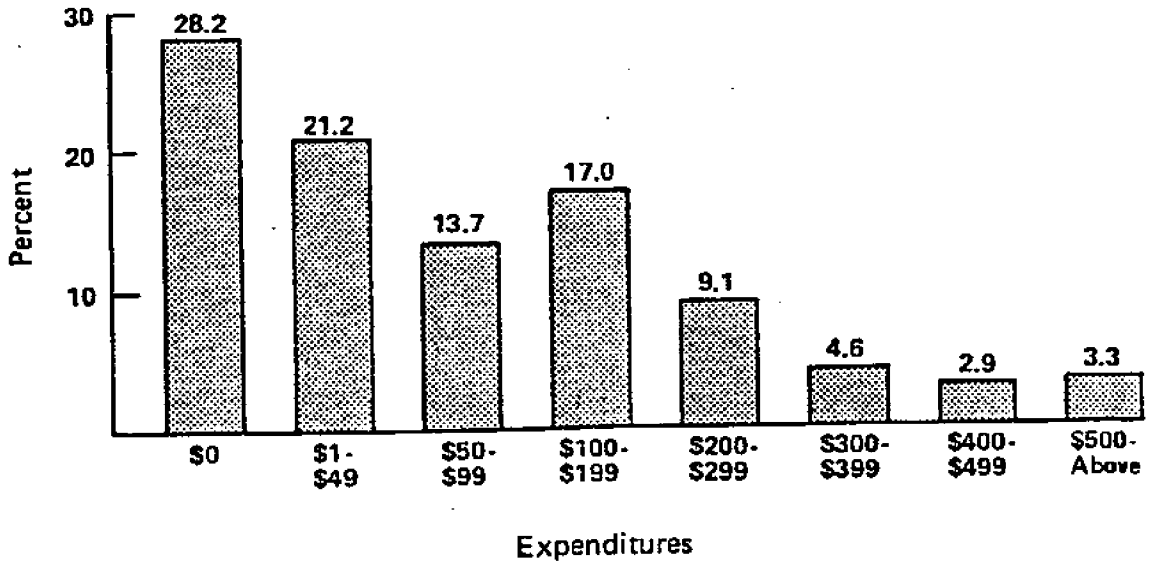


Figure 12. Transportation expenditures  
(average = \$30)

Visitors also spent additional dollars on miscellaneous items such as gifts, clothing, and entertainment. The average expenditure in this category was \$71. About 25% of the visiting parties estimated they spent \$0 and 44% noted they spent more than \$50 on miscellaneous items (Figure 13).

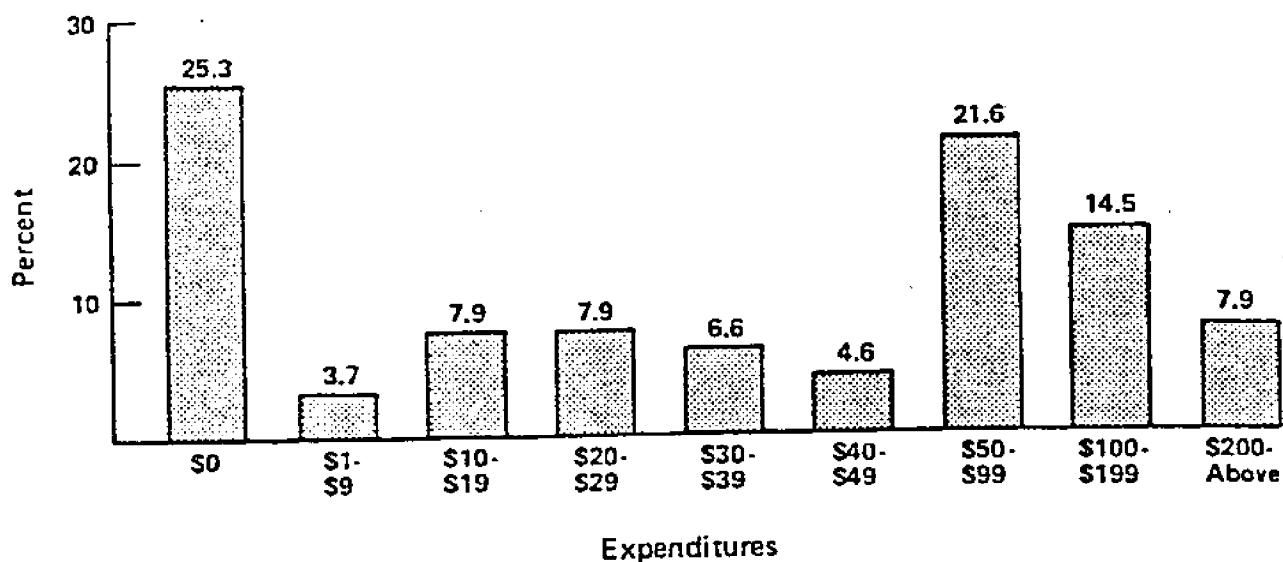


Figure 13. Miscellaneous expenditures  
(average = \$71)

#### CONCLUSIONS

This study of a small segment of out-of-state visitors who visited the Delaware beach area during the summer months was not meant to be exhaustive. There is a broader segment of visitors who visit the Sussex County shoreline during the summer season that are not represented in these survey results. A brief caution must be made to all who read this report that these results should not be extrapolated to the broader population of summer visitors.

Those visitors who visited the Delaware Beach area tourist information center can probably be termed "unique." Out of the many thousands of summer visitors who visit the Delaware Beach area, a "unique" population of 6,750 visitors elected to stop by the center for visitor information. These visitors constituted the sample for this study. This being the case, this report should

be perceived only as a profile and a characterization of those out-of-state visitors who visited the Information Center during its first summer of operation.

Hopefully, the results can be of some assistance to the coastal Chambers of Commerce; Sussex County; and the Delaware Development Office, State Travel Service to better understand one segment of visitors to the Delaware beach area and also to aid in planning for their visits.



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A P P E N D I X

DATA COLLECTION MATERIALS

Study Questionnaire

Initial Cover Letter

Follow-Up Cover Letter

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DELAWARE BEACH AREA VISITOR PROFILE QUESTIONNAIRE, 1984

1. Was this your first visit to the Delaware beach area?  Yes  No
  2. How were you traveling?  
 Automobile  Bus  Recreational Vehicle  Other (Specify) \_\_\_\_\_
  3. What was your destination?  
 Lewes  Rehoboth Beach  Dewey Beach  Bethany Beach  
 Fenwick Island  Other (Specify) \_\_\_\_\_
  4. How many were in your party?  Adults  Children
  5. How long did you stay in the Delaware beach area?  Days  Nights
  6. What types of lodging did you use while in the Delaware beach area?  
 Motels/Hotels  Private Campground  State Campground  Townhouse/  
 With Friends/Relatives  Rented Cottage or House  Other (Specify) \_\_\_\_\_
  7. Did you have your reservations confirmed before you arrived?  Yes  No
  8. What was your primary reason for visiting the Delaware beach area? (Check a maximum three; No. 1 for primary reason, No. 2 for secondary reason, No. 3 for last reason.)  
 Passing Through  Swimming/Sunbathing on Beaches  Fishing  Boat  
 Shopping  Camping/Hiking  Sightseeing  Historical Sites  
 Business  Other (Specify) \_\_\_\_\_
  9. Please estimate total expenditures during your visit?  
\$ \_\_\_\_\_ Lodging \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Food \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Transportation \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Other (Entertainment,  
Gifts, Recreation, Clothing)
  10. What is your approximate annual household income before taxes?  
 Under \$10,000  \$10,000-\$19,999  \$20,000-29,999  
 \$30,000-\$39,999  \$40,000-\$49,999  \$50,000 and above
  11. How did you first hear about the Delaware beach area as a place to visit?  
 Magazine  Newspaper  Outdoor/Travel Show  Family/Relatives  
 Friends  Television  Travel Agent  Radio  
 Sent Away for Information  Other (Specify) \_\_\_\_\_
  12. Would you visit the Delaware beach area again?  Yes  No  
If yes, when?  Fall  Winter  Spring  Summer
- Please provide any other general comments you may have about your visit to the Delaware beach area. \_\_\_\_\_

UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE  
LEWES, DELAWARE  
19958

SEA GRANT COLLEGE PROGRAM  
MARINE ADVISORY SERVICES  
COLLEGE OF MARINE STUDIES  
CANNON BUILDING  
PHONE: 302-645-4235

Summer 1984

Dear Friend:

We hope you have enjoyed your visit to the Delaware beach area.

In order to better plan for tourists, a survey of visitors to the Delaware beach area is being conducted by the University of Delaware Sea Grant Marine Advisory Service and the Delaware Coastal Chambers of Commerce. We ask you to complete the brief questionnaire that is enclosed. Please note the postage-paid envelope that is provided for your convenience. Any information you provide will be held in strict confidence and will be used only in aggregate form with other survey respondents.

Thank you for your assistance. We hope that you will visit the Delaware beach area again soon.

Sincerely,

James M. Falk  
Marine Recreation/Tourism Specialist

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Enclosures

UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE  
LEWES, DELAWARE  
19958

SEA GRANT COLLEGE PROGRAM  
MARINE ADVISORY SERVICES  
COLLEGE OF MARINE STUDIES  
CANNON BUILDING  
PHONE: 302-645- 4235

Summer 1984

Dear Friend:

About three weeks ago, you were sent a questionnaire which is part of a study of visitors to the Delaware beach area. If you have already returned the questionnaire, we thank you for your prompt reply. If you have not completed the questionnaire, would you please take the time to do so today.

The information you provide helps to increase the accuracy of the study. It will also help local businesses and tourist officials better respond to your needs. Remember, all responses will be summarized and handled in strict confidentiality.

A questionnaire and prepaid return envelope are enclosed in case you did not receive one or no longer have the first one we sent you.

Thank you again for your interest and cooperation.

Sincerely,

James M. Falk  
Marine Recreation/Tourism Specialist

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Enclosures