

Officials: State's tourism dollars on the rise thanks to late-summer sunshine

MANCHESTER (AP) — August's summer sun is raising more than the temperature — it's raising tourism dollars in New Hampshire.

After a soft start in July, the summer season appears to be making a strong comeback in August, state tourism experts say.

Fourth of July week was "not as good as we had hoped" said Alice DeSouza, director of the state Division of Travel and Tourism. So far this August, tourism business "seems to be coming back with a vengeance," she added.

Visitors waited for warm weather to go on vacation in New Hampshire, and when they did, they preferred cooking to dining out, campgrounds over hotels, and hiking, biking and kayaking over more expensive pursuits.

DeSouza said numbers coming in so far this month show retail sales are up, well-attended

events and larger-than-ever number of vacationers using canoes and kayaks to access state waters.

The state Liquor Commission reports sales are up, particularly at grocery and convenience stores, which shows customers are still buying, but making thriftier choices.

"The consumer is feeling the pinch and has cut back in certain places," said John Bunnell, the commission's administrator of sales and marketing. Sales at groceries and convenience stores are up 10 percent since July 1. "Pretty significant," he said. Sales at restaurants and hotels are up 2.4 percent.

Turnpike use is also up minimally, said state Transportation Department spokesman Bill Boynton. After falling in summer 2006, toll figures are up 2 percent this year, he said.

