

Boulder tourism officials foresee strong summer

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BOULDER, Colo. -

A year after surviving a summer of high gas prices, Boulder tourism is hoping to thrive this summer in a tough economy.

Early signs are encouraging for local businesses in Colorado's biggest industry. Lodging occupancies are holding steady, according to the Boulder Convention and Visitors Bureau, and local hotels haven't seen a dip yet.

"Despite the struggling economy, we're still encouraged by what we're seeing, with group bookings and with individual travelers," said Beverly Silva, spokeswoman for the Hotel Boulderado. "And now that we're heading into summer season, it's always a great time for Boulder."

A deep recession has some in the tourism industry worried about Americans staying home. But after Boulder didn't see a significant decline last year with gas prices at more than \$4 a gallon, the local tourism industry may be able to stay afloat again this year.

"Last summer everyone said drivers would stay home, but we didn't see that in Boulder," said Mary Ann Mahoney, the executive director of the visitors bureau. "We actually had a very good year in 2008. People really value their vacations and their time with their family."

Mahoney also said Boulder's business community provides a consistent customer base. With the University of Colorado and several federal labs, business travelers have continued to come to Boulder in a tough economy.

But those travelers -- as well as vacationers -- have been making reservations closer to their stay instead of months in advance, Mahoney said. She said that's likely a reflection of the economic uncertainty that has gripped the country in the last year.

The Hotel Boulderado has also seen the trend, but it hasn't had a decline in reservations. It's just having to wait for rooms to be booked.

"People are tending to make more last-minute type of reservations," Silva said. "People are waiting and looking for deals. It's harder to predict these days because something could happen at the last minute."

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