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Posted Mar. 26, 2007

HOSPITALITY & TOURISM

Spring arrives, tourism blooms, say state officials

By Nicole Dionne, PBN Staff Writer

In the upcoming tourism season, Providence will have 500 more hotel rooms than last year, and Newport will have a new historic inn, a new Marriott in nearby Middletown, and newly completed renovations and upgrades at the Hotel Viking and the Newport Harbor Hotel.

Moreover, Gov. Donald L. Carcieri noted last week, between now and the fall, there will be 325 events to draw visitors to the state, including the Amica Insurance Tall Ships event in Newport, The Rhythm and Roots Festival in Charlestown, Providence Sound Session, and the Campbell's Tennis Hall of Fame Tournament in Newport.

And there will be new attractions, including the \$7.7 million [Botanical Center](#) at Roger Williams Park in Providence. The center's 12,000-square foot conservatory, with thousands of plant species featured, is the largest indoor public garden display in New England.

All combined, it was enough to make elected officials and leaders in the tourism industry optimistic at the launch of the 2007 Rhode Island Travel Guide last Tuesday.

"North to south, east to west, we're seeing the growth of our hospitality industry," Carcieri said in a prepared statement. "Rhode Island's tourism industry is on the move. We have new hotels on the horizon, and existing hotels are being rehabbed. We also have world-class attractions and a host of annual events taking place throughout our state."

On the lodgings front, Providence will have one major new property, the Renaissance Providence Hotel, as well as the newly refurbished and rebranded Hilton Providence, while Newport has the new Hilltop Inn, plus the Marriott Residence Inn in Middletown.

But at the season launch last week, which was held at the Botanical Garden, the focus was on the events that officials expect will draw tourists to the state – some more than 100,000 people each – and the best attractions, especially the Botanical Center.

"We'll attract garden lovers from across the region, which is a form of eco-tourism, one of the strongest trends we continue to see in the travel industry," said David C.



IMAGE COURTESY R.I. TOURISM DIVISION

THE THEME of several ads in this year's campaign is 'unwind' – on the water, as in this ad, dining, shopping and more. And the new 2007 Rhode Island Travel Guide lists 325 special events, including this summer's Amica Insurance Tall Ships fest in Newport.

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because of the number of companies and the number of people employed. But it also enhances our quality of place, which then allows us to grow our entire economy."

According to the R.I. Tourism Division, in 2005, tourism and hospitality industry expenditures in the state added up to \$4.77 billion, and the sector created 57,900 jobs and paid out \$1 billion in wages and benefits.

Kaplan noted that because of this, the Governor's Workforce Board recently approved a \$150,000 grant to the R.I. Department of Labor and Training to support work force development in the travel and tourism industry.

DePetrillo said he expects more growth in the sector this upcoming season.

"There is just so much to be excited about this year," said DePetrillo. "We are heading into the peak vacation travel planning season, and our Web site is already getting more hits. There are lots of reasons to be optimistic for this spring and summer tourism season."

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