

East's tourism boom

STAYCATIONERS: early signs indicate another good year for region's tourism

Sarah Chambers

TOURISM bosses are hoping for another bumper year for the multi-billion pound East of England tourism industry with early signs indicating the "staycationer" trend is set to continue.

Two thirds of Suffolk tourism businesses expect their businesses to do even better this year despite a bumper year in 2009, and 84% of East of England tourism-related businesses believe their turnover will either improve or stay the same, according to survey results.

Tourism bosses believe that figures due out later this year will show that the region's tourism industry, previously worth around £5.2 billion, went up to at least £5.46bn last year, and they predict this year will at least stay at that level.

A variety of factors helped fan interest in rediscovering the delights of resorts and attractions in Suffolk and other parts of the region last year, including good weather, the exchange rate and a growing interest in local products and services.

Center Parcs said yesterday that its



REMEMBER THIS? Another "Staycation Summer" is forecast in 2010 for resorts such as Felixstowe

booking figures for this year were up 18% year-on-year, with almost 14,000 more booking for its short breaks for the coming year at its four holiday villages, which include a site at Thetford. Holiday homes business Best of Suffolk, which saw a dramatic increase in business last year, said it expected to see continued growth in 2010.

Tim Rowan-Robinson, chairman

of Thorpeness and Aldeburgh Hotels, said it was too early to say whether it would be a bumper year as the recession hits home, but feedback from their guests last year suggested they were coming back for more.

Alex Paul, tourism manager for Choose Suffolk, said their feedback indicated the staycation trend was more than a flash in the pan.

"According to East of England Tourism's Business Confidence Monitor carried out in conjunction with Choose Suffolk in December, two-thirds of Suffolk-based respondents indicated that they expect business performance levels to increase in 2010," he said.

"These findings echo the feedback from our own members within the Choose Suffolk Tourism Partnership who confirm that 2009 was a particularly good year and, rather than a positive blip, is part of an ongoing and growing trend for 'staycations'."

Keith Brown, chief executive of East of England Tourism, said early indications were that bookings were well ahead.

Early indications suggested a 5% increase in the value of the £5.2m East of England tourism industry last year, he said, and predicted this year it would at least keep at that level. "That's a very big number," he said.

"We have got a lot of new investment going into the region, and it's becoming a place people are very keen to discover."

Chief Executive for Choose Suffolk Celia Hodson said, "The word is clearly spreading about Suffolk as a quality destination."