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May. 25, 2013

The majority of Minnesota resorts and campgrounds polled in a recent survey, 84 percent, expect their 2013 summer season to be as good as or better than last year, according to Explore Minnesota Tourism, the state-funded tourism promotional agency.

The poll was released on the eve of the Memorial Day weekend holiday, traditionally the kickoff of the summer vacation season.

Explore Minnesota says that higher gas prices aren't likely to waylay travel spending in the state.

Of the 240 hotels and motels, resorts, B&Bs, campgrounds and vacation home rentals polled, 38 percent expect a better year in 2013 than 2012 and 46 percent said they expect as good a year as last. Nearly half predict higher revenues in 2013, the tourism agency reported today.

"Minnesota lodging business this summer is likely to surpass occupancy rates reached before the recessionary declines of 2008 and 2009," the agency said in releasing the poll results.

"Overall, our travel industry is pretty optimistic about the upcoming summer season," John Edman, director of Explore Minnesota Tourism, said in announcing the poll results. "Consumers are feeling better about the economy and their own pocketbooks, and there's pent-up demand to get out and travel."

The news comes after a cold and snowy spring slowed travel in some areas, especially hitting sectors of the tourism industry that focus on outdoor recreation. Among

responding hotels and motels whose business is much less weather-dependent, more

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summer as refinery outages end.

Gas prices have dropped in the past two days, down about a dime from their all-time highs earlier this week.

Gas prices today in Duluth dropped to as low as \$4.19 per gallon of unleaded regular self-serve, down nearly 25 cents from their highs earlier in the week, according to minnesotagasprices.com. The statewide average price dropped to \$4.18 today with prices ranging from \$3.79 in southern Minnesota to \$4.41 in Grand Marais. That's well above the U.S. average of \$3.62 per gallon.

AAA projects 34.8 million Americans will journey 50 miles or more from home during the Memorial Day holiday weekend, a 0.9 percent decrease from the 35.1 million people who traveled last year. The decline mostly is due to less air travel, with a slight increase predicted in auto travel.

Tourism is an \$11.9 billion industry in Minnesota and among the largest industries in Duluth and the Northland. The leisure and hospitality industry employs almost 240,000 in the state, representing 11 percent of private-sector employment and 17 percent of state sales tax revenues.

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