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May. 22, 2014



As you put the final touches on your travel plans for the Memorial Day weekend, keep in mind there might be a bit more traffic this year.

About 36.1 million Americans will travel 50 miles or more from their home between today and Monday — a 1.5 percent increase in travelers over last year, according to the national travel forecast from AAA.

AAA predicts this will be the busiest Memorial Day weekend since the beginning of

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the beaches and theme parks, but we definitely see people going to visit the freshwater springs areas.”

Brady added that AAA data predict steady summer travel.

The Alachua and Marion County visitors bureaus also expect a small increase in the number of travelers locally this weekend.

Marion County expects more travelers this year than usual during the Memorial Day weekend and the rest of the summer because of a long, harsh winter up North and because Midwesterners in particular are deemed more likely to spend more this summer on travel, said Sky Wheeler, sales and operations manager at the Ocala/Marion County bureau.

Apart from Floridians, many of the travelers who travel to Marion County are from Midwestern states like Illinois, Michigan and Ohio, she said.

“We expect this summer season to add to the banner year the county has been experiencing in tourism,” she said. “Now that Silver Springs is a Florida state park, the opportunity to draw visitors for special events has escalated.”

Alachua County will also get its fair share of visitors, but many of its residents will leave the county this weekend to visit the areas of Crescent Beach, St. Augustine and Daytona Beach, said John Pricher, interim director of the Alachua County bureau.

“You'll find most of our tourists at the river and the springs, like Ginnie Springs and Poe Springs,” he said. “The Memorial Day weekend is supposed to be really warm and the water will help them cool down.”

Although Poe and Ginnie are close to each other, Pricher said Poe Springs is sometimes overlooked by tourists and locals.

“I think it's a beautiful park that doesn't get as much attention as it should,” he said.

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of Natural History are popular during the holiday weekend.

Alexis Caffrey, director of Kanapaha Botanical Gardens said last year, approximately 700 people visited the gardens over the three-day weekend. This year, she expects a slight boost in attendance because every year the gardens get slightly more people.

“People like to take advantage of the nature areas,” she said. “It's somewhere peaceful where they can walk around with their families.”

The Museum of Natural History gets a mix of people on the holiday weekend: local people, tourists and people who see the billboard signs decorated with butterflies on Interstate 75, said Kaitlin Gardiner, marketing and public relations coordinator for the museum.

“We always hope we'll get more people visit us each year because it's a great spot to start your summer,” she said. “Memorial Day weekend is definitely a good weekend for all the local attractions.”

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