

The Augusta Chronicle

Business is booming for hotels this week

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Monday, April 5, 2010

Hotel rooms are hard to come by this week -- and many hotels are sold out -- as golf fans come to Augusta in droves.

Each of Jugal Purohit's five hotels are booked solid. He owns the Staybridge Suites, Country Inn & Suites, Best Western, Days Inn and Ramada Inn.

Three weeks ago, the hotels were only 92 to 94 percent occupied, and he attributes the final jump in business to Tiger Woods' comeback.

The Augusta Convention and Visitors Bureau won't have final numbers for several weeks, but local hotels appear to be doing well this year, said president and CEO Barry White.

"We don't expect anything to be different from last year or the year before. Patterns are, from what I've heard, a little bit softer on the Sunday at the beginning of the tournament, but the tournament days and throughout the rest of the week, it sounds like everybody is pretty well booked up," White said.

Most people had already made their hotel and travel plans, but the buzz surrounding Woods has attracted some media outlets that otherwise might not have come to Augusta, he added.

Business is up by 5 percent at Jameson Suites compared with last year, said general manager Mark Troiani.

"The so-called Tiger effect has really helped us. We are currently sold out Wednesday, Thursday and Friday," Troiani said. "Because of the demand, we haven't had to do as much discounting. We do 25 percent of our revenue for the year in the month of April. It is the most important event of the year for this hotel."

Four out of six hotels managed by the Newport Group are sold out, said Marty Matfess, vice president of the company that runs DoubleTree Hotel Augusta, Sheraton Augusta Hotel, Hilton Garden Inn, Holiday Inn, Wingate Inn and Hampton Inn.

"Our full-service hotels at the higher end are ... sold out. We're in good shape above last year," Matfess said.

The two remaining limited service hotels are still trying to fill the last few rooms, he said.

"Our bookings have been great again," said Darryl Leech, general manager at Augusta Marriott

Hotel and Suites. "We're sold out every year."

Club Magnolia, a hospitality club on Magnolia Drive, has seen an upswing in business compared with last year.

"I think honestly it's more of a factor of media being here than it is of even people being interested in Tiger playing," said Donna Garcia, vice president of sales and marketing.

Celebrity attendance also has increased. Bloomberg and Gannett Co. Inc. will broadcast from the club, she said.

Business is still down at The 1018 Club on Azalea Drive, but the club has attracted new corporate clients within driving distance from Atlanta, Greenville and Charlotte, N.C., said Glen Bynum, the director of sales. Attendance will probably be the same as last year, but it's still down by about 25 percent compared with three or four years ago, he said.

"Our numbers are down some, but not as much as we had thought they would be," said Sissy Boulus, the director of the Double Eagle Club on Washington Road. "It's picked back up some lately, but I really don't think it had anything to do with Tiger from the corporate world. I think a lot has to do with people making last minute decisions to come."

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