

Orlando Sentinel

OPINION

Julie Anderson
Editor-in-ChiefKrys Fluker
Opinion Editor

COMMENTARY

Climate change poses risks to Disney guests and could affect company's bottom line



Stop me if you've heard this before, but my kids love Walt Disney World. And, of course, my wife and I do too.

By Price Atkinson

Yes, we've been captivated by the magic, making annual returns to see Mickey and Minnie. It's in our blood and not going away anytime soon. Or at least not until my fifth- and seventh-grader graduate from their yearly desires to pin trade, ride Slinky Dog and experience the thrills of Space Mountain.

Living in South Carolina, we're pretty used to the heat. But instead of building trips to Walt Disney World around the parks' crowd levels, we are prioritizing the time of year and likely weather patterns we'll feel over the wait times in line. And if you live in Central Florida, I don't have to tell you what the summers feel like.

Of course, August through early fall brings the height of hurricane season in the Sunshine State. Effects are felt from coast to coast with hurricanes causing millions, even billions, in annual damages.

While hurricane frequency and the cost of storm damage is going up like sea-level rise on both coasts, soaring summer temperatures are hitting Disney's guests and the company's bottom line.

The National Weather Service had never issued an excessive heat warning for Orlando until last year — when they issued four in August 2023 for Orange County.

Paramedics at Disney World received 441 calls from guests experiencing heat-related medical issues last summer (one in five calls had people taken to a local hospital), according to data Florida Politics obtained from the Central Florida Tourism Oversight District through a public record request. That's a 2% increase from the summer of 2022 and more than double from five years ago.

While the normal August high is around 92 degrees, Orlando was in the upper 90s most of the month and on Aug. 12 even hit 100 degrees (the heat index almost touched 120 degrees) for the first time since June 2015. It was the warmest month on record for Orlando, going all the way back to 1892 when record keeping began.

When the temperatures soar so high that guests begin to suffer, do you think people will continue spending money to have "fun" in the sun?

My family and I got lucky at the Walt Disney World parks



As bands of rain from Hurricane Idalia move through, a family from Connecticut braves the stormy weather in the Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World in August. All four of Disney's Florida theme parks operated with normal hours during the storm. JOE BURBANK/ORLANDO SENTINEL

THE INVADING SEA

FLORIDA AND THE CLIMATE CRISIS

right after Labor Day last year. Our three-day trip fell during a cool front when temperatures were in the low- to mid-80s. Full disclosure: We didn't have a choice on trip dates due to our Colorado family members' schedules. But we all know we had dodged a major weather "bullet."

Weather and climate change are not only posing risks to their guests. A theme park's business and bottom line are impacted when closing for a hurricane or guests simply opt to go somewhere else. Parks are now beginning to compensate by building more shaded structures and added splash zones. Some even offer a free return ticket when local temperatures hit extreme levels.

Last summer, SeaWorld Orlando instituted a new "Weather-or-Not Assurance" program. This new consumer-friendly policy provides guests with a return visit to the

park free of charge if:

- Inclement weather causes early closure or negatively impacts the park's operating hours

- Rides are closed for more than 60 minutes due to lightning, strong winds, heat, rain or snow

- Park temperatures reach a heat index of 110 degrees or above

Even though business "friendly" Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis could care less about Disney's bottom line, it's probably safe to assume he does care about the state's coffers being hit when having to cover more and more damage due to the increased frequency and intensity of storms because of climate change.

Businesses continually adapt to consumers' buying and purchasing habits. It happens everywhere or else you aren't around long as an owner or employee. Whether it's a

department store in Omaha or Disney World in Orlando, retailers are constantly responding to changing consumer behavior because their livelihood depends on it.

Our country and the state of Florida should be run like a business. When something isn't working, it's time to change. This is why we need a robust climate policy at the federal level to help mitigate the effects of climate change.

My kids' and their future depend on it. Plus, I want my grandkids to hopefully one day experience the magic like we have over the years without my wife and I stuck in an Epcot cooling center or having to sip umbrella drinks all afternoon in a shady spot at Hollywood Studios.

Price Atkinson is the communications and programming director for republicEn.org, a growing group of conservatives who care about climate change. This opinion piece was distributed by The Invading Sea website (www.theinvadingsea.com), which posts news and commentary on climate change and other environmental issues affecting Florida.

COMMENTARY

Hospitality jobs are revolutionary



By Pam Nabors and Robert Agrusa

Central Florida is known for its hospitality and as a travel and tourism titan across the globe.

With nearly 40% of Central Florida's workforce driven by the hospitality and tourism industry, it would seem as though this would create a path for sought-after careers and opportunities.

However, many leaders in our community have begun to share common misconceptions about jobs that are available within the hospitality industry. Perceptions range from low wages compared to other industries, limited career growth, a lack of advancement opportunities and unreasonable hours and benefits.

Contrary to these beliefs, careers in hospitality and tourism, including right here in the Central Florida region, are booming with opportunities. Career-seekers can find jobs that offer life-changing benefits, high-paying salaries and can master customer service, management and many other transferable skills that will continue to advance them for lifelong careers with purpose.

After rebounding from the pandemic in 2022, Central Florida welcomed 74 million visitors, and reached an all-time high total economic impact of \$87.6 billion. With a surge of this magnitude, jobs and opportunities are prominent across the region and are paving pathways for individuals to thrive.

To help shift the narrative, the Central Florida Hotel and Lodging Association (CFHLA) and CareerSource Central Florida (CSCF) recently joined forces to create the first-of-its-kind State of the Hospitality and Tourism Summit in Central Florida. Right in the heart of world-class theme parks, hotels and resorts, this summit brought together industry leaders, community experts, local media and elected officials to have conversations and create mission-driven solutions that will help change the perception of today's hospitality industry.

During the summit experts also shared in-depth analysis of the current economic impact and workforce trends of the hospitality and tourism industry.

There are nearly 450,000 hospitality professionals working in Central Florida and understanding the perceptions, challenges and opportunities will help create a path forward that will foster a renewed interest of a career in the hospitality industry.

Additionally, Central Florida is the home to several Fortune 500 companies, but it is also home to many successful startups, small family-owned businesses that rely on the economic success of the industry and crave the same talent and skills found within the hospitality industry.

Where do we go next? CFHLA and CSCF kick-started the conversation and now are urging leaders and experts to partner and engage with us on solutions that can redirect the conversations and bring more outstanding talent into the hospitality industry. By collaborating with other sectors, hospitality and tourism businesses will gain access to a talent pool with transferable skills applicable throughout the industry.

Management positions in different industries offer talent with team leadership, crisis management and customer relationship management skills. Businesses in construction offer skilled talent in events design planning, project coordination, and aesthetics for hotels and resorts. These industries, and many others, allow businesses to recruit talent from diverse backgrounds.

The hospitality and tourism industry will always be a critical driver for economic growth and job creation in Central Florida. This is why CFHLA and CSCF are eager to collaborate and keep pushing the hospitality industry forward.

By elevating this dynamic industry and creating life-changing careers, we can build an even more unbelievably real region here in Central Florida and beyond.

Pam Nabors is president and CEO of CareerSource Central Florida. Robert Agrusa is president and CEO of the Central Florida Hotel and Lodging Association.

COMMENTARY

'Camping' legislation doesn't solve larger issue

Dear taxpayers,

We want you to know that a bill sailing through the Florida Legislature will likely cost you more for law enforcement, jails and attorney fees — while not solving the problem it was intended to: the growing number of people with no choice but to live on our streets.

Senate Bill 1530 and its companion, House Bill 1365, sound reasonable on some levels. They would prohibit unsanctioned sleeping or "camping" in our public parks or on our public streets and rights-of-way, unless a city or county establishes a designated, permitted place with 24-hour security, restrooms, running water and mental health care.

The concept is absolutely noble; no one wants people to have to sleep or live on public property. But the bills include some completely unworkable requirements, and there is no funding available to make them viable.

Foremost, if a city or county can't afford to provide such a place — and the expense to



By Martha Are

do so statewide would add up more than the entire state budget for homelessness — the bills enable any person or business to sue the jurisdiction if there are still people living on the streets, in parks, etc.

So one of two things will happen.

The cities and counties will need to arrest everyone on the street — which is currently considered unconstitutional unless there is space in local homeless shelters, which there isn't, thus leaving the cities and counties vulnerable to civil-rights lawsuits. Or the cities and counties will ignore the statute and face lawsuits from residents and businesses upset over the public presence of people who are homeless. In fact, jurisdictions are likely to face both types of lawsuits.

In addition, any designated space for the cities and counties establish for an authorized encampment cannot "adversely and materially affect the value or security of existing residential or commercial properties." Most likely that will be an industrial zone, with no public

transportation, access to other social service providers or access to jobs. No one is served well if people experiencing homelessness lose their job so that a city or county can comply with this legislation.

We completely agree people should not be living on the streets — and we are grateful that lawmakers are shining a light on this tragedy. It's bad for our neighborhoods, our businesses and our tourism economy. Most importantly, it's inhumane and potentially deadly for the people forced to do so.

But the increasing number of people on our streets are there because of the devastating outcome of a housing-affordability crisis, with rents for the average two-bedroom apartment skyrocketing up over \$600 a month in five years. Three-fourths of the people now becoming homeless have never been so before.

It is not, as the Cicero Institute falsely claims, a failure of Housing First policies. Study after study has shown that getting people into housing with supportive services — which is what we do — is

over 90% successful in keeping people stably housed. (It is a myth that most unsheltered people prefer to live that way.)

The problem now is that more new people than ever are losing their housing because they can no longer pay their rising rents.

It is not only people with mental illness or drug addiction living on our streets these days — although they matter too. It is also our veterans, families with minor children, older teens coming out of foster care and young adults without families to help them. It is, increasingly, seniors on fixed incomes — especially older women who are widowed or divorced. And it's theme-park workers struggling to keep up with the rising cost of food and health care and our neighbors who became ill with cancer or heart disease and spent everything they once had on medical bills.

What they need is not a sanctioned encampment but innovative, humane, fiscally sound housing solutions with a roof over their heads. Please, let's not waste our precious tax dollars on more lawsuits and arrests.