

TOURISM HELPS EMPLOYMENT IN FLORIDA



The area of Central Florida has endured a hangover from the country's recession this past year but has found a way to add close to 8,600 jobs over the past 12 months. Central Florida's growth has been centered in the leisure and hospitality industries, which boasts bars, restaurants, hotels and theme parks. These businesses form the core earning businesses that keep Central Florida operating. These industries are filled with unskilled labor workers who are young and who work for very little money. Some of them even work without benefits just so they can receive a paycheck each week or every two weeks. There have been more than 8,000 jobs added over the past 12 months in Metro Orlando, which consists of four counties. Employment has risen four percent in this sector of the state compared to the same time in 2010. The entire state has gained close to 40,000 jobs in leisure and hospitality over the past 12 months, which is an increase in jobs of 4.2 percent. To compare the numbers, the manufacturing industry dropped jobs by 0.8 percent and construction shrunk 4.1 percent during the same time frame. Central Florida has 15 massive non-government employers and six of them reside in the leisure and hospitality sector. Those six employers include Walt Disney Co. (64,000 employees), Universal Orlando (16,000), SeaWorld Parks (5,600) and Darden Restaurants (6,900). The six-company sector is responsible for 55 percent of all the jobs reported by the region's 15 largest employers. Many economists feel that the sector is almost individually responsible for the local job growth over the past year. One of the biggest advantages of the sector is that it provides those who do not have special training or education to find jobs. As the industry thrives, it explodes and hires employees quickly. The downside is that these jobs come with minimal to zero benefits and very low salary. According to the United States Labor Department, those working in the leisure and hospitality industries make just over \$11 an hour. To compare that rate, manufacturing jobs typically pay twice that amount. Officials running the area have been working tirelessly to broaden the economic base of Central Florida to include more than just leisure and hospitality businesses. Former President Bill Clinton has praised the training-simulator industry, one that continues to grow in Central Florida. This industry boasts 100 businesses that employ roughly 20,000 workers. In the southeastern area of Orlando, in Lake Nona, a medical city is gaining steam. This area boasts the University of Central Florida's brand new medical school as well as the Sanford-Burnham Medical Research Institute. Under construction in that area are a VA hospital, the M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, a Nemours Children's Hospital and a University of Florida Research Center. Since 1996, the employment rates for the construction industry have fallen to its lowest levels. The industry accounted for close to 7.8 percent of all jobs in 2007 and now it accounts only for 4.4 percent of jobs.