

Jersey Shorecast Panelists: Summer 2024 Tourism Outlook ‘Pretty Robust’

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Atlantic City, N.J. — The general outlook for businesses at the Jersey Shore heading into the summer of 2024 is “pretty robust,” but there are some concerns, especially with no beach concerts in Atlantic City this year and New York casinos looming on the horizon.

That was the overall sentiment from a panel of local experts who spoke at the 16th annual Jersey Shorecast on May 8, sponsored by the Lloyd D. Levenson Institute of Gaming, Hospitality and Tourism (LIGHT) at the Stockton University School of Business. The discussion was held at the Stockton University Atlantic City John F. Scarpa Academic Center and streamed online.

LIGHT Faculty Director Jane Bokunewicz opened the discussion, which was moderated by Bre Young '20, the event coordinator and project manager for Good Time Tricycle Productions. Good Time Tricycle has put together several events in the Atlantic City area, including the Atlantic City Beer and Music Festival.

This year’s panelists had an Atlantic City focus and included:

Mark Callazzo, managing partner, RMS Capital. Callazzo is the man behind the revitalization of the Orange Loop in Atlantic City and is co-owner of the Tennessee Avenue Beer Hall, Cuzzie’s Pizzeria, Rhythm & Spirits and Bar 32 Chocolate.

Oliver Cooke, associate professor of Economics at Stockton and editor of the South Jersey Economic Review.

Daniel Gallagher, director of sports sales for the Atlantic City Sports Commission.

Gary Musich, vice president of sales and destination services for Visit Atlantic City.

“I’m cautiously optimistic for the summer,” Cooke said. “Job growth right now has kind of picked up over the first quarter for Atlantic City proper, relative to where we were in late 2023. Unemployment remains very, very low. My sense is that we’re in a pretty decent

nongaming net revenue was 45% of the total net revenue compared to 39% in previous years.

But not all of the numbers were positive as overnight stays were up 8% but were shorter

And it's not going to go back because wage inflation is sticky. So, we're just stuck with those higher wages. But I think there's plenty of people that are looking and willing to work now.

Cooke: Atlantic County actually had five consecutive years of population declines. That was pre-pandemic. The pandemic cost another year of out migration, for I think, obvious

Musich: That's the behavior in a lot of cases, right? They're going to come. But also, I think you displace certain customers. I'm not going in there. I'm not going to be able to get a hotel. It's going to be expensive, or the traffic sucks or all these things.

Looking into the future, are there new challenges/new opportunities to consider in 2024?

Gallagher: From a sports perspective. For us, it's the wild, wild west in a very, very good way. The growth of women in sports, first of all, is long overdue. These women deserved to be celebrated years ago. When did we think that an Omaha, Nebraska, volleyball game would sell out and break records at 92,000 people? Or Caitlin Clark would sign a million-dollar deal with Nike. How is this applicable to Atlantic City? We had 4,000 female wrestlers in the NJSIAA wrestling tournament at Boardwalk Hall this year. That would have never been a thing before. So, you're seeing direct economic impact in those sports and through the growth of women in sports.

Musich: I think the most important thing we need to do as a business community is consolidate our marketing effort, consolidate the message, get everybody on the same page. When you had the convention authority, you had a branding plan and structure and strategy in place. We have to get back to that. I think it's critical, because I think it helps all businesses. It allows us to talk on a broader scale about investment.

Cooke: I do think that one of the things long term that Atlantic City is going to have to do is transform itself from being a place that produces a commodity, an entertainment commodity, as important as that is going to remain, that ultimately requires visitation, to something that actually you can sell, absent people actually being here because it puts such tremendous pressure on the entire regional economy. You have to get people to come. That was the thing that casinos did. You didn't have to just do just the summer. The casinos provided you 12 months. ... Finding a way to diversify beyond just the leisure and hospitality industry is going to be very, very important over the long haul.

Callazzo: I think the overlooked piece here is the city needs to fix itself. Bringing people to the city is really what we need to changeuTf0a (i)2.6 (t)4.3 (s)-2 (el)thN a com.6 (c)-2 (i)2d 6 (hi)daindin11

PHOTOS (Credit: Mark Melhorn/Stockton University)