



‘America’s Best Beach’ Title Buoy Caladesi Tourism

‘Caladesi Connection’ Sets Records in ‘08, Expands Service After Island’s #1 Ranking

Dunedin, FL (March 11, 2009) – When St. Pete/Clearwater area visitors Donna and Steve Denhof and their daughters boarded the Caladesi Connection ferry to explore America’s #1 Beach late last December, they had no idea they’d be sailing off into history.

But the vacationing family from Charlotte, NC, did just that.

That’s because it was *their* round-trip ticket purchases that pushed the ferry’s yearly total over the 100,000 passenger mark for the first time in the operation’s 23-year history, beating the previous year’s total by more than 25,000 passengers.



“The increase in traffic has been phenomenal,” said Phil Henderson, Sr., owner of Caladesi Connection ferry service. “And with fuel prices in upheaval, this couldn’t have come at a better time.”

According to park management, the reason for the surge in traffic can be summed up in four words: America’s Number One Beach.

“Judging by the crowds we’ve seen lately, being named number one has really put Caladesi on the map,” said Caladesi Island State Park manager Pete Krulder. “We’re proud to be honored like this, and the increase in attendance proves what a treasure this place is.”

And it seems this “treasure” is being discovered in a big way.

According Florida’s Division of Recreation and Parks, visitation to this island has increased by more than 30 percent since last Memorial Day Weekend when coastal geologist Dr. Stephen Leatherman, aka Dr. Beach, crowned Caladesi “America’s Best Beach” during live satellite broadcasts on MSNBC. The ensuing media blitz included a 40-city satellite media tour that aired from L.A. to London, in addition to radio and countless newspaper and magazine features.

It’s great press for the park, and all the hoopla seems to have paid off for Henderson, too: since the only way to get to Caladesi from Honeymoon Island is by boat, the distinctive aluminum-pontoon ferries have handled record crowds.

Business is so strong, in fact, that new service has been added to accommodate the demand. The expanded service, which is offered on a 59-foot double-decker ferry, departs from Clearwater Beach Marina, offering passengers a Gulf of Mexico tour complete with dolphin sightings, spectacular photo-

ops and complimentary beer, wine and soda on the return trip. For schedules and pricing, visit DolphinEncounter.org.

Other exciting developments on Clearwater Beach include the **Hyatt Regency Clearwater Beach Resort & Spa**, which is scheduled to open later this year. Composed of ocean-view suites, fine dining and an expansive full-service spa, the 250-room Hyatt Regency will serve as the centerpiece of Beach Walk, Clearwater Beach's winding Gulf-front promenade lined with shops and dining options along South Gulfview Boulevard.

Visit St. Petersburg/Clearwater is the official destination marketing organization for Pinellas County, Florida.

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