Snowbirds Flock to the South During Cold Months

The cold weather months in the northern parts of the country can be brutal; that’s why many retirees migrate south to spend their winters along the Gulf Coast or in the southern states. These snowbirds spend their winters basking in the warm weather, then return home to the north for the summer months.

Hubert “Sonny” Massey, a Business instructor and advisor at South University’s Savannah school, says snowbirds generally begin to head south after Labor Day and stay through the spring.

While Florida is most popular state for snowbirds to flock to during the cold months, Massey says that many prefer locations in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and the Gulf coast of Alabama.

Massey says revenue from both the snowbird population and tourism in general is very important to businesses in these warm weather regions of the country.

“Some businesses actually schedule their operating times based on population ebbs and flows,” Massey says. “Many local businesses close when the snowbirds leave and re-open when they are expected to arrive.”

Massey says some areas see a drastic increase in population and economic activity when the snowbirds arrive.

Many local businesses close when the snowbirds leave and re-open when they are expected to arrive.

“I know the area around southwest Florida still shows a marked difference,” Massey says.

Enjoying the Warm Weather Along the Gulf Coast

Howard and Helen Wise have been spending their winters along the Gulf Coast of Alabama to seek refuge from the cold weather in Pennsylvania for the past 15 years.

“We get there before New Year’s and stay until term break [in] mid-March when rents increase,” Howard Wise says.

Wise says that snowbirds make up a significant amount of the population of Baldwin County, which is along the Gulf Coast of Alabama, during the months of January through April. He says this is a big economic help to the area.

Wise says snowbirds also sponsor a number of events for local charities, to raise funds for places such as the libraries, the zoo, and the fire departments.

The Wises are members of the Pennsylvania Snowbird Club, where they socialize with other snowbirds visiting the Gulf Coast of Alabama during the cold weather months.

Snowbird club members participate in a number of activities together, while supporting local businesses.

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Wise says the club has weekly meetings at Hazel’s, a restaurant in Orange Beach, Alabama.

“We get hugs when we arrive and tears flow when we leave,” Wise says. “Local businesses tell us that they appreciate snowbirds and, in particular after the oil spill, businesses were very glad to see us back.”

Snowbirds Enjoy the Florida Sun
Paul and Nancy Hewitt head to their winter home of Destin, Florida, each year to escape the cold weather in their hometown of Sauble Beach, Ontario, Canada.

The Hewitts joined the Destin Snowbird Club eight years ago, and Nancy serves as the group’s publicity director.

“The majority of our members spend three months in the area,” Nancy Hewitt says.

Hewitt says the club offers a number of activities to keep members busy, including dinner dances, harbor boat cruises, golf play days and tournaments, card games, quilting, a computer club, bowling, tennis, fishing, trips to Biloxi casinos, New Orleans vacations, and cruises to the Western Caribbean.

The club also holds regular meetings at the Destin Snowbirds Roost, where Hewitt says local businesses donate door prizes to give to members.

“The local merchants are very generous with gift certificates for restaurants, golf, fishing trips, and some goody bags of promotional merchandise,” Hewitt says.

Hewitt cites a number of reasons that she and her husband chose Destin as their warm weather home, including affordability, the snowbird club, less traffic, and the abundance of restaurants and entertainment.

“The place has a small town feel that we find very welcoming,” Hewitt says.

Elizabeth Spies, vice president of communications at the Destin Area Chamber of Commerce, agrees with Hewitt that higher temperatures aren’t the only thing drawing snowbirds into the area.

“Snowbirds are not only attracted by warmer climate, but also by Destin’s world-class amenities and small town, Southern hospitality,” Spies says.

Spies says that Destin is a popular destination for snowbirds to seek refuge from the cold weather each year.

“Last year, we had almost 2,000 snowbirds check in at the Destin Snowbirds Roost, though we know many more came to the area during the winter months,” says Spies.

Snowbirds aren’t the only ones who enjoy the time they spend in the area; local companies also are grateful for the increase in business.

“Our accommodations, restaurants, and retail businesses benefit the most from the snowbirds,” Spies says. “Snowbirds also patronize our arts organizations, including Sinfonia Gulf Coast and the Mattie Kelly Fine & Performing Arts Center, whose seasons run through the winter months.”

During the spring and summer months when snowbirds head north for the winter, Spies says that vacationing families fill the gap in business until it’s time for the snowbirds to return.