

Why St. Augustine is Becoming a Millennial Hotspot

March 7, 2016

Alexa Epitropoulos

Just a few years ago, St. Augustine was primarily a tourist destination for baby boomers who spent their nights at area bed and breakfasts and their days walking around St. George Street.

Now, the historic city, buoyed by a growing craft cocktail and beer industry, an emerging culinary scene and growing live music culture, is attracting more and more individuals from the younger demographic, said Richard Goldman, president and CEO of the St. Augustine, Ponte Vedra & The Beaches Visitors and Convention Bureau.

"It all combined at a time when millennials kind of discovered St. Augustine," Goldman said. "We tie that moment into [Mumford & Sons'] Gentlemen of the Road tour. We've seen a significant impact. The way we're able to see that is the growth in that demographic, which we had not previously had much of a footprint in."

Since the Gentlemen of the Road tour in 2012, that's only increased. Goldman said the amount of visitors has doubled in the last three years, and a significant portion of that growth is in the millennial sector.

The St. Augustine Distillery is a major part of St. Augustine's recent success with younger travelers. The distillery, which opened in 2014, is the number one destination on tourism site TripAdvisor, with 2,660 reviews. It's also located in the same building as popular craft cocktail bar and restaurant The Ice Plant, which opened slightly before the distillery in late 2013.

"The Distillery fits right in. They did a great job of communicating what they have. They do tours, so they created interest in the distillery as an attraction," Goldman said.

Goldman said breweries that have emerged in the past few years, including Ancient City Brewing, which opened last year, and Bog Brewing, a microbrewery that opened near the historic district on Friday, are also part of what's bringing millennials into the area. "The success that Jacksonville is having with the Ale Trail, the success of our brew products here, it just suggests that Bog is going to do a great job," Goldman said.

Alcohol isn't the only motivating force in St. Augustine's tourism industry, though it is a compelling one. Up-and-coming restaurants, including The Floridian, which moved to a bigger space late last year, and smaller restaurants, like Catch 27, which expanded its footprint recently, also have a lot to do with millennials visiting St. Augustine.

"We see expansions. You look at one of our preeminent, early adopters of farm-to-table The Floridian, which has enlarged and bought a new facility. Our wonderfully quirky little Catch 27 had to expand. We're seeing a lot of those things," Goldman said.

The live music scene is led by live music venue the St. Augustine Amphitheater, which frequently features popular bands, ranging from Death Cab for Cutie to My Morning Jacket to CHVRCHES.

"Over the last few years, [St. Augustine Amphitheater's] Ryan Murphy's leadership in booking has done a great job of bringing in the right attention," Goldman said.

It also helps that millennials who come in for a band will stay for a night or two.

"We're seeing – and not just in our B&Bs – that other properties in Downtown are starting to see the impact," Goldman said. "People walk around and see some of our wonderful live music and, frankly, we're staying open later because the market is demanding it."

Goldman said he foresees the restaurant and craft alcohol industries bolstering the number of people who come into St. Augustine as tourist season kicks off in Florida.

He said St. Augustine's tourism success boils down to the experience offered.

"We think that it speaks very well to the uniqueness of frankly all of our attractions down here," Goldman said. "They're little, somewhat quirky experiences. Experience is what people are craving in their travel."