

U.S. travelers hitting the road means hotels are hiring

By Anna-Louise Jackson and Anthony Feld, Bloomberg Businessweek

Hotels are hiring. That simple statement is giving hope to many long-unemployed or underemployed Americans who see hotel jobs as a pathway back to full-time work – low-paying, long-hours work, but a job nonetheless.

Hotels and motels are getting busier as Americans feel a little more secure economically and are taking vacations.

“With more people on the road, we’ll need more people working in hotels,” says Jan Freitag, a senior vice president at Smith Travel Research. He cites a 4.1 percent gain in first-quarter hotel bookings as a “very positive sign” that U.S. tourism is rebounding.

The Federal Reserve confirmed the shift in travel in its most recent survey of current economic conditions, with data collected on or before April 2 indicating “strong” trends in several districts. The St. Louis Fed – which oversees all of Arkansas and parts of Missouri, Mississippi, Tennessee, Kentucky, Indiana and Illinois – reported that hotel service companies “announced plans to expand operations and hire new workers.” Business travel, essential to hotel revenue, has rebounded enough to restore hotel occupancy levels to 63.6 percent, close to the historic average.

About 7.6 million people, or 5.7 percent of the U.S. workforce, held tourism-related jobs in March, according to the U.S. Travel Association in Washington. The travel industry accounted for “a substantial component” – 2.7 percent – of 2010 gross domestic product, according to a Jan. 19 statement from the White House. The number of Americans working at

hotels, motels and casino hotels rose 3.2 percent in March from the same month in 2010, to 1.6 million, outpacing a 2.7 percent increase for all employees, data from the Department of Labor show.

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