

Collaborative tourism planning: An application of shrimp tourism across multiple coastal regions in South Carolina

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Introduction

South Atlantic coastal communities are in various stages of transition and transformation due to increasing coastal development and tourism (Johnson & Orbach, 1996; Kitner & Brownrigg, 2001). Commercial shrimpers throughout the southeast are struggling due to fuel prices and competition with low-priced imported shrimp. Accordingly, shrimpers must seek out new methods and strategies to increase their return on investments, fitting with the changes in the local coastal communities.

Shrimp seems to be an essential element to the South Carolina coastal regional identity, local distinctiveness, culture, and history (Rogelia, 2002). Although eating seafood near where it is landed seems attractive to coastal tourists, seafood restaurants are increasingly serving imported seafood products while giving the impression of serving the local catch. By partnering with the tourism industry, the local shrimp industry could increase its ability to distinguish itself as an integral aspect of the coastal experience. For South Carolina, coastal counties represent three of the top five destinations (SCPRT 2003). Four of the fastest growing tourism segments in the state are heritage tourism, nature-based tourism, agritourism, and culinary tourism (SCPRT, 2003).

The purpose of the research is to develop a tourism plan for the South Carolina coastal region (encompassing three distinct areas: Myrtle Beach, Charleston, and Beaufort) that facilitates collaboration with the local shrimp industry to enhance the tourist experience and bolster the waning shrimp industry.

Methods

Through the analysis of data from the South Carolina Coastal Tourism Survey (2004), tourist preferences for seafood and related commercial-fisheries tourism experiences were identified. The development of the plan included on-site observations, analysis of secondary data from restaurant interviews, and interviews with county, tourism and local officials/organizations, and shrimpers. Printed material, website searches, and on-site observations were used to collect data regarding current shrimp tourism opportunities. Formulation of the shrimp tourism plan followed the eight-step procedure as outlined in (Messer, 2004).

Results and Conclusions

The degree of implementing and marketing shrimp tourism differs in each of the three SC coastal areas throughout the region. Separate plans were developed, tailoring each to the distinctive qualities of each coastal area. Action plans ranged from marketing locally-caught

shrimp on shrimp eating tours in Myrtle Beach to the construction of a shrimping visitor center in Beaufort highlighting the local heritage of shrimping.

The tourism planning process is dynamic in nature and should reflect changes in the industry and visitation. Success of the tourism plan implementation can be addressed through monitoring the steps of the plan as well as the overall viability of the shrimp industry and tourism segments.

Application

Tourism planning in collaboration with a specific industry appears to be a new planning approach. Examples of such tourism plans have only been found within the last five years (i.e., wine and horse racing). Shrimp tourism plans for South Carolina may serve as a planning model for other tourism regions in partnership with other specific industries. Further research is needed to determine the viability of tourism planning with specific industries as a more mainstream approach.

References

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