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From: South Carolina Tourism Today
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Expecting Another Great Summer

Duane Parrish

Director, SC Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism

With the summer now in full swing, 2016 continues to look like another record breaking year for South Carolina tourism. Economic indicators reflect continued growth for the past several years, suggesting the final economic impact for 2016 will exceed the most recent annual measurement of \$19.1 billion.

Since January, RevPAR has grown in double-digits each month. Statewide deplanements are also up nearly 10% for January through April with nearly all major airports in South Carolina exhibiting strong growth. Year-to-date

Statewide RevPAR -- Continues to grow significantly, and is now 10.2% greater through April than last year at this time.

Admissions Tax -- Also trending upward, currently holds a 1.4% increase over last year's collections through April.

State Parks Revenue -- Revenue for April is normal compared to most years in the park system, but well below the record month of April 2015. Passport sales and park admission continue to show the largest increases for the fiscal year.

Deplanements

Deplanements at the state's major airports remain strong, with Charleston International leading in actual number. YTD, deplanements are 9% greater than January-April 2015.

Occupancy Forecast

STR, Inc., predicts growth in occupancy through the summer months, roughly steady business when football season begins.

DiscoverSouthCarolina.com Reports Strong Performance

For three consecutive months this spring, traffic for South Carolina's official tourism website was up an average 87 percent, indicating a growing number of consumers are using the website in prime vacation planning months. The performance was 99 percent greater in May 2016 than a year ago, 82 percent in April and 80 percent in March.

In addition to effective marketing and public relations, the growth was partly due to adjustments made to the website to meet evolving expectations of consumers. In 2015 and into 2016, SCPRT made more than 100 improvements to the website after studying audits and analyses and after gathering feedback from "user testing" participants.

Other performance metrics for May 2016 include:

- Page Views (up 69.8 percent)
- Total Sessions (up 99 percent)

Admissions Tax collections and state parks revenue are also up.

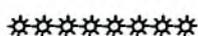
Multiple factors contribute to the positive outlook. At SCPRT, we continuously seek ways to reach more customers, to motivate them to travel to South Carolina and to serve them once they reach our borders.

We made more than 100 improvements, large and small, to our website DiscoverSouthCarolina.com to meet evolving needs of browsers. The result was an average 87 percent increase in the number of hits on the website during the busy vacation-planning months of March, April and May this year.

We amped up our social media presence, and witnessed more than four times the consumer engagement on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube than we had last year.

The total rebuilds of welcome centers on I-77 and I-95 are on schedule to be completed this fall, and two other welcome centers are now getting prepped for their transformations.

With lower gas prices and an improved economy, great destinations and SCPRT's supporting role, we could not have asked for better conditions. I hope this tourism season is a resounding success and I hope it converts to a better quality of life for all South Carolinians.



Reminders!

Advertise in the DISCOVER Guide

SCPRT is currently accepting advertising for the 2017 DISCOVER Guide. Rate card and specifications can be

- Unique Users (up 70 percent)

One of SCPRT's most valuable consumer outreach tools, DiscoverSouthCarolina.com was launched in 2014, and was lauded for its bold look, trip-planning and storytelling capabilities. The website team at SCPRT and at its marketing communications company of record, BFG Communications, continues to analyze the site's appeal in order to help it remain a trusted and relevant source for travel planning.

New Exhibit at Edisto Beach State Park Wins Award

The new interactive exhibit at Edisto Beach State Park's environmental education center won a 2016 Telly Award for Outstanding Nature and Wildlife Production. The touchscreen exhibit explains how research conducted by the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources in the ACE Basin directly affects the quality of life in the Palmetto State. Produced by Winikur Productions, the exhibit provides an immersive user-driven experience, enabling visitors to explore the region's ecosystems through video, audio, info-graphics and more.

For a demo of the interactive, click [here](#).

The exhibit cost \$20,000 and was installed in September 2015.

The Telly Awards is a visual arts program that recognizes outstanding film and video productions, online video content, and local, regional and cable television commercials and programs.

Chef Ambassadors Serve South Carolina Fare at Atlanta Food & Wine Festival

Gathering food experts from across the South - spanning from Texas to Washington, D.C. - the Atlanta Food & Wine Festival kicked off its annual, weekend-long event during the first few days of June. Chefs - executive, sous and pastry - mixologist and culinary thought leaders converged on Atlanta with one universal goal in their minds and bellies - create and consume noteworthy dishes, desserts and delectable libations with likeminded peers and attendees!

In an effort to extend South Carolina's footprint beyond the borders, the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism's marketing team took the South Carolina Chef Ambassadors out of their kitchens and on the road for the event - providing an occasion for festival goers to

Chef Ramone Dickson served Southern fried mac and cheese stuffed chicken wings with pimento cheese creamed collards.

experience the Palmetto State, a state away.

Chefs Forrest Parker from Mt. Pleasant, Ramone Dickerson from Columbia, Teryi Youngblood from Greenville and Orchid Paulmeier from Hilton Head Island led experiential classes, moderated panels, were the featured chefs during various private events and served thousands of samples over the weekend in South Carolina's section in the ever popular, Tasting Tents.

found at this [link](#). Space is limited and is available on a first-come first-served basis. The deadline to reserve your space is Friday, Sept. 23.

Save the Date!

The annual Governor's Conference on Tourism and Travel will be held **Feb. 20-22, 2017** at the [Spartanburg Marriott](#). The Governor's Conference is the largest annual gathering of tourism industry professionals in the state and provides a business setting for educational sessions and networking. Registration should begin in November and will be available at [www.SCGovCon.com](#).

The chefs served up Country Captain Quail with raw vegetable succotash topped with puffed rice and Bene seeds, Southern fried mac and cheese stuffed chicken wings with pimento cheese creamed collards, Red Chow Chow on Duck Confit with a corn cracker, and Hot Asian s hrimp tacos with Mexican street corn salad and avocado crema. Lines continually formed, smiles brimmed from ear to ear and seconds were on repeat!

This out-of-state opportunity benefits not only the immediate chefs involved, but their respective restaurants, their regions and the state as a whole. Their participation in a program initiated by Governor Nikki Haley shines a light on some undiscovered culinary destinations, talents and offerings found throughout the entire state.

The Chef Ambassadors will prepare a private lunch and public dinner this fall at the James Beard House in New York City as they represent South Carolina in a special media outreach.

Chef Orchid Paulmeier served Hot Asian shrimp tacos with Mexican street corn salad and avocado crema.

Rolling Billboard -- State Park's Ultimate Outsider Campaign on Wheels

The State Park Service's Ultimate Outsider campaign is now in motion! The branding, featuring park visitors who are super-loaded with outdoor gear, has been wrapped onto the Park Service's cargo van and its programming trailer.

The campaign invites people to become Ultimate Outsiders by visiting every state park (as well as six National Park Service properties in South Carolina during NPS's 100th anniversary celebration) and win prizes. Currently, there are more than 200 Ultimate Outsiders in South Carolina. Many of them share photos of their adventures on Instagram using the hashtag #UltimateOutsider.

Welcome Center Construction Updates

Roof decking in place at I-77 Welcome Center at Fort Mill

Total rebuilds for the welcome centers at I-77 in Fort Mill and I-95 in

Hardeeville remain on schedule and should be complete by mid-Fall and late Fall respectively.

At the I-77 Welcome Center at Fort Mill, the steel roof decking is in place and exterior sheathing applied. At the I-95 Welcome Center at Hardeeville, contractors have already installed plumbing and conduits and poured the slab in mid June.

Electric vehicle charging stations, with solar panels, are currently being installed at both sites.

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