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Summer Forecast is Sunny and Bright

Duane Parrish

Director, SC Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism

Summer is the busiest season for tourism in the Palmetto State. And while we don't know if we'll have another record-breaking year like we did in 2015, there are a few indicators that give us a sunny outlook.

For a state with approximately 86 percent drive-in visitation, record low gas prices could be a significant driver for tourism growth. According to AAA, Americans have saved approximately \$15 billion on gasoline purchases this year compared to the same time period in 2015, which is prompting greater desire to travel.

While car travel remains the principal mode of transportation for travelers to South Carolina, our state has also experienced significant additions to its air inventory. Deplanements at our major airports are up 11.5% through March, and the nation's leading airline

Statewide RevPAR -- Increases in both occupancy and average daily room rate continue to grow RevPAR.

Admissions Tax -- The large difference in collections in March 2016 was mostly due to fluctuations in payment last year. Year-to-date, admissions tax collections edge slightly above last year's.

State Parks Revenue -- While all revenue categories for state parks increased in March 2016, the largest increase was in state park admissions.

Deplanements

Charleston International Airport continues to lead the state in number of deplanements, while most airports continue to report growth in their activity.

industry organization, Airlines for America, is predicting another record-breaking year for summer air volume.

Apart from national trends, our own statewide tourism metrics also indicate positive growth heading into the summer season. Hotel occupancy through April is up nearly five percent. STR, Inc., forecasts a moderate increase in occupancy for the summer as South Carolina continues to outperform the nation significantly. State Parks revenue is at an all-time high. And even admissions tax collections from golf, which had trended downward for the past few years, have shown consistent signs of resurgence in the current fiscal year.

Of course, there are always unknown and unpredictable factors, like weather, that can significantly impact visitation and visitor spending. But, based on what we do know and the current trends in our tourism economy, it looks like South Carolina has a bright and sunny summer ahead.

Reminder!

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

Occupancy Forecast

STR, Inc. forecasts a moderate increase in occupancy in South Carolina during the summer season.

STARs Aligned

SCPRT sports grant makes it easier for Greenville to host the 2017 SEC Women's College Basketball Tournament

SCPRT's [Sports Tourism Advertising and Recruitment Grant](#) is helping Greenville host three major events in 2016-17, including the prestigious Southeastern Conference Women's College Basketball Tournament, scheduled for March 1-5, at Bon Secours Wellness Arena.

On behalf of Visit Greenville, the city's destination marketing organization, Greenville was awarded:

- \$18,000 to host the SEC Women's College Basketball Tournament
- \$8,750 to host the NAIA Men's and Women's Lacrosse Championships, May 3-6, 2017
- \$5,000 to host the Southern Conference Baseball Championship, May 24-29, 2016 and
- \$6,000 to cover a portion of the cost to pursue the Top Gun Sports Baseball Summer Nationals

STAR grants provide financial assistance for the recruitment and hosting of new sporting events in South Carolina. Events that contribute to local admissions tax collections are given priority. The grant will provide a 1:1 match up to \$50,000 per event for common recruiting costs such as bid fees, event advertising and equipment rentals.

Bid applications are accepted year round. Hosting applications are accepted twice per year in spring and fall cycles.

The SEC Tournament was last held in Greenville in 2005. The University of South Carolina Lady Gamecocks are two-time defending champions of the tournament, and have led the nation in attendance each of the past two seasons.

Lakeshore Campground Reopens at Santee State Park

The Lakeshore Campground at Santee State Park has reopened, six months

after it was closed when the road leading to it was damaged by flooding.

The campground is a significant revenue generator for the park, with 108 campsites suitable for RVs and popular with repeat-camping families. Overall camping revenue for Santee State Park for fiscal year 2014-15 was \$270,148.

Reservations opened up in early May and the campground officially opened May 6. The Park Service is generating record amounts of revenue this fiscal year and officials expect campground occupancy at Santee State Park to contribute significantly this spring and summer.

Indie Film Grant Applications Due June 6

The deadline for applications for the South Carolina Indie Grants Program is Monday, June 6. South Carolina writers, filmmakers and other production professionals who are interested in funding are encouraged to visit www.indiegrants.org to submit a script and official application. Projects selected for funding will be announced in August.

As a film industry training and professional development program, the grant helps provide hands-on experience to the next generation of industry professionals and advancement for South Carolina's indigenous filmmaking community.

"We take a very practical approach to the program," said Duane Parrish, Director of the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism, which oversees the South Carolina Film Commission. "Over the last five years we've established ways to maximize its value, with a series of South Carolina-positive goals achieved with each short film project."

Selected short film projects will receive production funding and additional professional support to make high-quality independent film projects. These film projects are then used as real-world training exercises for Trident Technical College students, who are employed for each production and work under production professionals. Recent collaborators include Oscar-winning DP Russell Carpenter (*Titanic*, *Ant-Man*) and DP Peter Simonite (*The Perfect Guy*, *Skateland*, *Tree of Life* [2nd Unit DP]).

"Industry crew positions are high-paying jobs, with production projects bringing in dollars across the state," said Parrish. "The best way for South Carolinians to become qualified for these jobs is to learn them in an actual set environment."

SC Tourism Monitoring Zika

South Carolina's tourism industry is engaged in conversations with public health authorities on the threats posed by the Zika virus, including its impact on the tourism industry. SCPRT Director Duane Parrish delivered remarks at a Zika Forum in April hosted by the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control, and he covered potential impacts if the state's reputation is compromised by news of an outbreak.

Parrish's remarks begin at 10:15 in this video:

The forum also helped local municipalities understand Zika and discuss ways to control mosquito populations. In late May, DHEC held a similar forum for the South Carolina legislature.

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