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Year in Review...

Duane Parrish
Director, SCPRT

By all accounts, 2016 was an interesting year for tourism in South Carolina.

Our economic indicators trended upward for most of the year, including RevPAR, which, through October 2016, is 6.5 percent greater than the same period last year, and State Park revenue, which is reporting 4 percent increase over last fiscal year's revenue through October.

The state's tourism industry capitalized on the craft brewery and culinary travel trends, continuing the successful Satisfy Your Thirst initiative and the Chef Ambassadors program. Those efforts culminated in a South Carolina lunch and dinner at the coveted James Beard House in New York City.

Statewide Hotel RevPar -- Throughout the year, RevPAR continued to show modest gains over 2015.

Admissions Tax -- An admissions tax report was not available for the month of October as upgrades are made to the tax processing system.

State Parks Revenue -- October 2016 was a difficult month for state parks. All revenue categories reported decreases as parks recovered from the hurricane.

Deplanements

Deplanements in October were down for airports in destinations hit hardest by Hurricane Matthew.

Occupancy Forecast

STR, Inc., forecasts hotel business during the winter months in South Carolina to be similar to last year's.

Spend New Year's Day in a State Park

First Day Hikes get resolutions off to a good start
If you hike, post your photos and comments with [#FirstDayHikes](#) or [#SCStateParks](#)

More than 30 state parks in South Carolina will offer ranger-guided hikes, walks and special events on Sunday, Jan. 1, to help launch the new year (and to get resolutions off to a good start.) The [First Day Hikes](#) are mostly walks along beaches and lakes, in forests or on historic trails, to help visitors learn more about the cultural and natural heritage of South Carolina and to get in some holiday exercise.

A few parks also will offer special events. There are 5K runs planned at [Charles Towne Landing](#) State Historic Site and [Devils Fork](#) State Park; horse rides scheduled for [Lee](#) and [Kings Mountain](#) state parks; and "plunges" into lakes staged at [Aiken](#), [Devils Fork](#), [Paris Mountain](#) and [Sadlers Creek](#) state parks.

"Traditionally, New Year's Day is a time to recharge and restart, and we're happy to offer ideal settings for people to do that," said Duane Parrish, Director of the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism. "The trails and pathways in state parks are some of the most naturally scenic and historically significant in the state. Inspiring and re-affirming, they set the

And we are very close to opening South Carolina's first two brand new welcome centers; facilities totally rebuilt and specifically designed to meet the evolving expectations of today's traveler.

Then came the fall, and it brought several challenges.

In October, Hurricane Matthew skirted South Carolina's entire coast long enough to produce significant flooding and high winds that toppled trees and damaged buildings. Thanks to tremendous resilience and collaboration within our industry, South Carolina's most popular destinations recovered within a few weeks. Hunting Island State Park, however, remains closed.

In November, a slow-moving wildfire consumed the mountaintops near Table Rock State Park. While we haven't tracked its effects on tourism, we know the revenue lost from closed campgrounds and cabins at this popular park compounded the losses at coastal state parks that were damaged by Matthew.

Nevertheless, we have proven to be an industry that faces these challenges with resolve and solutions. The wise leadership, teamwork and commitment from members of the South Carolina Association of Tourism Regions, local convention and visitors bureaus, chambers of commerce, our fellow conservation agencies like SCDNR and Forestry, major attractions and resort destinations have made all the difference in recovery. I thank them for their support and great ideas, and am proud of what we've accomplished together.

I hope we can continue that

stage for enriching experiences in the South Carolina outdoors."

Park visitors who participate in First Day Hikes are encouraged to share their experiences through comments and photo posts on social media using the hashtags [#FirstDayHikes](#) and [#SCStateParks](#).

State parks are also inviting members of the Armed Forces to a friendly competition during First Day Hikes to see which branch can cover the most miles in a single day. All personnel serving in the U.S. Marines, Army, Air Force, Navy and Coast Guard must check in with park rangers when they arrive and report miles covered at the end of their hikes.

For a complete list of parks hosting hikes and events, click [here](#). Additional information about state parks can be found at www.SouthCarolinaParks.com.

The Park Service's First Day Hikes are part of a national movement by the [America's State Parks](#) program to get more people out into the great outdoors on New Year's Day and to rediscover the beauty and significance of their natural heritage.

2017's slate of South Carolina Chef Ambassadors Announced

Pictured left to right are Chefs William Cribb, Adam Kirby, Amy Fortes and Sean Mendes

Four chefs in South Carolina were named official Chef Ambassadors today and will spend a year representing South Carolina at key tourism and agricultural events.

The chefs are William Cribb of Cribb's Kitchen and Willy Taco in Spartanburg; Amy Fortes of Flipside Café in Fort Mill; Adam Kirby of Bistro 217 in Pawleys Island, and Sean Mendes of Roadside Seafood in Charleston.

The Chef Ambassadors program seeks chefs who embody the best of South Carolina's food scene, both in the quality of their provisions, as well as their dedication to using healthy, locally-grown ingredients.

"This initiative showcases South Carolina's wealth of agricultural resources," said South Carolina's Commissioner of Agriculture, Hugh Weathers. "These chefs, and many others, strive to consistently incorporate the state's vast produce offerings into their menus - which is wonderful to see and taste."

Throughout the year, the chef ambassadors will participate in a number of culinary and tourism specific events, hosting cooking demonstrations, conducting educational seminars and discussing the offerings found in the cities in which their establishments are based.

"Representing fantastic parts of our great state, this program allows these chefs to put a unique spotlight on not only their culinary talents, but the place in South Carolina in which they live, work and play," said Duane Parrish, director of the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism. "We encourage visitors and locals alike to make the trip and dine in each of these top-notch restaurants. You won't be disappointed!"

In its third year, the South Carolina Chef Ambassador program was an initiative Governor Nikki Haley enacted in June of 2014 after the concept was brought to her by Chef Brandon Vellie, executive chef at *Juniper* in Ridge Spring.

2017 SC Chef Ambassadors are:

CHEF WILLIAM CRIBB - Cribbs Kitchen, Willy Taco
Early on, Chef William Cribb knew he was destined for a career in the kitchen.

collaborative spirit through 2017, beginning with the [Governor's Conference on Tourism & Travel](#) in February. I am looking forward to doing whatever we can to continue growing tourism.

Reminder!

Register early for the 2017 Governor's Conference on Tourism & Travel and get a discount on the conference fee. The early bird registration deadline is Monday, Jan. 30. Registration is available online only at this [link](#).

With an ultimate goal of owning his own restaurant by his 30th birthday, now at 32, Chef Cribb is the executive chef of two popular establishments in Spartanburg -- Cribbs Kitchen, which was recently awarded the 2016 Small Business of the Year by the Spartanburg Chamber of Commerce, and Willy Taco, as well as one highly sought after business, Cribbs Catering. Having spent a number of years out in Steamboat Springs, Colorado and North Carolina, learning and honing his culinary skills, Chef Cribb strives to always incorporate fresh, flavorful, seasonal and sustainable fare into his menu items.

CHEF AMY FORTES - The Flipside Restaurant, The Flipside Café and The Flipside Catering Company

Once a trauma surgeon student, Chef Amy Fortes, eventually learned that her true passion was not in the OR, but in the kitchen. After taking a break from studying medicine, Fortes began working at a few restaurants in her hometown of Lockport, New York - just outside of Buffalo. Quickly falling in love with the comradery within the culinary industry, Chef Fortes changed her major, and the rest is history. Now the co-owner and chef of The Flipside Restaurant, The Flipside Café and The Flipside Catering Company in Rock Hill and Fort Mill, she thrives on the relationships between great food and great people.

CHEF ADAM KIRBY - Bistro 217

A graduate from Le Cordon Bleu of the Western Culinary Institute, Chef Adam Kirby, a native of Atlanta, Georgia, is the chef and co-owner of Bistro 217 on Pawleys Island - an establishment he's been with since it opened in 2004. Pulling inspiration from both his Southern roots - both his mother and grandmother where fantastic home cooks - and time spent in Hawaii, Portland and San Francisco, Chef Kirby's regularly changing menu incorporates locally sourced eclectic elements, making his dishes exciting, flavorful, and most of all, memorable.

CHEF SEAN MENDES - Roadside Seafood, Blues Burger Joint

Having parents who both served our country in the United States Air Force, Chef Sean Mendes was exposed at an early age to distinctive cuisines and cultures from all over the world. With a father who hailed from Portugal, Spain and a mother from South Carolina, soulful, authentic, interesting and unique culinary experiences were a regular part of his life growing up. In 2012 Chef Mendes opened and operated the wildly popular and successful food truck, Roadside Seafood in Charleston. A year and a half later, he opened a full-fledge restaurant under the same name. In 2016, Chef Mendes decided to venture into the gourmet burger world, opened Blues Burger Joint in Charleston - a hot spot that has been one of the go-to places since opening for "top shelf" burgers.

The industry's monthly e-newsletter Tourism Today will profile general session speakers and other key topics each month leading up to the [2017 Governor's Conference on Tourism & Travel](#). Scheduled for Feb. 20-22 at the [Spartanburg Marriott](#) in [Spartanburg](#), the conference is the industry's largest annual gathering, and offers sessions on consumer trends, best marketing practices and industry insight to help grow tourism in South Carolina.

Brian London

CEO London Tourism Publications

General Session Speaker, 2 p.m. Monday, Feb. 20

Brian London loves research. He has been conducting research, writing about research and talking about research for the last 15 years. His first project was for his local airport. They asked him to present the marketing and operational implications of their recent consumer satisfaction study.

Brian continues to work with organizations that desire to understand the

marketplace; and position resources to take advantage of coming trends. His insight and analysis have led to frequent calls by the Associated Press and the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta - to share research and comment on international and domestic tourism developments affecting the industry.

Prior to starting his own company, Brian was the research manager for the St. Augustine (Florida) DMO; and after, the research analyst for VISIT FLORIDA, a Destination Marketing Organization responsible for marketing the State of Florida as a tourism destination. He specializes in performance measurement, economic impact, and advertising effectiveness.

In addition to conducting research, Brian publishes industry trend reports, including: Travel Industry Indicators - Monthly Trend Letter and Travel Smart News - The Daily News Briefing. His first book, *More Than Trends*, is due out in April 2017.

Brian has also served on the international board of directors for the Travel and Tourism Research Association (TTRA) and currently serves as Executive Director of the Southeast States Chapter of TTRA (2010 - present).

Breakout Sessions Provide Marketing Insight

The governor's conference continues to provide insightful sessions that will help South Carolina's tourism industry remain on the cutting edge of destination marketing. Breakout sessions for the 2017 conference, which will be held from 10:45 to 11:45 a.m. on Tuesday, Feb. 21, will cover public relations, sports marketing and social media.

Tom Martin, founder of Converse Digital, will lead a session on The Life Cycle of a Best-selling story, outlining the fundamentals of shaping and sharing a destination's authenticity, and then measuring the results.

Tim Schneider, President and CEO of Schneider Publishing, will discuss how sports are Scoring Big Wins for Travel, providing insights into the size and scope of the sports travel market, including what event organizers look for in a destination.

BFG Digital professionals Jesse Bushkar and Patty Short will lead a session called How to Win on Social Media, discussing the future of social media, its critical role in marketing, and what success looks like on multiple platforms like Facebook and Twitter.

[Registration](#) is available online only at [SCGovCon.com](#).

Featured This Month!

Story provides walk through an undiscovered preserve outside the capital city.

Among the stories posted in December on DiscoverSouthCarolina.com are several that describe the outdoor experience in the winter, especially in undiscovered destinations. Places like the Congaree Creek Heritage Preserve are profiled for their natural beauty and unique history. As the story notes:

The woodlands and ponds that cover the park's 627 acres are home to a bounty of wildlife, including hawks, water fowl, deer, wild hogs, bobcats and more than 30 species of amphibians.

But it's the history of the land - located outside Columbia near the point where Congaree Creek meets the Congaree River - that makes it such a unique outdoor destination. Archaeologists believe tools, arrowheads and pottery shards discovered on the site were left behind some 12,000 years ago

by Native Americans traveling on the Old Cherokee Trail from the Appalachian Mountains to the coast.

Read more at this [link](#).

Articles are posted every week on the state's tourism website, sharing deeper stories about the South Carolina experience, encouraging travelers to find something new and explore.

Other stories posted in December are:

[Holiday Light displays in South Carolina](#)

[Timmerman Trail in Cayce](#)

[Cornbread and a slice of history](#)

[Five Best Outdoor Outings Outside of Greenville](#)

[Lights Before Christmas at Riverbanks Zoo](#)

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