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Date: 3/31/2016 10:02:25 AM
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March 31, 2016

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----- Duane Parrish SCPRT Director

With azaleas in full bloom and temperatures quite pleasant, April is already a beautiful month in South Carolina. It is made even more spectacular, however, with major events that draw national and international attention to the Palmetto State.

The Volvo Car Open will be held April 2-10 on Daniel Island near Charleston, featuring the world's top women's professional tennis players. Last year's champion, Angelique Kerber, will return to defend her title against an impressive slate of challengers.

RevPAR -- A moderate increase in occupancy and higher lodging rates led to a double-digit increase in RevPAR for January. National RevPAR growth for January was 2.4%.
Admissions Tax -- Admissions tax reports are returning to normal after disruptions last fall. Current reports show a slight decrease for the fiscal year to date.
State Parks Revenue -- Although revenue from camping is still down as several campgrounds recover from the October flood, successful First Day Hikes on New

But it's the international exposure for South Carolina that's perhaps most noteworthy for our industry. The tournament is broadcast in 165 countries and has an audience exceeding 10 million. Four days of the tournament will be broadcast live on ESPN2 in the United States.

Immediately following the tennis tournament is the RBC Heritage at Harbour Town Golf Links on Hilton Head Island April 11-17. This legendary event will be broadcast on CBS Sports into 220 countries with an audience exceeding 200 million households.

Added to these are the Cooper River Bridge Run in Charleston this weekend and a host of other festivals, including the Pendleton Spring Jubilee in the Upstate and ArtFields in Lake City, that capture statewide and regional attention.

We are fortunate to have such broad, positive promotion at the beginning of spring, a time when many consumers are still making vacation decisions. I'm looking forward to seeing more light shine on South Carolina through these events, and the great results that are sure to come.

Reminders!

DiSCover Guide available

The 2016 DiSCover guide is available in print, [online](#) and as a [mobile app](#)! In addition to features about great things to see and do in South Carolina, the guide has listings of lodging properties, tourism attractions, and festivals and events. Partners are encouraged to embed links to the online guide on their websites and to share on social media.

TODS Applications Due May
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Year's Day pushed state park revenue slightly above last year's.

Deplanements

An increase in seating capacity and other improvements at Columbia Metropolitan Airport have led to growth in deplanements. Statewide, deplanements are 9.3% greater than January 2015. Deplanements for Greenville-Spartanburg International Airport were not available.

Occupancy Forecast

STR, Inc. forecasts limited to no growth in statewide occupancy for South Carolina throughout the spring.

"Top Chef" Chooses Charleston

Bravo Media's hit culinary competition series "[Top Chef](#)" has chosen Charleston, SC, for its 14th season. Production will begin this spring in several venues throughout the Charleston region, and the season is expected to premiere on Bravo later this year.

"We're excited that Bravo Media chose South Carolina for its award-winning show," said Duane Parrish, Director of the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism. "Their presence reinforces our reputation as a place for great food and great fun."

In the show, chefs compete against each other in a variety of culinary challenges. They are judged by a panel of culinary professionals from the food and wine industry, and one of the competitors is eliminated each episode until there is one left standing.

For Season 14, the show will be hosted again by Padma Lakshmi. The panel of judges will include celebrity chef and restaurateur Tom Colicchio, Canadian food writer Gail Simmons and James Beard Award-nominated chef Richard Blais.

Top Chef is one of Bravo Media's most popular unscripted shows and a top rated food program on all of cable television. Season 13, which wrapped up in California in March, averaged 1.9 million viewers per episode, up 7 percent from the previous season.

Pre-approval applications for the [Tourist Oriented Directional Signage](#) program are due to SCPRT by 5 p.m. Monday, May 2. The pre-approval process helps certify that an attraction or business meets the program's rural tourism definition. In phase two of the application process, all certified businesses can apply through the SC Department of Transportation to be included in the signage program. For more information, click [here](#).

HBO Comedy Series "Vice Principals," Filmed in Charleston, to Premiere this Summer

HBO found a home in the Charleston region for their new comedy series, "Vice Principals," which tells the story of a high school and the people who almost run it -- the vice principals. The series will begin airing on HBO in July and stars Danny McBride ("Tropic Thunder," "Pineapple Express," "Eastbound & Down,") Walton Goggins ("The Shield," "Justified,") Busy Phillips ("Cougar Town,") and Kimberly Hebert Gregory ("Devious Maids".)

Filming took place from May thru November of 2015. The filmmakers built their sets in a North Charleston warehouse, where much of the interior school scenes were shot. The "Goer Stages," as they are known by the locals, were also used by the CBS series, "Reckless." R. B. Stahl High School in North Charleston, as well as Porter Gaud and West Ashley High School provided the exteriors. Viewers should recognize many Lowcountry area attractions and sites as the series unfolds, including Charles Town Landing State Historic Site and the South Carolina Aquarium.

HBO shot two seasons back-to-back during 110 production days, contributing to more than \$11.3 million in direct spending in the Trident Region on personnel and more than 820 local suppliers. The production also contributed to 10,500 room nights, 467 in-state job opportunities and the hiring of more than 2,000 local extras.

Actors Danny McBride and Walton Goggins star in the new HBO comedy series "Vice Principals."

Currently filming in South Carolina is the pilot for the proposed ABC series "The Death of Eva Sofia Valdez," which tells the rags-to-riches story of an immigrant who became a successful entrepreneur in Miami, only to face dark forces from her past. The pilot is filming in locations around Myrtle Beach.

South Carolina Hosts Southeast Welcome Center Conference

State welcome center professionals from around the Southeast toured the newly renovated Landrum Welcome Center on I-26 and other sites in Spartanburg during the annual Southeast Travel Counselors Alliance meeting this month. They were shown customer service upgrades at Landrum that could serve as a model for other centers, including a more open lobby and advanced technology suited for today's traveler.

Forty six participants from North Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, West Virginia, Virginia, Tennessee, Maryland and South Carolina attended the three-day meeting. The gathering gives them an opportunity to share resources, information and experiences about operating welcome centers.

In addition to learning more about the Landrum center, the group enjoyed outdoor activities at Croft State Park.

Hospitality Students Win Governor's Award

From left to right: Heriberto Zuniga, Sydney Palad, Keri Boyle, Olivia Hardy, Raine Templeton-Bradley, SCPRT Director Duane Parrish, Governor Nikki Haley, Rachel Bradd, Nicholas Chapman-Rizza, Emilie Walker and Stacey Johnson.

Nine college students in South Carolina were given a Governor's Tourism Student Award in March for outstanding academic and extracurricular achievement in a hospitality and tourism program.

The students were:

- Keri Boyle from the University of South Carolina,
- Rachel Bradd from the College of Charleston,
- Nicholas Chapman-Rizza from the Culinary Institute of Charleston at Trident Technical College,
- Olivia Hardy from Coastal Carolina University,
- Stacey Johnson from Horry Georgetown Technical College,
- Sydney Palad from the University of South Carolina-Beaufort,
- Raine Templeton-Bradley from Clemson University,
- Emilie Walker from Greenville Technical College and
- Heriberto Zuniga from Spartanburg Community College.

Sponsored by the South Carolina Travel and Tourism Coalition, the Tourism Student Awards give scholarships to students who are recommended by their respective schools' faculty because of their exemplary work. Scholarships are provided through the Fred Brinkman Memorial Fund, which is funded through a silent auction held at the annual Governor's Conference on Tourism & Travel.

The Growing Importance of Video in Marketing Strategy

Thanks to social media giants like Instagram, Facebook and Twitter making their platforms compatible for rich media including video content, video marketing has taken the world by storm - and the tourism industry is no exception.

According to HuffingtonPost.com: "74 percent of all Internet traffic in 2017 will be video ... In addition, studies show that using the word 'Video' in the subject line of an email can increase open rates by 19 percent, click-through rates by 65 percent and reduce un-subscribers by 26 percent," and "According to Twitter, videos and photos get the most retweets."

Not only do rich media like videos perform better in search engine results and inspire viewers to share content, but they also drive Web traffic and improve engagement across social media channels. The South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism is taking full advantage of all video has to offer, adding 21 videos for eight new marketing initiatives since June of 2014 - and we're just getting started.

From coastal seafood festivals to outdoor adventures in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, we've been able to showcase some of our state's most picture-perfect assets using video webisodes as a highly effective marketing tool. In fact, our YouTube channel has amassed more than 425,000 views, and nearly 30,000 viewers have tuned in to videos on Facebook and our official

tourism website, DiscoverSouthCarolina.com.

Instead of just telling travelers what they can do on a trip to South Carolina, video marketing allows us to actually show them the meaningful experiences and unique destinations they're looking for-anytime, anywhere, on any Internet-enabled device.

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