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**INTERSTATE HIGHWAY TRAVELERS, TIMESHARES
AND COASTAL RESORTS--ARE THEY RELATED?**

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ABSTRACT

Interstate highways provide access to virtually every region of the contiguous United States. While destination oriented travelers may or may not make stops in intermediate regions, those travelers do form images of non-destination regions and may be enticed to make leisure-based stops in regions they deem to be "attractive." Hence, understanding the behavior of interstate travelers is of great importance to tourism- and leisure-based endeavors located in traditional "drive-through" interstate highway corridors. This paper presents the findings of a study based on coastal Georgia Interstate 95 travelers that utilized side-trip behavior and non-destination attractiveness variables as components of a predictive model that was designed to increase the efficiency of time-share and coastal resort marketing practices.

INTRODUCTION

Those involved in or attuned to the leisure, tourism, and travel industries are keenly aware of the incredible business resource that our nation's interstate highways represent. In the southeastern United States that resource is Interstate 95, or more specifically, those who travel on Interstate 95. Understanding the behaviors, motivations, and images that travelers engage in or form as they travel through various regions on interstate highways can have a profound impact on the development and marketing efforts of regional tourism industries that include timeshare and/or coastal resorts.

Hence the authors became interested in studying the interstate highway traveler population and then relating the findings of that study to various issues of concern to the

regional tourism industry. From our perspective, several of those issues include:

1. The collection of data that could shed light on the propensity of destination oriented interstate travelers to make side-trips from the interstate.
2. Understanding the attractiveness or image of *non-destination* areas that interstate travelers have or form as they travel through these regions.
3. The development of predictive modeling procedures based on side-trip propensity and destination attractiveness variables that may assist timeshare and coastal resort managers in developing more effective marketing practices.

To study those issues, relevant data were collected as part of a traveler survey conducted on Interstate 95 in coastal Georgia. That survey, and the resulting data analysis, provided an exploratory step in data collection methods and analysis techniques that were thought to be useful in studying interstate travel behavior. This paper will identify those findings germane to coastal resort and timeshare vacationers, and provide a discussion of the traveler profiles and predictive model that have been developed.

DISCUSSION OF RELATED LITERATURE

A considerable amount of research focused on the effectiveness of interstate highway visitor information centers (VICs) in influencing the behavior of interstate highway travelers exists. This literature addresses a variety of topics including: the influences of information obtained at VICs on travel behavior (1, 2, 3), types of services preferred

(7), and profiles of VIC users and nonusers (10, 3, 6).

Our literature review revealed a less than definitive answer to the issues regarding the influence of information obtained at VICs. This variance may be due to the geographic locations at which the studies were conducted. For example, Fesenmaier et al (2) questioned travelers at Illinois welcome centers regarding the influence of the information obtained at the center. Fesenmaier found that while "almost all" visitors reported that the information obtained would be used in planning future trips, "relatively few" indicated that the information influenced their propensity to make a side-trip during the current journey. Conversely, in a study of Colorado tourist information center (TIC) visitors, Tierney (11) concluded that nonresident automobile-based tourists had a "relatively flexible itinerary." He also found that, after the completion of their trip, two-thirds of the respondents indicated that the stop at the TIC had influenced their travel behavior in some way (visiting new areas, attractions, or special events). Clearly, as indicated in this literature, "trip-type" and/or the "stage of trip" variables exert an important influence on a traveler's behavior.

Perdue (7), indicated that one conclusion supported by this body of work is that "the information obtained at VICs influences visitor behavior on the current trip and on future trips, particularly route selection and (in-state) attraction visits." Perdue's summary statement "the information influences both current and future trips" is less than satisfying for practitioners concerned with "how-to" tap the interstate highway traveler resource base. What this assessment tells us is that there is much more work to be done in understanding interstate highway traveler behavior.

Measures of the traveler's perception or image of an "attractive" side-trip destination were utilized in the development of the predictive model. These measures were based on the ideas presented by Hu and Ritchie (6) for measuring the attractiveness of international destinations. In that model, a series of 16 touristic attributes were developed to gain an understanding of the various factors that tourists consider in developing an image of potential destinations. Analysis revealed that while the situation-specific multiattribute attitude model used in the Hu and Ritchie study shed some light on destination attractiveness, further work was required in developing a more complete multiattribute model and/or the development of a different measurement/analysis technique. Based on the apparent utility of the touristic attribute concept as a starting point for understanding destination attractiveness, the Hu and Ritchie attribute set was modified for use in this study by incorporating language and descriptions that would better reflect the attributes of coastal Georgia (Appendix 1).

The literature review yielded no information regarding the propensity of interstate travelers to make side-trips. Given the authors' interest in this topic, several questions were generated to guide the research on this issue.

1. Regardless of how or when information is used, do people who make side trips differ from those who do not?
2. Can a model be developed that will shed light on who will make a side-trip and who will not?
3. How do these findings relate to coastal timeshares and resorts?

Related to this discussion is the question "what is a side-trip?" In the context of this

study, the authors were concerned with the traveler's view of their propensity to make unplanned side-trips during interstate highway travel--*regardless* of the traveler's view of the influence of the VIC stop or information obtained. To that end, travelers were asked to categorize their side-trip behavior along the following four dimensions.

1. I/We don't do side-trips (32.1%).
2. Spontaneous – the decision to stop for a side-trip can be made within 30 minutes or miles from the stopping point (33.7%).
3. Longer-term decision – requires 60 or more minutes or miles of discussion (11.7%).
4. Pre-planned – any side-trips must be planned prior to departure from home (22.5%).

METHODOLOGY

Research Instrument

The data analyzed in this study were collected as part of the 1997 Coastal Georgia Tourism Survey. This survey was conducted to update the information provided by a comparable survey conducted for the Coastal Area Planning and Development Commission in 1985. Both surveys were designed in order to establish descriptive profiles of coastal Georgia travelers and tourists, including such characteristics as demographics, duration of stay, and activities of interest while visiting the coastal region. In addition, the 1997 research instrument included a series of questions designed to secure information regarding side-trip behavior and destination attractiveness attributes.

The sampling procedure employed required conducting personal interviews of I-95 motorists who stopped at one of three Visitor Information Centers in Coastal Georgia. Hence, the instrument was developed to serve as a script and response record for the interviewer. The questionnaire was pre-tested on a convenience sample (n=120) of people who were determined to generally match the profiles of those who would participate in the actual study. After the pre-test, revisions regarding wording, question sequence, question load, and other problems were made.

Purposive sampling procedures were employed. Interviews were conducted at the three Visitor Information Centers (V.I.C.) located on the section of Interstate 95, which traverses the length of Coastal Georgia between South Carolina and Florida. Northbound travelers (n=210) were interviewed at the Kingsland V.I.C. Southbound traveler interviews were collected at the Brunswick V.I.C. (n=149) at the Savannah V.I.C. (n=191), resulting in the collection of 550 usable questionnaires.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using factor analysis (principal components with a varimax rotation), discriminant analysis and logistic regression. Principal components analysis was used in order to investigate the hypothesis that travelers who took side-trips differed from those who did not on the basis of preferred destination attributes. Discriminant analysis was employed in order to identify those variables/characteristics which differentiated travelers who made side-trips from those who did not. Logistic regression was used in order to develop a model for predicting who would make a side-trip and who would not.

Findings

Through principal components analysis we identified five distinctly different factors that classified the components of attractive vacation for those who made side trips. By using the varimax rotation the factors tend to load high on a smaller number of variables and low or very low on the other variables (9). This type of rotation results in “cleaner” or more differentiated factors. The first factor indicated a *cultural orientation* which included a preference for historical attractions, museums and cultural attractions, the uniqueness of the local life style and festivals and special events (Appendix 2, Table 1). The factor loadings for this factor ranged from .55 to .86. The second factor indicated a more *utilitarian orientation* (Appendix 2, Table 2). The variables included in this factor were: ease of highway accessibility, local price levels, the local people’s attitude toward tourists and opportunities for shopping. The factor loading for this factor ranged from .52 to .70. The third factor we identified was associated with an *hedonistic orientation* (Appendix 2, Table 3). The variables contained within this factor included; sports and recreational activities, ocean beaches and general entertainment. The factor loadings for these variables ranged from .58 to .77. The fourth factor was associated with an *environmental/comfort orientation* (Appendix 2, Table 4). The factor loadings for the variables comprising this factor ranged from .59 to .72 and included scenery, climate and the availability and quality of accommodations at a particular destination. The fifth factor had to do with the *availability of dining opportunities* (Appendix 2, Table 5). There were two variables that loaded on this factor, opportunity for non-routine dining and the availability of routine food. The factor loadings for these variables were .77 and .58 respectively.

By using discriminant analysis based on variables associated with destination attractiveness and selected demographic information we were able to differentiate travelers who made side-trips from those who did not with an 83.5 percent success rate. These variables were: the attractiveness of shopping opportunities (mean = 3.28 on a five point scale), the perceived attitude of the local people toward tourists (mean = 3.42 on a five point scale), age (mean = 45.37 years), education level (mean = college educated), income (\$40,000-49,000), and the respondent's overall impression of coastal Georgia (mean = 4.01 on a five point scale). Next, using a logistic regression equation consisting of the six variables identified through discriminant analysis, we were able to predict who would take a side-trip with an 81.6 percent correct classification. Lastly, we compared the information derived from the analysis of tourists who made side trips to the information available on those who purchased timeshares (8).

Our results indicated a similarity of those who take side trips and those who purchased timeshares. The mean age for the decision maker for both groups was roughly forty-five years old, married, college educated had an average income of \$50,000, and was employed full time.

Application of Results

These findings may be useful to individuals who are associated with travel and tourism attractions located along drive-through interstate corridors. Knowing how travelers who make side-trips differ from those who do not could lead to more cost effective marketing efforts by allowing those associated with "side-trip destinations" to more accurately target their promotional activities. Para-

mount among these results is the ability to predict those who will be likely to make a side-trip from those who would not. Profiles based on this information will allow marketers and managers to better understand their potential customer thereby helping them determine who to "go after" and who to pay less attention. Among those who make and do not make side-trips are those who frequent timeshare accommodations. By comparing the profiles of those who make side trips and those who purchase timeshares we can identify particular characteristic overlap. This overlap is valuable in demonstrating the similarities between the two groups which is indicative of the viability of coordinated efforts to turn side trip travelers into timeshare purchasers. This proposition leads us to make the following recommendations:

1. Brokers of timeshares should use welcome centers and shopping venues to promote their product.
2. Appeals with reference to historical attractions, the friendliness of the local people and beach recreation opportunities may be especially effective.
3. A tourist's first exposure to a particular region may be through a side trip taken from the interstate. Therefore, collaborative efforts with spontaneous visit or short-stay venues would be appropriate as a means of establishing or modifying the image of coastal regions in potential timeshare purchasers.
4. The fact that six of the top ten states for timeshare ownership residence lie on the I-95 corridor (8) is indicative of the potential for timeshare promotion at appropriate side-trip destinations.

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APPENDIX 1

Attributes Utilized in Assessing the Attractiveness of Non-Destination Regions

- Climate
- Quality Lodging
- Sports/Recreation opportunities
- Scenery
- Unique Dining opportunities
- Routine Food opportunities
- Entertainment
- Unique Local Lifestyle
- Historical Attractions
- Cultural Attractions
- Festivals, Special Events
- Easy Access
- Shopping opportunities
- Local attitudes
- Local prices
- Ocean Beaches

APPENDIX 2

TABLE 1

Factor 1 Cultural Orientation

Destination Characteristic	Factor Loading	Mean Score*
Historical Attractions	.86	3.39
Museums, Cultural Attractions	.85	3.13
Uniqueness of Local People's Life Style	.67	2.95
Festivals, special Events	.55	3.00

TABLE 2

Factor 2 Utilitarian Orientation

Destination Characteristic	Factor Loading	Mean Score*
Ease of Highway Accessibility	.70	3.80
Local Price Levels	.69	3.55
Local People's Attitude toward Tourists	.65	3.42
Shopping	.52	3.28

TABLE 3

Factor 3 Hedonistic Orientation

Destination Characteristic	Factor Loading	Mean Score*
Sports & Recreational Activities	.77	3.05
Ocean Beaches	.62	3.60
Entertainment	.56	3.17

TABLE 4

Factor 4 Environmental/Comfort Orientation

Destination Characteristic	Factor Loading	Mean Score*
Scenery	.72	3.91
Climate	.61	3.56
Availability and quality of Accommodations	.57	3.76

TABLE 5

Factor 5 Dining Orientation

Destination Characteristic	Factor Loading	Mean Score*
Opportunity for Unique or Non-routine Dining	.77	3.22
Availability of Routine Food	.59	3.15

* Note: All mean scores were based on a five point scale.