An Effective Tool for Economic Development

Tourism

Alabama Cooperative Extension System
Alabama A&M University and Auburn University
Tourism

What Is Tourism?

Like many concepts, tourism is not easy to define and means different things to different people. To some, tourism is simply people visiting a particular site for sightseeing or taking a vacation and visiting family and friends. Others include people attending a convention, a business conference, and similar business and professional activities as part of the concept of tourism. For the purposes of this publication it is not important to make great distinctions among the reasons individuals travel; rather, we want to place the importance on the service provided to and the economic benefits derived from all who visit your community. The following are the goals of this publication:

• Define tourism and identify the economic impacts of tourism on a community.
• Describe the components of tourism.
• Discuss the benefits and costs of the travel industry.
• Describe methods of attracting visitors to your community.
• Identify resources available to communities.

The definition of tourism applied to this publication is "travel for personal satisfaction" (Fritsch and Johannsen, 2004). Travel is obviously an important part of tourism, because it is contained in the very definition of tourism. Motivators for travel in today’s society include both business (meetings, events, group travel, trade shows, conventions, research, seminars) and leisure (vacationing, entertainment, escape, relaxation and stress relief, bonding, socializing, indulging, personal growth, exploration, sports) (Raza, 2005). The World Tourism Organization has defined tourism as follows: “tourism comprises the activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business, and other purposes” (Middleton and Clarke, 2001).

Tourism is not new. People have traveled for adventure, relaxation, entertainment, and commerce for centuries. Although travelers were not recognized by the title of tourists until the 1800s in England, Greeks traveled to Egypt more than 2,500 years ago to sightsee among the pyramids. While tourism is not new, the manner in which tourism is viewed by society is new. Until relatively recently, most people viewed tourism as a frivolous activity, something engaged in by people with more time and money than sense.

That perception is changing. Today, many view tourism as big business, as a tool of economic development. The financial and economic figures assembled by the Travel Industry Association of America are impressive.

• Tourism ranks as the first, second, or third largest employer in 29 states.
• Tourism directly employed 7.5 million people in 2005, representing $171 billion in payroll income for Americans. Furthermore, $105 billion tax revenues were generated from tourism for federal, state, and local governments. Without the tax revenues generated by tourism, each U.S. household would have to pay $924
Table 1. Domestic U.S. Person-trips – 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose of Trip</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leisure travel</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business/convention</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined business and pleasure</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Modes of Transportation Used:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modes of Transportation Used</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Auto, truck, RV</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Airplane</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus/motorcoach</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Train/ship/other</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rental car (primary mode)</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Top Activities for Domestic Travelers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shopping</td>
<td>First</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend a social/family event</td>
<td>Second</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor activities</td>
<td>Third</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A person-trip is one person traveling 50 miles (one way) or more away from home or overnight or both. A trip is one or more persons from the same household traveling together.

in additional taxes. One out of every eight non-farm jobs in the country is directly and indirectly created by tourism.

• Domestic U.S. person-trips exceeded 1,100 million in 2004. As shown in Table 1, while business travel plays an important role in the tourism and travel industry, by far the vast majority, more than 81 percent, of person-trips was solely for leisure travel.

Not only has the country as a whole benefitted economically from tourism, but Alabama has definitely shared in that success.

• Tourist expenditures in 2005 were $7.6 billion, an increase of 3 percent from the previous year.

• Local tax revenues generated in 2005 were $163.6 million, an increase of 40 percent from 1998. [Figures provided by the Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel.]

The state government recognized the economic importance of tourism by spending about $9.8 million during the year 2006 to promote Alabama as a tourist destination. While this may sound like an impressive amount, of the 12 southern states, only Mississippi spends less on tourism promotion than Alabama. The average amount of money spent by each state for tourism promotion for this region was more than $16 million for the year.

While some business leaders and local officials concede that tourism does bring dollars into the local economy, they often believe that only a few businesses actually benefit. These leaders see the money going entirely to hotels, restaurants, and tourist attractions, and having little impact on the rest of the community. This is not the case. Tourism benefits the entire community. Many local business leaders fail to recognize that shopping is a primary activity of today’s travelers. Among those that benefit are banks, grocery stores, service industries, insurance companies, and the local government; even hardware and agricultural supply businesses benefit from tourism.

The travel industry is not just a passing fad; rather, it is a growing industry. Growth is expected because of continued rising household incomes, increased leisure time, higher education levels, lower travel costs, changing lifestyles that include travel as an important part of life, and changes in tourists’ preferences toward leisure, recreation, and travel. However, tourism can be impacted negatively by factors such as economic recessions and higher gas prices.
Tourism Components

Some leaders will briefly emphasize tourism in their communities and then dismiss the prospect saying, “We don’t have a Walt Disney World or a Six Flags, so we can’t compete.” While the glamour attractions may catch most of the attention, tourism is much more than people attending the super attractions. The major components of the travel industry are transportation, accommodations, shopping, and activities. Attractions are a small, but vital, component of the industry. Table 2 indicates the types of activities in which domestic US travelers participate. Nationally, only about 10 percent of travel expenditures are spent on attractions. As shown in Figure 1, about the same proportion is spent on attractions by travelers to Alabama.

Tourism requires a solid base of natural, cultural, and developed resources. The natural resources provide the fundamental supply for use and enjoyment by the visitors. These include air and climate, terrain, land forms, flora and fauna, bodies of water, beaches, and natural beauty. Cultural resources such as literature, history, sports, music, and fine arts are also highly desired. Of course, there must be transportation systems to get the travelers to your community. You must have hotels, motels, campgrounds, restaurants, and similar accommodations to feed and house guests once they arrive. The infrastructure of

![Figure 1. Tourist industry total (impact) earnings in Alabama in 2005 ($ in millions)](image)

**Table 2. Domestic Trip Activity Participation by U.S. Travelers – 2004**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shopping</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend a social/family event</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor activities</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City/urban sightseeing</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural sightseeing</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beach activities</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historic places, sites, museums</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gambling</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme/amusement park</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National/state park</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminar/courses</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nightlife/dancing</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend sports event</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoo/aquarium/science museum</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water sports/boating</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performing arts</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural events/festivals</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golf</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art museums/galleries</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter sports</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
water supply systems, sewage disposal, communications, gas and electric lines, highways, and railroads must be in place to support tourism. And, just as important, your community must present an atmosphere of hospitality. To successfully host visitors, the residents need a positive attitude toward visitors, and service personnel must demonstrate an attitude of friendly service. Hospitality training programs are a must for tourism-conscious communities.

Benefits of Tourism to Local Communities

Most communities in Alabama could increase their tourism industry substantially. This is true even for cities that already have developed tourism programs. The following benefits are among numerous reasons for desiring to increase the number of visitors to your community.

Increases income. Billions are spent in Alabama by tourists each year, and this money is spent in the host communities visited by these tourists. Money spent on travel leads to significant earnings. The total impact of the tourism industry on Alabama’s earning power was more than $3.2 billion in 2005. Figure 1 indicates the distribution of the earnings across the industry.

Money comes from outside the system. Tourists bring in new outside dollars to the community. All of it filters through the local economy and much remains there. Many segments of the community benefit indirectly by supplying the businesses that sell directly to the tourists. This re-sending of tourism income is called the multiplier effect.

Local economy diversifies. Tourism blends well with other types of industry and is not an “either-or” proposition. Prosperous communities broaden their economic base, and communities in decline gain financial hope through tourism.

Tax dollars are brought into the local government. The public sector as well as the private sector gains economically. Visitors directly pay gasoline, lodging, sales, tobacco, and alcohol excise taxes. Indirectly, tourists also help pay real estate, business, and income taxes as businesses pass these on to the customer.

Taxes on tourists are politically popular. Certain taxes, such as lodging taxes, primarily affect visitors and generate revenue without the political fallout often associated with increased taxation. Hotel operators generally oppose such taxes, but if rates are moderate it is an effective method of financing a community’s tourism efforts. Unfortunately, most often lodging taxes are used to fund non-tourism programs, such as jails, schools, and other general fund items.

Creates employment opportunities. More than 159,600 jobs in Alabama depend on tourists. For every $70,735 spent in the state each year in the travel industry, one direct job is created. For every two jobs created, the Alabama economy created an additional indirect job. Some of these are part-time or seasonal jobs, which often match the employment needs of youth and second-wage earners in families. Because travel has become a major component of current lifestyles, this employment area is often stable during economic downturns.

Tourists require few basic services. Visitors are often major tax contributors, but usually not major tax consumers. Basic services such as education and health care are not required by tourists.

Tourism is a clean industry. If planned and managed properly, tourism will provide the economic benefits indicated without degrading the natural and cultural environment. Tourism is dependent to a large degree on an attractive natural environment. Therefore, the industry itself provides justification for environmental protection. But problems such as overcrowding and visual pollution can occur if tourism is not properly managed.

Communities may build new facilities. A community must develop infrastructure and recreational facilities to support a tourism industry. Although
specialized government spending experienced greater stability than those dependent on rural manufacturing, coal mining, oil exploration, and farming. Fishing and hunting are often overlooked as components of tourism and are thought by many to be moderately low cost activities. However, a research study found that more than $600 million is spent each year in Alabama in all segments of the economy on hunting and related activities (Stribling and others, 1989).

Specific expenditures included equipment, clothing, hunting dogs, vehicles, vehicle operation, lodging, land lease, and food plots.

Attracting Tourists to Your Community

Some citizens of Alabama may look around at their communities and say, "Why would anyone want to visit our town?" We often take for granted the resources and attractions in our own backyard. Alabama has a large, diverse natural resource base and a rich cultural heritage upon which to build a strong tourism program.

The Florida Department of Commerce asked automobile travelers why they visited Florida. The results of the survey (Table 3), indicated that even with highly publicized attractions such as Walt Disney World, Sea World, Cypress Gardens, Busch Gardens, Spaceport USA, and Silver Springs, less than 10 percent traveled to Florida primarily to visit attractions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shopping and restaurants</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest and relaxation</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beaches</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attractions</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pool activities</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historic sites</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishing</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golf</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dancing and night life</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many visitors traveling by auto to Florida pass through Alabama. Your community need not just provide a little food and gas to visitors on their way to another state; you can have your own tourism economy. But tourism will not just happen by itself.

Organize (a prerequisite for success). Your residents and leaders must have a vision for the tourism potential of your community. Community support and financial resources need to be present. A reason must
Establish a tourism organization. Establish or designate one community group or organization to head the tourism effort. This should be a formal commitment and widely announced. This organization cannot be simply a designation for show or publicity; it must be a working association. The organization will be responsible to inventory tourist resources, identify trends, advise local officials, and market your attractions. Often this organization will be an independent tourism association or part of the Chamber of Commerce or the Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Develop a tourism plan. If you do not plan properly for tourism, you could lose control of its development. Development that occurs without proper controls or limits could degrade the community’s cultural and natural environments. The plan should be comprehensive and far reaching. The planning process can take many forms. Design a dynamic decision-making process to guide future actions and solve future problems. The completed plan should be evaluated periodically and viewed as flexible and dynamic, not as written in stone.

Take the first step. Identify key individuals interested in tourism. This group may include business people, civic leaders, city officials, and retirees. Bring up the topic of tourism in discussions at community group meetings to raise community awareness. This could be done at meetings of the Chamber of Commerce, civic clubs, city council, and county boards of commissioners.

exist for travelers to visit your area. That is, man-made attractions or natural, historical, or cultural resources are required to attract tourists. You must have the ability to manage these resources as well as human and financial resources. Closely tied to all of this, effective leadership is an absolute requirement. Some person or small group of individuals must have the vision, desire, time, and energy to organize the entire community effort.

**Table 4.** Length of Domestic US Person Trips – 2004

| No nights | 23% |
| 1-2 nights | 35% |
| 3-6 nights | 29% |
| 7 nights or longer | 13% |

**Table 5.** Types of Lodging for Domestic US Person Trips – 2004

| Hotel/motel/bed and breakfast | 54% |
| Private homes | 40% |
| RV or tent | 5% |
| Condo or time share | 4% |
| Other | 7% |

**Table 6.** Travel Party Composition for Domestic US Person Trips – 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domestic Household Trips</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total (millions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solo travelers (1 adult)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults with kids</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domestic Leisure Household Trips</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total (millions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solo travelers (1 adult)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults with kids</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domestic Business Household Trips</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total (millions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solo travelers (1 adult)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults with kids</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

opportunity to improve the total community rather than just one part of the community at the expense of the other parts.

An effective tourism plan will include a comprehensive assessment of your tourism situation. Part of this assessment will include determining who your potential visitors are. For example, Table 4 indicates that more than half of all travel in the US is for two nights or less. Most US travelers will stay in hotels and motels (Table 5), and the travel party composition for leisure trips will be roughly equally divided among solo travelers, adults only, and adults with kids (Table 6).
The specific components of a comprehensive tourism plan will vary from community to community. Carefully consider including each of the following:

- **Basic Philosophy.** State what tourism is to you and the extent of development desired in your community.
- **Data Collection.** Gather information on community attitudes, existing attractions, support services, tourist markets, and your competition.
- **Goals and Objectives.** Determine what kind of tourism you want. Goals must be realistic and achievable.
- **Theme.** Select the major theme or focus of your tourist area. Determine the distinctiveness of your community.
- **Facilities and Services.** Determine if new facilities are needed and if basic services are adequate.
- **Coordination.** Decide how to coordinate the programs, activities, and attractions in your area. Establish how to coordinate public and private interests.
- **Tourist Information.** Determine how to collect and disseminate information about tourists once they begin arriving.
- **Marketing.** Determine your strategic marketing plan. Include your marketing mix, target markets, and methods of promotion.
- **Education.** Plan ways to inform residents and public officials of the benefits of tourism.
- **Community Pride.** Encourage community pride in your unique natural endowments and heritage. Instill the desire to maintain a litter-free environment.
- **Hospitality Training.** Determine how to train managers and front-line personnel on the importance of friendly service. Because there is a large turnover in hospitality employees, repeat training sessions annually.
- **Time Table.** Establish realistic times for the completion of each segment of the plan.

**Implement the tourism plan.** Put the decisions you made during the planning process into action. The plan required considerable time and effort to complete and was based upon the best information available. Therefore, follow the plan unless new information forces you to change it.

**Evaluate the tourism plan.** Evaluation should not be overlooked or taken lightly. It measures the success your community has achieved in meeting your goals and objectives. The evaluation must be continual and conducted on a regular basis to be effective. Through this process, weaknesses in plans can be detected and corrected before they can cause major problems. As the tourism situation changes in your community, your plan should be continually reviewed, modified, and updated.

Small communities with limited resources may believe that such a planning process is too complicated and beyond their resources. However, to be successful, any tourism effort must be planned. Small communities should seek help from others with experience, such as the Chamber of Commerce of a larger city. Data collection could be accomplished through involvement with instructors and students at local colleges, junior colleges, technical schools, or high schools. Also make use of state tourism officials, other state agencies, Extension agents, and tourism trade groups and associations.
To be most effective, tourism efforts should expand beyond the limits of a single community. The tourist is extremely mobile; tourism equals travel. This is particularly important in Alabama where we do not have the number or quality of developed glamour attractions of Florida, Georgia, and Tennessee. Alabama’s glamour lies in our natural, cultural, and historical attractions. Through countywide and multicounty regional efforts, more attractions will be marketed to potential tourists. The more attractions available, the more tourists will visit and the longer they will stay.

Costs and Liabilities of Tourism to Local Communities

Not all results of the travel industry are beneficial to communities, and tourism is not possible for every community. The benefits to be derived must be balanced by the potential costs.

Loss of sense of place. Tourism means strangers will come into your community, creating potential conflicts. Competition will exist on the highway, for local services and facilities, in food services, and at local attractions. For example, hunting is an important part of the local lifestyle in many communities in Alabama. Conflicts over resource use and availability must be considered and negotiated before hunting is promoted as a primary visitor attraction. The resulting competition and clash of values can result in the community losing the charm and appeal that made it both a nice place to live and attractive to visitors.

Excessive demands on service. Tourism promotion may be so successful that the community ends up with more visitors than can be comfortably accommodated. Traffic congestion and long lines at attractions and services can become commonplace.

Loss of environmental quality. Increased pressures on local services and resources could result in pollution and deterioration of the physical environment. Too many visitors could adversely impact the cultural environment, also. The quality of environment that attracted visitors could eventually be destroyed, leaving the community without income from visitors and a less desirable setting for residents.

Social problems. Consumer-oriented values brought by tourists can clash with traditional values of many communities. The resulting shift in values and desires could result in increased expectations, crime, and gambling.

Pressure on community services. Visitors will increase the demands on public services such as police and fire protection, water and sewer systems, solid waste disposal, and restrooms.

Inflated prices. Increased demands and pressures by visitors can result in inflated land values. The cost of local goods and services may also rise.

Seasonality and leakages. Depending upon the types of attractions and visitors, much of the touring may occur during relatively short periods of the year, such as summer and holidays. Also, economic leakages could be so large that the anticipated economic benefits do not meet expectations.

Diverted funds. Other more promising forms of economic development for the community could be ignored or lost if all funds are put into tourism development.

Good planning and action can help prevent or at least lessen economic and social costs. Public policies should be established related to land use and signing restrictions. A broad segment of the public must be involved in developing a planned tourism policy to guide development. The policy must not be based solely on profit and loss but also on human welfare and happiness. Sound planning will
assist the community in realizing the advantages of tourism and reducing the disadvantages.

What some communities call a nuisance, others might consider a golden opportunity. For example, Fort Lauderdale, Florida, considered college spring break activities detrimental to their community and drove the college students out about a decade ago with tight restrictions on behavior, beach use, drinking, and bar crowding. The initial cost was a loss of $140 million each year; this has been offset with a new emphasis on family and foreign tourism. On the other hand, Daytona, Florida, saw the students as an economic opportunity, not as a profitable nuisance. Daytona encouraged 4,000,000 visitors to spend $120 million over a three-week period.

**Resources Available to Your Community**

Many support resources are available to your community if you desire to strengthen your attraction base, services and facilities for visitors, and local marketing programs.

**Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel.** This state office was created by the legislature to plan and conduct all state programs of information and publicity designed to attract tourists to the state of Alabama. Its purpose is to promote travel to and through Alabama. It does this both nationally and internationally. Promotion is accomplished outside the state through Internet, television, magazine marketing, billboards, and direct mail campaigns. Within Alabama, the bureau relies on press releases, public service announcements, and feature articles, many of these by use of the Internet. They also provide matching grant funds for local tourism promotion projects. The state office is located at 401 Adams Avenue, Suite 126, Montgomery, AL 36104 (334-242-4169 and 800-ALABAMA). Their Web site is www.800alabama.com.

**Other State Agencies.** Specific types of information concerning tourism may be obtained from other state agencies. These agencies include:

- Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
- Division of State Parks
- Division of Marine Police
- Alabama Department of Transportation
- Alabama Historical Commission
- Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs

**Alabama Travel Council.** This agency represents the private sector of the tourism industry. Their address is 516 Oliver Road, P.O. Box 210729, Montgomery, AL 36121 (334-271-0050). Their Web site is www.alabamatravel.org.

**Alabama Tourism Partnership.** This organization is a consortium of statewide organizations, both public and private, who have a stake in Alabama’s burgeoning tourism industry. Their primary focus is the implementation of the state’s tourism strategic plan. ATP member organizations are the Alabama Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus, Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel, Alabama Cooperative Extension System, Alabama Hospitality Association, Alabama Travel Council, and the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. The address for ATP is 500 Beacon Parkway West, Birmingham, AL 35209 (205-943-4742).

**Trade Associations.** Several statewide associations linked to the hospitality and travel industry exist. Many communities also have local associations affiliated with these state associations:

- Alabama Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus
- Chamber of Commerce Association of Alabama
- Alabama Hospitality Association
- Alabama Restaurant Association
- AAA Alabama

**Community and Regional Associations.** Chambers of Commerce and Convention and Visitor Bureaus are located in many moderate to large cities. Often these organizations are willing to assist smaller or more inexperienced communities in developing their own associations.

**Alabama Cooperative Extension System.** Many people associate the Alabama
Several others are in the planning and development stages.

**Private Sector Travel Groups.** Many trade organizations exist in the private sector. A small sampling of these include:
- American Bus Association
- American Society of Travel Agents
- International Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus
- National Tour Association
- Travel South, USA

**Regional Planning and Development Agencies.** There are twelve regional planning councils affiliated with the Alabama Association of Regional Councils located throughout the state. These agencies, with their office locations, are as follows:
- Alabama Tombigbee Regional Commission (Camden)
- Birmingham Regional Planning Commission (Birmingham)
- Central Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission (Montgomery)
- East Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission (Anniston)
- Lee-Russell Council of Governments (Opelika)
- North Central Alabama Regional Council of Governments (Decatur)
- Northwest Alabama Council of Local Governments (Muscle Shoals)
- South Alabama Regional Planning Commission (Mobile)
- South Central Alabama Development Commission (Montgomery)
- Southeast Alabama Regional Planning and Development Commission (Dothan)
- Top of Alabama Regional Council of Governments (Huntsville)
- West Alabama Regional Commission (Northport)

**Colleges and Universities.** Virtually all sections of the state are served by institutions of higher education. Alabama has 28 senior universities (14 public and 14 private), 22 public community colleges, and 4 public technical colleges. An individual could contact business administration, social sciences, leisure studies, or hotel and restaurant management programs at these institutions to determine their ability and willingness to provide assistance in tourism.

**Small Business Development Centers.** The purposes of these centers are to provide interaction between Alabama’s educational institutions, businesses, and government; to provide business plans and loan packaging assistance; and to offer in-depth counseling assistance to ensure more successful start-ups of new businesses and to strengthen existing enterprises. Eleven centers are located throughout Alabama with the Office of the State Director located at the Alabama Small Business Development Consortium, 2800 Milan Court, Suite 124, Birmingham, AL 35211 (205-943-6750).
Federal Agencies. General information relating to tourism can be obtained from the Washington, D.C., offices of selected federal agencies. Often, more specific information and assistance related to your community can be obtained if these agencies have field offices near your location. These agencies include the following:

- National Park Service (Department of Interior)
- U.S. Forest Service (Department of Agriculture)
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Department of Defense)
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Department of Interior)
- Tennessee Valley Authority (Federal Corporation)
- U.S. Small Business Administration

Will Tourism Work in Your Community?

Tourism can be an effective tool for strengthening or revitalizing the economic development of your community. But it does not work in all instances or by itself. Successful tourism development requires careful planning and cooperation.

Many potential attractions exist throughout urban and rural Alabama. Each community needs to identify and build upon its own distinctiveness. Some examples of the possibilities throughout the state include the following:

Cultural attractions:
- History and folklore
- Religion and art
- Culinary tours
- Theatre, music, dance, and other entertainment
- Festivals based on cultural traditions
- Museums
- Craft shows

Agri-tourism attractions:
- Orchard, berries, vegetable-oriented events
- Farm animal/breeding shows, cattle and livestock events
- Steam-powered farm festivals
- Wine tasting
- Working farms, farm inns, and bed and breakfasts

Natural attractions:
- Ecotourism activities
- Lake and riverboat tours
- Landscape, seascape, and beaches
- Camping, hunting, fishing
- Wildlife tourism
- Festivals based on land and water (logging, lumbering, mining)
- Networking of trails into regional complexes (hiking, equestrian)

Built attractions:
- Parks and gardens
- Industrial tours
- Themed retail areas (renovation of historical factories)
- Industrial archaeology
- Modern architecture and monuments

The future of the tourism and travel industry in Alabama appears very bright.

Not only are many people currently traveling to the Southeast, but this trend should continue. A recent study indicated that most travelers (55 percent) intend to take about the same
number of trips over the next 5 years. Only 8 percent plan to take fewer trips while 37 percent plan to take more trips. The study also indicated that travelers will be taking fewer weekend trips and an increased number of longer trips. Alabama can become a destination for many of these travelers.

Individuals are traveling and are likely to continue to travel. Your task is to identify your attractions, examine your infrastructure and accommodation facilities, and promote your community to entice tourists to visit.

Notes and Resources for Further Reading


Profile of the Florida Visitor. 1989. Tallahassee, Fla.: Florida Department of Commerce, October.


Photography courtesy of the Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel.
J. Thomas Chesnutt, Extension Tourism Specialist, Auburn University

For more information, call your county Extension office. Look in your telephone directory under your county’s name to find the number.

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