

10-1-2010

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Sylvia Smith

Southern Illinois University Carbondale, ssmith@siu.edu

Nicole Davis

Southern Illinois University Carbondale, ndavis@siu.edu

John Pike

University of Illinois Extension, jpike@illinois.edu



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Recommended Citation

Smith, S., Davis, N., & Pike, J. (2010). Rural Tourism Development: A Case Study of the Shawnee Hills Wine Trail in Southern Illinois. *The Journal of Extension*, 48(5), Article 19. <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/joe/vol48/iss5/19>

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October 2010
Volume 48 Number 5
Article Number 5RIB4

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Rural Tourism Development: A Case Study of the Shawnee Hills Wine Trail in Southern Illinois

Sylvia Smith
Assistant Professor
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
Carbondale, Illinois
ssmith8@siu.edu

Nicole Davis
Instructor
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
Carbondale, Illinois
ndavis@siu.edu

John Pike
Community and Economic Development Educator
University of Illinois Extension
Carbondale, Illinois
jpike@illinois.edu

Abstract: The research reported here analyzed non-wine activities that wine tourists might engage in while visiting a wine trail. Data was obtained by online questionnaires from 104 tour visitors to the Shawnee Hills Wine Trail in southern Illinois. Results indicated wine tourists were older, with higher education and income than local visitors. Wine tourists found local dining, national parks, and fine dining to be important, whereas locals considered local dining, site seeing, and photography important. Results reported may assist the rural wine tourism industry to better understand activities to enhance the tourist experience while increasing the tourism dollars to rural communities.

Introduction

Tourism development has long been identified as a way to help revitalize struggling rural America. Tourism creates jobs, thus stimulating economic growth, and can improve the standard of living for those living in a tourism-targeted area (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2003). While tourism development in urban locales can involve major commercial attractions that result in substantial short-term job creation and tourist traffic, rural tourism development tends to evolve at a slower, less dramatic pace. Additionally, it is less likely that a single entity will emerge as the dominant tourism attraction in rural areas.

Cultural tourism has increased in popularity as travelers seek out folklore, natural landscapes, historical landmarks, and customs of regions they visit (MacDonald & Jolliffe, 2003). In most rural regions, especially in the Midwest, agriculture-related attractions have been popular. Examples include wineries, pumpkin

patches, orchards, hunting clubs, and bed and breakfasts. An increasing number of local and regional efforts are underway to package multiple agritourism attractions to more effectively promote tourism in rural areas (Burrows, Fennell, Redlin, & Verschoor, 2007).

Located in the rural Midwest, southern Illinois is in a unique position to take advantage of agritourism opportunities. Unemployment rates in the lower 16 counties of Illinois ranged from 12.9% to 29.5% in 2008. The 2008 Illinois and national poverty rates were 12.2% and 13.2% respectively. Additionally, the median household income in these same counties averaged approximately \$19,600 below the 2008 Illinois median of \$56,230 (Social Impact Research Center, 2009). Continued tourism development is a long-term strategy to help alleviate economic distress in the region.

The focus of the research reported here was to examine alternative activities in which wine tourists might engage in to enhance the rural wine experience. The area of interest was the Shawnee Hills Wine Trail in southern Illinois, a region noted for its scenic rural landscape and state parks (Figure 1). The results of the study can provide the rural wine tourism industry with a better understanding of potential services they can provide to enhance the tourist experience, increase overall profitability, and provide additional tourism dollars to rural communities.

Figure 1.

Map of Illinois with Shawnee Hills Wine Trail Region Indicated



Rural Tourism Development

Rural America has become a popular tourism destination to many travelers according to the Travel Industry Association (2009), and the potential benefits that tourism offers to these areas are significant. Tourism can increase the overall quality of life for rural host communities if properly planned; increase job and entrepreneurial opportunities; serve as a source for local tax revenue; and provide a range of opportunities to revitalize otherwise downtrodden regions (Brown, 2007).

According to a poll by the Travel Industry of America Association, the majority (62%) of American adults (individuals 18 years of age or older) visited rural places in the past 3 years. Of these trips, 86% were for leisure purposes (Miller & Washington, 2009), while other reasons included visiting friends, business or personal reasons. The popularity of rural destinations stems from the quest for culture and heritage, for the experience of "folklore, customs, natural landscapes, and historical landmarks" (MacDonald & Joliffe, 2003).

Rural tourism destinations can use several different development strategies either singly or in combination including agritourism, nature-based tourism, and heritage tourism. Southern Illinois is poised to further develop each of these aspects of rural tourism (Brown, 2007). Located at the juncture of the Great River Road National Scenic Byway and the Ohio River Scenic Byway, southern Illinois has a variety of heritage attractions, as well as outdoor and agritourism opportunities.

Wine Tourism Research

Wine tourism is defined as "visitation to vineyards, wineries, wine festivals and wine shows for which grape wine tasting and/or experiencing the attributes of a grape wine region are the primary motivating factors for visitors" (Hall, Sharples, Cambourne, & Macionis, 2000). Wine tourism is noted as fulfilling the needs of the cultural tourist by providing aesthetic, as well as experiential involvement. Carlsen (2004) described the wine tourist as seeking a lifestyle package to include the experience of enjoying wine at its source: landscape, culture, and food. Although there is no single stereotype of the wine tourist, some researchers suggest that high income and education best describes the overall profile (Dodd & Bigotte, 1997; South Australian Tourism Commission, 1997).

A study by Dodd and Bigotte (1997) segmented Texas winery visitors into two groups: older adults with higher income (group 1: average age = 52 years, average income = \$50,000) and younger individuals with lower incomes (group 2: average age = 31 years, average income = \$40,000). Group 1 rated label, aroma, and quality higher in importance while making wine purchasing decisions. Group 2 rated overall service, as well as price, more important in purchase decision. Although group 2 purchased less wine, they spent more per bottle. Researchers concluded that younger consumers may be more interested in the image of the wine, which is associated with a brand name and higher price than the taste of the wine itself.

Getz and Brown (2006) examined motivations of long-distance wine tourists from Calgary, Canada, a city remote from any wine region. Calgary residents were selected as a sample because of their similar high income and education characteristics to those of wine tourists. Research findings revealed Calgary wine consumers were married adults in an upper socio-economic group (Getz & Brown, 2006). Results indicated that 79% of respondents had visited a wine-producing region in the previous 5 years from when the study was conducted.

Last, Charters and Ali-Knight (2002) segmented wine tourists in Australia based on demographic and motivational characteristics. Findings revealed about one-third of respondents could be called "wine lovers" who desired a learning experience at wineries. Results suggested "wine lovers" were more likely to want to buy wine, learn about wine, and taste wine at the winery and were less motivated by ancillary activities, such as retail shopping. In terms of educational interests, "wine lovers" were more likely to want to learn about food and wine links and storing and maturing wine than the "wine interested" and "wine novices." Research concluded that bundles of benefits have to be offered, not just wine-related experiences, because wine tourism is rarely a discrete activity.

A review of related research indicates that wine tourists are not alike in terms of their needs, wants, and demographic characteristics. Research often includes detailed information concerning attribute items that are important to the visitor's experience. Renquist (2007) noted that producers and commodity groups typically

lacked marketing expertise to effectively promote the wine product, or recruit customers. Therefore, cooperative marketing with key Extension and tourism entities may prove to be a successful strategy.

Methods

The focus of the research reported here was to analyze activities that wine visitors may engage in while visiting the Shawnee Hills Wine Trail. The wine trail was created in 1995 with a partnership between three wineries, the Carbondale Convention and Tourism Bureau, and the Southernmost Illinois Tourism Bureau. Today, the wine trail boasts 12 wineries and vineyards across two counties, intermixed with a variety of bed and breakfasts (B&B), boutiques, and the scenic background of southern Illinois. Data was collected from visitors to the wine trail. A local wine touring company released a list of emails and mailing addresses (for education purposes only) of clients who had visited the wine trail in the past year. The resulting sample consisted of 260 individuals.

An online Web-based survey was conducted to gather study data. Survey content included visitor satisfaction, travel activities, travel behavior, and demographic items. Tourism activities were compiled from a review of rural tourism textbooks and related materials. Email and postcards invitations were distributed inviting individuals to participate in the study with no penalties for decline. Using a modified Dillman method (2000), reminder emails were sent 1 week after the study to encourage anyone who had not completed the survey to do so. In addition, participants were entered into a drawing as an incentive to participate in the study.

Surveys were completed online by 104 visitors, for a 40% response rate. Descriptive statistics including frequencies and percentages were used to describe the respondents, whereas independent sample t-tests were used to compare the two groups in terms of demographic information and travel behavior characteristics. Prior to administering the survey, the instrument was pilot tested for reliability with a convenient sample of wine tour visitors. Cronbach's coefficient of reliability alpha was tested indicating a reliability of 0.877, which is indicative of internal consistency.

Findings

The study used an a priori segmentation of local wine visitors versus tourists. Tourists were defined as visitors traveling 50 miles or more one-way (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2003). Based on distance traveled, the results indicated 39% were considered wine tourists, whereas 61% were local wine visitors. Demographic characteristics of the two groups showed significant differences concerning age, income, and education. Regarding age, the majority of the wine tourists were between the ages of 32-59 (65%), with 15% 60 years or older. Local wine visitors, on the other hand, were younger, with the majority (50%) between the ages of 21-31. Income differences revealed wine tourists to have higher household salaries (64% at \$75,001 or higher) compared to local wine visitors, where 43% had incomes of 50,000 or less. In terms of education, 50% of wine tourists had graduate degrees, whereas 71% of local wine visitors had associate degrees or less (Table 1).

Table 1.
Demographic Characteristics of Shawnee Hills Wine Trail Visitor

| | A Priori Segmentation | | | |
|--|-----------------------|--|--|--|
| | | | | |

| | Wine Tourists (n=40) | Local Wine Visitors (n=62) | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|----------------|---------------------|
| Variable | Percent | Percent | t-value | Significance |
| Age | | | 0.001 | 4.159 |
| 21-31 | 20 | 50 | | |
| 32-45 | 35 | 30 | | |
| 46-59 | 30 | 20 | | |
| 60+ | 15 | - | | |
| Education | | | 0.001 | 4.296 |
| High School | 5 | 10 | | |
| Associate's Degree | 25 | 61 | | |
| Bachelor's Degree | 20 | 13 | | |
| Graduate Degree | 50 | 16 | | |
| Household Income | | | 0.001 | 3.382 |
| \$10,000-20,000 | - | 20 | | |
| \$20,001-50,000 | 20 | 23 | | |
| \$50,001-75,000 | 16 | 19 | | |
| \$75,001-100,000 | 37 | 19 | | |
| \$100,001+ | 27 | 19 | | |
| Marital Status | | | 0.869 | 0.131 |
| Single (Never Married) | 16 | 23 | | |
| Married | 63 | 61 | | |
| Separated, Divorced, Widowed | 21 | 6 | | |
| Married with Children | - | 10 | | |

Table 2 presents the travel behavior characteristics of the two groups. In terms of primary reason to visit Shawnee Hills Wine Trail, there were no significant differences between the two groups. Expectedly, wine tourists were more likely to stay in a hotel while traveling, yet both groups patronized the B&B's in the area. About 36% of wine tourists stayed for 2 or more days, unlike local wine visitors, who were from the surrounding areas. Both groups had visited other wineries in the past 2 years, suggesting that networking with other regional wine trails may be a mutually beneficial marketing tool for wineries, in general.

Table 2.
Travel Characteristics of Shawnee Hills Wine Trail Visitor

| | A Priori Segmentation | | | |
|--|-----------------------|----------------------------|---------|--------------|
| | Wine Tourists (n=40) | Local Wine Visitors (n=62) | | |
| Variable | Percent | Percent | t-value | Significance |
| Primary Reason to Attend | | | 0.870 | 0.164 |
| Friends/Family | 25 | 26 | | |
| Enjoy the Entertainment | 5 | 13 | | |
| To See and Taste the Wine | 70 | 55 | | |
| Business | - | 6 | | |
| Accommodations | | | 0.001 | 3.561 |
| Hotel/Motel | 22 | - | | |
| Bed & Breakfast | 17 | 15 | | |
| Campground | - | 13 | | |
| Friends/Family | 28 | 10 | | |
| Other | 33 | 75 | | |
| Length of Stay | | | 0.001 | 6.285 |
| 0 Days | 11 | 71 | | |
| 1 Day | 37 | 21 | | |
| 2-3 Days | 26 | - | | |
| 4-6 Days | 5 | 2 | | |
| 7+ Days | 5 | - | | |
| Visited Other Wineries in 2 yrs | | | 0.898 | 0.129 |
| Yes | 60 | 61 | | |
| No | 40 | 39 | | |

In terms of travel activities, participants were asked to identify activities important to them while traveling. Twenty-eight activities were measured on a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = not at all important to 5 = very important). Wine tourists found local dining, national parks, and fine dining to be very important while taking a trip, whereas local wine visitors considered local dining, site seeing, and photography important (Table 3). Both groups found local dining as the number one activity important while traveling. Local dining represents cultural tourism. Culinary tourism is emerging as a strong and growing area of special-interest

tourism worldwide and represents an increasingly significant component of regional and rural tourism products. Tourism destinations are using local culture and cultural products to enhance their image in the eyes of the discriminating tourist.

Table 3.
Activities Important While Traveling by Group

| | A Priori Segmentation | |
|--|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| | Wine Tourists | Local Wine Visitors |
| Activities | Means | Means |
| Local Dining | 4.15 | 4.26 |
| National Parks | 4.00 | 3.65 |
| Fine Dining | 3.90 | 3.32 |
| Wineries | 3.85 | 3.61 |
| Site Seeing | 3.70 | 4.13 |
| Photography | 3.20 | 3.71 |
| Activities importance was on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 = not at all important, 5 = very important). | | |

A principal component factor analysis (PCA) with a varimax rotation was performed to explore different types of activities to bundle in order to offer wine tourists additional travel options (Table 4). PCA results confirmed that there were eight factors with Eigenvalues greater than 1.0 that accounted for 74.11% of the variance. Items with factor loadings of 0.399 were suppressed from the analysis, and any item loading within 0.05 on more than one factor was removed from the analysis. The total Cronbach's alpha value indicated that the model was internally reliable ($\hat{\alpha} = 0.896$). (Note. All tourist activities surveyed were available in southern Illinois.)

Outdoor activities such as rock climbing, biking, and hiking combined to form one dimension of activities representative of an "outdoor sport enthusiast." Golf, hunting, and horseback riding formed another dimension, which represented more expensive activities geared toward the "serious leisure enthusiast." A third dimension included clubs and bars, spas, wineries, and fine dining, representing "urban relaxation." Photography, historic parks and houses, orchards, and national parks combined to form a dimension representative of "heritage tourism." These exploratory findings revealed special interests that may be bundled to offer the visitors additional touring activities beyond the wine experience to enhance their stay.

Table 4.
Factor Analysis of Activities Important to the Winery Visitor

| Activities | Factor Loading | Eigenvalue | % Variance Explained | Reliability Coefficient |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
|-------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|

| | | | | |
|-------------------------|-------|-------|--------|-------|
| Factor 1 | | 7.774 | 11.904 | 0.790 |
| Casinos | 0.788 | | | |
| Skateboard parks | 0.757 | | | |
| Camping | 0.647 | | | |
| Skeet shooting | 0.645 | | | |
| Water sports | 0.576 | | | |
| Fishing | 0.566 | | | |
| Factor 2 | | 3.106 | 11.142 | 0.866 |
| Rock climbing | 0.784 | | | |
| Biking | 0.745 | | | |
| Hiking | 0.718 | | | |
| Factor 3 | | 2.386 | 11.128 | 0.795 |
| Visiting historic parks | 0.834 | | | |
| Visiting local orchards | 0.777 | | | |
| National parks | 0.712 | | | |
| Photography | 0.527 | | | |
| Museums | 0.525 | | | |
| Factor 4 | | 2.037 | 9.556 | 0.766 |
| Hot air balloons | 0.848 | | | |
| Skydiving | 0.745 | | | |
| Bird watching | 0.576 | | | |
| Factor 5 | | 1.608 | 9.169 | 0.815 |
| Hunting | 0.774 | | | |
| Golf | 0.738 | | | |
| Horseback riding | 0.598 | | | |
| Factor 6 | | 1.371 | 8.021 | 0.673 |
| Local dining | 0.793 | | | |
| Fairs and festivals | 0.771 | | | |
| Factor 7 | | 1.314 | 7.317 | 0.682 |
| Wineries | 0.762 | | | |

| | | | | |
|--|-------|-------|--------|-------|
| Fine dining | 0.672 | | | |
| Spas | 0.668 | | | |
| Factor 8 | | 1.154 | 5.874 | 0.575 |
| Shopping | 0.780 | | | |
| Antiques | 0.654 | | | |
| Total Variance Explained | | | 74.111 | |
| Respondents used a five-point Likert scale to rate their level of importance with trip activities: 1 = not at all important to 5 = very important. | | | | |

Conclusions

Southern Illinois is considered a drive-in destination, whereas the majority of tourists arrive via the highway system and most commonly in their own vehicles. This fits well with the notion that rural tourism in America is tied to the highway infrastructure (Gartner, 2004). Gartner also points out that a strong rural destination must be "linked to some nearby population center." Results of the study reported here, combined with Gartner's (2004) position, provides strong marketing implications for the wine tourism industry in southern Illinois.

Given the two demographic sets analyzed (wine tourists and local wine visitors), it is clear that two distinct market segments exist and should be treated as such when developing marketing campaigns. Although both types are interested in wine tasting, the wine tourist is more so, suggesting that this experience is something that would draw them to the Trail. The local wine visitor is more interested in the entertainment value of the visit, which would require a different marketing approach. Educational programming conducted by Extension and their tourism partners will provide winery operators with better information to assess this customer mix and potentially increase the efficiency of their marketing efforts.

Extending the average length of stay of the wine tourist is an opportunity that would benefit the region as a whole. The current 1-night stay can be extended to a weekend getaway by packaging the Trail with accommodation and other activities in the region. Results of the factor analysis suggest activities to package with wine trail promotions to generate additional interest to the wine tourist with potentially additional night stays. This would require new partnerships to be formed and possibly the incorporation of the culinary/agritourism experience as a whole, especially considering "local dining" was the most important non-wine activity for both market segments. The St. Louis, Missouri area would be an ideal location in which to market. It is within a 2-hour drive of southern Illinois and provides the greatest potential for market growth.

From a regional and cooperative marketing perspective, a more benefit-based approach to marketing southern Illinois may attract more visitors to the area, as opposed to the traditional single attraction campaign. Vossen (1992) recommended a comprehensive approach for small agricultural markets to increase consumer demand for local products. This could be accomplished through the same packaging concept as previously mentioned, as well as simple cooperative marketing efforts among key extension and tourism entities. While the combination of various tourism assets provides many opportunities to attract new tourists to the region, there is also potential to broaden the scope of the visit for a significant number of tourists who currently visit the region and only patronize one type of tourism attraction. Coordination and cross promotion

among the various tourism related businesses will also be a critical component of long-term rural tourism development and economic opportunity. Because Extension already serves as a resource to the variety of tourism related businesses in the region, the information resulting from the study reported here will be a beneficial addition to educational programming efforts to foster an improved collaboration among a more diverse collection of tourism attractions that will improve the marketability of the region as a whole.

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