

EXPLORING CONSUMER DEMAND FOR VALUE-ADDED PRODUCTS AND SERVICES ASSOCIATED WITH FOR-HIRE BOAT TRIPS ON THE SOUTH CAROLINA COAST USING CHOICE MODELING

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Interviews with recreational charter operators on the South Carolina (SC) coast demonstrate a need for information on consumer demand for value-added products and services, among anglers as well as coastal tourists. Charter operators are trying to adapt to numerous challenges to business survival, such as high fuel costs, regulatory restrictions, customers unwilling to pay the high cost of a charter trip and competition with other coastal tourism businesses and amenities. They need strategic information to develop new “fishing products”, including new fishing and non-fishing trip offerings, that are possible to attract a broad range of coastal tourists. The goal of this study was to assess the demand for value-added charter fishing and non-fishing experiences and services among anglers and coastal tourists visiting and/or recreating on the SC coast. Researchers developed a consumer survey that applied choice modeling (CM) toward understanding preferences for different charter trip attributes. Traditional research designs ask respondents to provide their preferences using a series of single-item questions. This separate evaluation approach can result in failure to identify the relative and interacting importance of one attribute to another (i.e., tradeoffs). Consequently, decision-makers risk having very little insight into the participants’ actual trade-off oriented preferences when developing practical management measures or new product offerings. The CM is a joint evaluation approach that was applied in this case to provide a more valid and reliable means for identifying tradeoffs coastal tourists and recreationists are willing to make. It was also used to provide decision-makers with an understanding of how anglers and coastal tourists are likely to change their behavior in response to new saltwater charter boat trip products. A consumer survey was developed to present choice sets with various hypothetical boat (fishing and non fishing) trip attributes such as onboard amenities, nearby or onshore tourism activities, quality of captain and crew, onboard marine nature-based tourism, onboard marine history and culture-based tourism, interpretation and education services, and boat fee. The attributes and levels for the choice modeling as well as other important issues were identified and revised using information (i.e., what is already possible, what could be possible) from interviews conducted with operators of 43 SC licensed vessels during phase one of the study. The consumer survey sample included 1500 anglers (drawn at random from the 2012 SC license database and including 750 resident and 750 non-resident licenses) and also 977 tourists intercepted at various coastal venues in the three major tourist regions (Myrtle Beach, Charleston, and Beaufort/Hilton Head) on the SC coast. There were a total of 597 respondents, including 272 anglers with a SC saltwater fishing license (147 resident, 125 non-resident), and 325 coastal tourists. Forty-Nine percent (N=267) of respondents had gone saltwater fishing in the last 24 months and of these, 62 % (N=165 which is 28% of total sample) had ever gone on a charter vessel. This presentation will discuss the process and results of the choice modeling and include a comparison between saltwater anglers and non-anglers.

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