
David L. Butler

The Department of Economic Development
The University of Southern Mississippi, and
Butler and Associates: A Research Consulting Firm

Supply and demand at tourist sites: A case study of plantations

This article contains the summary of the marketing research conducted at a tourist plantation outside of New Orleans, Louisiana. The data was collected in April 2002 over a period of about two weeks. The data provided by the tourist indicate that not all of the marketing material produced by tourist plantations is directly in line with what the tourists desire to see and experience at a plantation. More marketing research is needed at tourist sites to ensure that the sites are successfully transforming what they offer thus meeting the needs (demands) of the dynamic tourist population.

Keywords: tourism, marketing research, plantation, supply and demand, survey

David L. Butler, Ph.D.

Director, International Development Doctoral Program
The Department of Economic Development
The University of Southern Mississippi, and
President, Butler and Associates: A Research Consulting Firm

Address: The Department of Economic Development
The University of Southern Mississippi
Box 5051
Hattiesburg, Mississippi 39406-5051

Telephone: 601-266-4735

Facsimile: 601-266-6219

Email: david.butler@usm.edu
butlerandassociates@yahoo.com

Dr. David Butler earned his PhD from the University of Cincinnati and his MS and BA degrees from Texas A&M University. Dr. Butler is currently director of the International Development Doctoral Program at The University of Southern Mississippi and President of Butler and Associates: A Research Consulting Firm focusing on marketing plans for tourism sites.

Background

The following research builds on Butler's existing research focusing on the supply-side of tourism plantations derived from marketing materials (Butler, 2001). In this research Butler examined 102 sites finding that most tourism plantations offer primarily five topics to attract tourists. These include: histories of the original owners, architecture, current owners, landscapes and gardens, and the U.S. Civil War in order of importance. However, knowing what the plantations supply to tourist is only half of the coin. This research update examines the demand-side of the equation by examining what tourist's desire to see at plantations to determine if supply is accurately meeting the demand (Mcintosh, et. Al., 1996; Tribe, 1995).

Tourism in 2001 was a \$463 billion dollar global industry according to the World Tourism Organization (http://www.worldtourism.org/market_research/facts&figures/menu.htm). However, many tourists' sites have little marketing information to help drive their business decisions on expansion, contraction, and change of formats. Furthermore, smaller tourist sites do not have the necessary skills in their human capital to complete an effective marketing survey of the tourist they serve thus creating a quandary on how to obtain this necessary information. The researcher was requested by the marketing director of a plantation to complete a marketing analysis of their plantation tourism site to use in strategic planning since the plantation owners did not have the expertise to complete the research in house.

Methodology

The goal of the marketing research was to 1) to determine if the demand at this plantation matched the supply found in Butler's research and 2) to obtain the largest number of completed survey instruments possible within a delimited amount of time. To achieve the first goal, the marketing survey instrument was derived in part from the findings of Butler's supply focused-research. The same set of topics found in the research was transcribed into the survey instrument. Each of these topics was arrayed on a Likert scale to allow the tourist/consumer to choose (demand) their desire to see each topic at the plantation. Besides the topics, other questions on the instrument included demographics, how they traveled to the site, zip code, where they learned about the plantation, and more. A total of 19 questions appeared on the instrument. The survey was offered in both English and French to accommodate the expected tourist to the site.

Two tables were set up at the entrance to the plantation with signs clearly indicating free food and drink. As tourist entered the site, they were asked to stop back by the tables on their way out for some free refreshments and to fill out a voluntary and anonymous survey. A series of chairs, and benches were set up in shaded areas for the tourists to sit with their survey, clipboard, and snack to complete the survey. When completed, the clipboard and completed survey was returned to the researcher or assistant. The tourist surveys were conducted for 13 days in April 2002. The total number of surveys collected was 1362, 1266 in English and 96 in French. One of every three tourists, or 31.47%, who came through the plantation during the 13 days completed a survey. This is an excellent response rate which reflects the researcher's years of experience in conducting survey research in the field.

Data and findings

The data from the 1362 surveys was coded and analyzed. From the mean and median scores, a typical visitor profile was created for the plantation owners to allow them to fully digest the vast amount of data collected. The typical visitor at the plantation during April 2002 was a white female who has a bachelor's degree and possibly an advance graduate degree. She has a household income near or above \$100,000 annually and is 50 years old. She learned about the plantation through a brochure or travel guide and is staying in a nearby city and on personal vacation. She may have equal chances of arriving at the site either via tour bus, rental car, or by her own car. She was pleased with the tour and is mostly interested in local history/culture, original owners, architecture and slavery at plantations. If one thing could be changed, she would like to hear more about slavery during the tour. Our tourist's favorite part of the tour was the history told through stories. She also believes that the tour guides are a critically important part of the tour experience. She has plans to visit 1 to 2 more plantations during this trip, most likely those within a 15 mile radius of this plantation. During other trips she has visited approximately 5 other tourist plantations, mostly in Louisiana and Virginia. Our visitor was born and currently lives in California but does not speak a foreign language.

The finding also indicate a partial disconnect between what is generally supplied at tourism plantations and what the tourist are demanding. Remember the top list of topics from Butler's research indicated that histories of the original owners, architecture, current owners, landscapes and gardens, and the U.S. Civil War were the top five topics of supply. The marketing research found that local culture, original owners, architecture, slaves and other were the top five demanded. Both architecture and original owners as topics appear to be both supplied and demanded. However, tourist desired local culture, information on slavery, and various other topics in the other category. Topics supplied but not demanded in the top five list included: current owners, landscapes and gardens and the US civil war.

Conclusions

Two critical pieces of information emerged from this marketing research for the plantation owners. One, they are now offering specialty slave tours to determine if the market exists to support this market. Two, the owners were surprise that their average tourist was highly educated and had a high social-economic status. This is critically important for revenue generation in two ways. One, outside of the actual physical structure, the narrative (story) is the driving force of any tour. With a more educated audience, the narrative can be targeted at a more advanced audience which embraces the level of education of the typical tourist. Plantation operators do not wish for customers to leave a site with the feeling that the tour was "dumbed down." Two, many tourist sites generate a large percentage of their revenue from gift shop sales. However, knowing what to have in a gift shop is in part a function of the buying power of the typical tourist. The plantation owners realized that they could offer more and a larger number of higher end items that would be purchase a remembrance by the customers through their sites thus generating more revenue and ideally higher levels of profitability.

DATE	VISITORS		Total Visitors	SURVEYS			
	Walk ups	Bus/Van	(minus <18)	Total Surveys	Percent of total visitors completing survey	French	English
8-Apr	108	160	268	104	38.81	7	97
9-Apr	151	119	270	95	35.19	4	91
15-Apr	139	269	408	184	45.10	17	167
16-Apr	185	185	370	124	33.51	6	118
22-Apr	222	187	409	138	33.74	11	127
23-Apr	92	240	332	84	25.30	6	78
24-Apr	203	97	300	62	20.67	12	50
25-Apr	142	246	388	100	25.77	2	98
26-Apr	169	305	474	93	19.62	4	89
27-Apr	172	106	278	104	37.41	1	103
28-Apr	198	74	272	99	36.40	6	93
29-Apr	191	106	297	85	28.62	15	70
30-Apr	106	204	310	90	29.03	5	85
Totals	2078	2298	4376	1362	31.47	96	1266

References

Butler, D. L. (2001). "Whitewashing Plantations: The Commodification of a Slave-Free Antebellum South," in *The International Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Administration*, Haworth Press.

McIntosh, R. W, et. al. (1996). *Tourism: Principles, Practices, Philosophies*, Wiley: New York.

Tribe, J. (1996). *The Economics of Leisure and Tourism: Environments, Markets and Impacts*, Butterworth-Heinemann: Great Britain.

World Tourism Organization (2003). "Fact and Figures." http://www.world-tourism.org/market_research/facts&figures/menu.htm.