

# Coastal Agritourism: Case Studies in Integrating the Gulf and South Atlantic Shrimp Industry with Tourism?

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## Project Objective

The purpose of this project was to gain a more in depth understanding as to the types of tourism enhancement strategies implemented through the commercial shrimp fishery and the tourism industry along the Gulf and South Atlantic Coast that could potentially be applied to developing the shrimp tourism experience in South Carolina.

## Background

The Gulf and South Atlantic shrimp industry has been struggling for due to a combination of increased fuel costs and competition with foreign shrimp imports. Due to imports, prices decreased as much as 28 percent from 2000 to 2002 (Southern Shrimp Alliance 2003). In response, the US Congress provided \$5.6 million in assistance to South Carolina (SC) to provide relief options as well as support marketing strategy development for the shrimp industry. A small portion of the funding was designated to examine the potential of developing and marketing new products associated with locally harvested shrimp to coastal visitors in partnership with the SC tourism industry. This was based on the proposition that partnership between the SC shrimp and tourism industries could benefit both sectors due to the magnitude of tourism's impact on the coast and the presence of the state's shrimp industry.

Partnership (as illustrated in Figure 1) makes sense for several reasons:

- The SC travel and tourism industry is the second largest employer and the leading export industry.
- Four of the fastest growing tourism segments in SC are heritage tourism, nature-based tourism, agritourism, and culinary tourism (SCPRT, 2003).
- Commercial shrimp fishery imagery is common in SC coastal destination literature as well as in restaurants.
- Shrimp fishery imagery is important to regional identity, local distinctiveness, culture, and history (Rogelija, 2002).
- The rapid growth of coastal tourism and related development can change the character of traditional fishing communities (Orbach and Johnson, 1989; Baum, 1999; McCay and Cieri, 2000).
- Tourism needs to be established before or early in the fishery decline period "in a manner that is complementary to existing activities rather than solely instead of them" (Baum, 1999; p.47).
- Tourism plays a key role "as a driver for cultural and environmental betterment and local economic resilience" (Grant, 2004; p.234).

According to Telfer and Well (2000), "to maximize benefits from tourism development, ways must be found to increase backward economic linkages, including utilizing local food products in the tourism industry" (p.??). Stronger linkages could be developed between the local seafood industry and coastal tourism by focusing on the availability of fresh, locally caught shrimp and the physical presence of a viable shrimp industry. This may increase the attractiveness of the SC coast, improve the travel experience of coastal visitors and contribute to the sustainability of the shrimp industry. Success stories of coastal agritourism related to the shrimp industry in the Southeastern US can be useful in informing development of strategies for creating linkages.

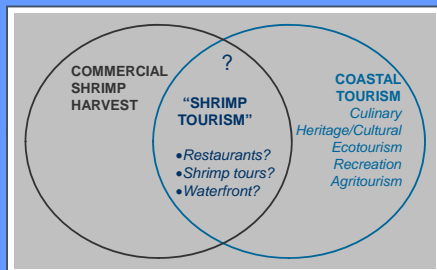


Figure 1: Illustration of partnership potential between tourism and commercial shrimp industries on the coast

## Methodology

This study seeks to gain a more in depth understanding of specific cases along the South Atlantic and Gulf Coasts where partnership or integration of the local seafood industry with the tourism experience is 1) more mature and 2) successful at enhancing marketing of wild caught shrimp directly and indirectly to tourists.

Based on these criteria, the project team selected cases of shrimp and tourism industry partnership on the coast of South Carolina and the gulf coast of Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi. Cases included seafood markets, seafood retailers with valued-added products or innovative business approaches, restaurants with direct relationships to the fishery, shrimp eco-tours, maritime museums, chambers of commerce, shrimp festivals, and cities or planned developments that supported shrimp fishery imagery.

Case study information was collected using Spradley's (1979) ethnographic interview methods and (1980) participant observation techniques. Methods included site visits, phone interviews, email correspondence, and review of written materials from March to May 2005. Componential analysis of the interviews and observations identified categories and patterns of meaning found in the data. Four domains emerged regarding the areas that partnerships were addressing.

## Selected Case Study Results

The data revealed four domains regarding the types of tourism enhancement strategies implemented through commercial fishery and tourism industry partnership—1) integration of commercial fishing culture in waterfront planning as a means to create a unique tourist experience, 2) providing unique experiential education opportunities, 3) developing and/or enhancing regional qualities of the area or state, and 4) innovative marketing and distribution of locally harvested seafood. Tables 1-4 provide selected results.

Table 1. Integration of Commercial Fishing in Waterfront Planning

Community	Findings	Application to Coastal Agritourism
Biloxi, Mississippi	Seafood and tourism highly integrated; Designated space and parking at dock for shrimp fleet in new Hard Rock Development; Partnership with State Department with literature	Ability to partner with private enterprise while maintaining the character of town; local authenticity
	Active integration of advertising and partnership with the Biloxi Bay Chamber of Commerce	Need for facilitated partnerships between the tourism business, marketing, and seafood industry.
Destin, Florida	City of Destin Harbor Plan	Role of locals and city planning in destination image

Table 2. Providing unique experiential education

Community or Business	Findings	Application to Coastal Agritourism
Shrimping Tour, Biloxi, Mississippi	Barriers due to commercial vs. passenger boat regulations	Working under the legal framework.
	Occupational substitution	Willingness to adapt skills.
Shrimp Festival, Gulf Shores, Alabama	Use of local products	Local food products as measure of quality
	Low current involvement with local shrimpers	Need to integrate the local shrimp association
	National festival	Platform to share the local shrimp heritage message.
Shrimp Festival Beaufort, South Carolina	Community festival	Engaging community stakeholders in providing an agritourism experience.
	Integration of shrimpers	Platform for telling the story and sharing about local tourism businesses.

Table 3. Developing and/or enhancing regional qualities

Community or Business	Findings	Application to Coastal Agritourism
Biloxi, Mississippi	Shrimp images with tourism promotions; highly connected industries; State promoted shrimp	Promoting city identity through the seafood industry
South Carolina Low Country	Use of shrimp imagery, but disconnected between the local fisherman and images used of shrimp and boats for promoting the coastal region and businesses; Ex: Shrimp City Band	Need for connecting the tourism sector with the seafood sector for an integrated approach

Table 4. Marketing and distribution of locally harvested seafood

Business	Findings	Application to Coastal Agritourism
Joe Pattie's Seafood, Pensacola, Florida	Premium price, guarantee of quality from 60 local shrimpers; high level of integration between seafood retail business & shrimpers, low integration with Pensacola marketing agencies.	Negotiations between shrimpers and dock; seafood market to support local fleet.
	Relationship with Customers	Education of customers on local seafood quality & products.
	Value added products and internet shipping	Providing additional opportunities with specialty items; Relationship with regional tourism reps.
Zirlott Seafood, Coden, Alabama	Small business diversification through value added product development	Partnership with family to produce products.
	Small-business diversification through shipping product; marketing website	Ability to ship specialty products to the consumer.
Dewey Destin's Seafood Market, Destin, Florida	Restaurant and Market: one owner, entrepreneurial spirit; authentic; preserves heritage and flavor of town	Ability to share fishermen's story and integrate with the tourist experience.
	Buys and sells local product: works with shrimpers directly	Ability of shrimpers to connect with local restaurants.
	Occupation substitution: docks were the location of his family's fishing boats	Capacity to adapt to industry changes, but prefers fishing.

## Discussion

The case studies offer insight on a variety of successfully marketed tourist experiences, including marine ecotourism adventures, a maritime museum, and two shrimp festivals. In each of these cases, there is some focus on the regional fishing heritage. However, the level of integration between the local area tourism promotion organizations and these experiences varies.

At the community level, Biloxi on the whole, seems to provide the best example of integration between the shrimp and tourism industries. One of the important lessons is that community level integration of shrimp and tourism can be facilitated by the local Chamber of Commerce or similar organizations. Ideally, the local Chamber of Commerce or other area promoters recognize the value of the shrimp industry to attracting tourists and their partnership with the industry is authentic. The South Carolina shrimp industry may want to explore stronger partnership with the area promoters.

Partnership between commercial shrimp and industries and communities focused on tourism can offer mutual benefits. The research provides insights that can be used in the development of an ecotourism, agritourism, or culinary tourism market related to locally harvested shrimp products and experiences in South Carolina. For the shrimp industry, the promotion of shrimp consumption and local sales to coastal visitors and restaurants may help the industry achieve a higher price per pound based on quality and uniqueness and achieve a fair return on their investment.

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