A Study of the Attitudes of Impacted Groups Within a Host Community Toward Prolonged Stay Tourist Visitors

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One group which has generally been neglected in research on resort communities has been the host population. This study attempted to determine the impact of winter visitors on Corpus Christi as perceived by residents and particular interest groups in the city. The data revealed a generally positive attitude, suggesting that the major publics in the community are supportive of the state and city tourist agencies in promoting winter tourism.

Introduction

Despite the growing interest of researchers in tourism, one group which has generally been neglected in research on resort communities has been the permanent, or host, population. "Very little is known of how permanent residents feel about their communities or how they react to the presence of large numbers of transients in their community."

This study was designed to evaluate the impact of winter visitors to the Texas Gulf Coast on host communities. Most of these visitors gravitate to South Texas, to either the South Texas Coastal Zone in the lower Rio Grande Valley or the Texas Bend area around Corpus Christi. This study focuses on the latter of these two sub-regions.

Tourism is a highly competitive industry. Some regions have indigenous competitive advantages and South Texas is fortunate in this respect. Tourists come to the extensive Texas coastline to take advantage of a more pleasant winter climate and to escape the bitter weather in their native northern states. Their presence, which has grown exponentially in recent years, has generated a certain amount of controversy.

It has been documented that although they help the economy, tourists also may be responsible for blighting a host area.1-1 No accurate measurement of total winter tourist visitation to South Texas has been attempted, but estimates range from 30,000 to 300,000. Rush reports that 74.4% of winter visitors come from ten states: Iowa, Minnesota, Illinois, Michigan, and Missouri account for 50.8% of all winter visitors, and Wisconsin, Kansas, Nebraska, Indiana, and Ohio contribute an additional 23.6%. Twenty-five percent of these individuals have made previous winter visits. The majority of them (93.5%) are retired or partially retired, and the median age is 67.1 and 60.6 for males and females respectively. They live primarily in their own travel trailers. The most important, and perhaps unique, characteristic of this tourist population is that their median length of stay in the area is approximately 17 weeks.5-4 Typically, they arrive in mid-December and stay through late-April, which suggests that their impact on the host community, for better or worse, is likely to be considerable.

The Texas Tourist Development Agency has indicated that its primary marketing objective at this time is to encourage more winter visitors to come to Texas.1 The case in favor of increased tourism revenues is often presented in terms of benefit to the state. However, tourism is primarily a localized phenomenon and winter visitors to Texas are concentrated in a relatively small area of the state. Hence, the marketing effort devoted to promoting winter visitors to Texas should be related to this particular area’s capacity to absorb this special brand of tourist.

Newspaper headlines such as "Sought-after winter visitors may be rarer (snow) bird," "Climate good for tourists," "Padre seashore visitors double—Bigger than ever in Corpus Christi area," "Old folks welcome, with or without cash," and "Higher winter tourist count might mean best season ever" suggest that winter visitors are welcome, actively sought, and considered a positive addition to the Corpus Christi community. Local observers of the winter visitor phenomenon have noted that their annual migration probably comprises the "biggest single industry in the area."13 An industry of such magnitude has stimulated investment of outside dollars and resulted in the establishment of entertainment programs, services, and facilities.14-15 However, most of the information for these articles was supplied by the Chamber of Commerce, Coastal Bend Tourist Association, Corpus...
Christi Area Tourist Bureau, or local hotel/motel associations, and may not be representative of the feeling of the total community.

Focus of the Study

During the rapid increase of winter visitors to the area, no attempt has been made to assess the attitudes of local residents, entrepreneurs, or those individuals employed by agencies who provide services and facilities used by winter visitors. The state tourist agency and the Corpus Christi Area Convention and Tourist Bureau promote winter visitors on the assumption that their presence is beneficial. This study sought to investigate whether their constituency was in fact in agreement with that assumption. It attempted to determine the impact of winter visitors on Corpus Christi as perceived by residents and particular interest groups in the city.

The descriptive phrase “sparkling city by the sea,” which appears in most of the city’s tourist literature, denotes the principal products offered to winter visitors by the Corpus Christi area, i.e., sun, sand, sea, pleasant weather, and pleasant overall surroundings. Supportive products, such as leisure facilities, accommodations, eating establishments, and adequate infrastructure, augment the desirability of Corpus Christi as a winter vacation site.

These supportive products can be changed by three major publics:

1. Entrepreneurs, concerned with optimizing profit, have the financial potential and motivation to improve the product to meet the needs of winter visitors if they feel it will improve their return on investment.

2. Public sector personnel, through their implementation of policy decisions, are able to influence the product. For example, they are able to provide greater or lesser emphasis on programs and services used by winter visitors.

3. Residents, through their voting ability, influence both capital and operational budget allocation decisions.

For these products to be improved, the three groups should first agree whether it is desirable to attract more winter visitors to the area. Second, if the impact of recreational tourism is considered to be desirable, the nature of the improvement necessary to attract more tourists must be identified. This study was an attempt to reveal whether such a consensus exists toward winter visitors among the three initial publics. Consensus would provide guidance for product development. Explicit identification of conflict areas would form the basis for a dialogue among the three publics to resolve the existing conflicts. These findings could, in turn, form the basis for strategy decisions relating to product development.

The two specific objectives of the study were:

1. To develop a profile of the attitude of Corpus Christi area residents toward winter visitors and thereby identify both favorable and unfavorable attributes of attitude of Corpus Christi area citizens toward winter visitors.

2. To investigate the differentiating attributes of attitude toward winter visitors by residents, entrepreneurs, and public providers of services and facilities in the Corpus Christi area.

Methodology

Operational definitions were required for each of the three community groups to be surveyed. A resident was defined as an individual of at least 18 years of age who had resided in the Corpus Christi area for at least 12 months. An entrepreneur was defined as an individual who owned, managed, or operated a hotel or motel, condominium complex, restaurant, trailer park, mobile home park, or recreation vehicle site. Public providers were defined as personnel employed by the following agencies: the Corpus Christi recreation and parks, police, fire, sanitation, and human relations departments; the Corpus Christi Chamber of Commerce; Senior Community Services; Planning and Urban Development Council; Coliseum and Exposition Hall; City Hall; City Marina; Y.M.C.A.; the Corpus Christi Area Convention and Tourist Bureau; General Bell Telephone Company; Nueces County Recreation and Parks Department; and the Flour Bluff Water Department.

A series of 24 unstructured personal interviews was undertaken over a three-day period with representatives of the resident, entrepreneur, and public provider segments of the Corpus Christi area population. Content analysis of the tapes resulted in an exhaustive list of frequently repeated words and phrases relating to winter visitors. Antonyms were developed for each identified word and phrase. These verbal expressions were then used as the polarized terms in the development of a series of seven-point semantic differential scales. The scales were subsequently grouped and incorporated into a questionnaire.

Forty-five semantic differential scales were retained after pre-testing. Each scale represented a component of attitudes toward winter visitors and the scales in total comprised the questionnaire. These scales are shown in Figure 1. The questionnaires, together with a prepaid return envelope, were mailed to a probability sample of 283 residents drawn from the Corpus Christi telephone directory and 93 entrepreneurs drawn from both the telephone directory and Woodall’s Campground Directory.

Access to respondents in the public provider groups could only be obtained through the cooperation of the administrator of each agency or department. This access was secured after personal interviews or telephone conversations. The questionnaires given to each agency for its employees to complete were delivered by hand to each agency administrator or designated assistant who was responsible for their distribution. Consequently, decisions on the number and selection of respondents within the public provider groups were made, in effect, by the agency administrator rather than by the investigators. The total sample size for public providers of services and facilities emerged as 94. Follow-up telephone calls and mailings resulted in the following final response rates: residents, 55% (156 respondents); entrepreneurs, 59% (55 respondents); and public providers, 53% (50 respondents).
FIGURE 1
A PROFILE OF THE ATTITUDE OF CORPUS CHRISTI
RESIDENTS, ENTREPRENEURS, AND PUBLIC SECTOR
PROVIDERS TOWARD WINTER VISITORS

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The 45 differential scales were scored by assigning digits from one to seven, with one representing the positive pole and seven the negative pole. A one-way analysis of variance was performed on each semantic differential scale to determine whether there were meaningful differences in the attitude attributes of residents, entrepreneurs, and public providers. Significant differences (.05 level) were found on 13 of the 45 attribute scales. These are expressed in Table 1. Twelve of the 13 scales appeared to cluster into three groups concerned with the personal characteristics of winter visitors, their perceived value, and their impact on facilities and services. A series of t-tests was undertaken on these 13 scales to identify differences between pairs of means.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute Attribute</th>
<th>Mean Scores</th>
<th>Level at which F-Test Was Significant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resident n = 156</td>
<td>Entrepreneur n = 55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal characteristics</td>
<td>Nice/awful</td>
<td>2.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Honest/dishonest</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bad/good</td>
<td>2.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unpleasant/pleasant</td>
<td>1.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clean/dirty</td>
<td>2.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fair/unfair</td>
<td>2.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived value</td>
<td>Worthless/valuable</td>
<td>2.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beneficial/harmful</td>
<td>2.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trying to spend/save money</td>
<td>4.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact on facilities and services</td>
<td>Produce no strain on community services</td>
<td>3.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Result in uncrowded/crowded fishing areas</td>
<td>4.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Result in uncrowded/crowded beaches</td>
<td>3.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Believe Corpus Christi area is unfriendly/friendly</td>
<td>2.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Six attributes relating to personal characteristics of winter visitors exhibited significant differences between the three groups. The mean values indicate each of the respondent groups felt winter visitors were nice, honest, good, pleasant, clean, and fair. The t-tests between pairs of means showed no significant differences (.05 level) between residents and public providers. However, in every case, differences were identified (.05 level) between entrepreneurs and residents and between entrepreneurs and public sector providers. Hence, entrepreneurs perceived winter visitors significantly more favorably than did the other two respondent groups.

Three scales showed significant differences between the three groups in their perceived value of winter visitors. The mean scores indicated that all respondent groups perceived winter visitors as highly valuable and beneficial to the economy but also as trying to save money. On the attributes worthless/valuable and beneficial/harmful the t-tests indicated no significant differences between residents and public providers. There were significant differences (.05 level) between entrepreneurs and residents on both scales and between entrepreneurs and public sector providers on the worthless/valuable attribute. Again, entrepreneurs perceived winter visitors to be significantly more beneficial and valuable than the other two respondent groups. The third attribute in this set, trying to spend/save money, exhibited a different alignment of groups. No significant difference was found between entrepreneurs and public sector providers, but there were significant differences (.05 level) between entrepreneurs and residents and residents and public sector providers.

Three attributes related to facilities and services were significant at the .01 level. The t-tests showed no significant differences (.05 level) between public providers and residents on the attributes produce no strain on community services, and result in crowded/uncrowded fishing areas. Significant differences were apparent (.05 level) between entrepreneurs and public providers and between entrepreneurs and residents. On the scale result in crowded/uncrowded beaches, there was a different alignment of groups. No differences were found between entrepreneurs and public sector providers. Significant differences (.05 level) were found between residents and public providers, and residents and entrepreneurs. This reflects the residents' view that beaches were slightly overcrowded, whereas the other two groups did not feel this was the case.

Response to these three clusters of attributes relating to personal characteristics, perceived value, and impact on facilities and services suggests that respondents' attitudes toward winter visitors were influenced by the relative costs and values brought about by those visitors as perceived by each group. They bring additional income to the entrepreneurs who in turn perceived them most favorably. Their presence placed additional responsibilities upon public providers and requires them to accrue additional resources in order to service the winter visitors. Local residents sometimes have to vie with winter visitors for the same resources. Hence, public providers and residents generally exhibited significantly less favorable attitudes toward winter visitors.

Believe Corpus Christi area is unfriendly/friendly was the only other scale significant at the .05 level. The mean scores indicate that each respondent group felt winter visitors believed the Corpus Christi area was friendly. The only significant difference (.05 level) shown by the t-tests was between residents and entrepreneurs.

While the analysis of variance statistical procedure tested for significant differences between the three groups on each individual attribute, an attitude is usually considered to be comprised of the summation of these attributes. There is no basis for assuming equal intervals...
between scales, so the data were transposed into ordinal form and a Kruskal-Wallis test was undertaken. In effect, this is analogous to an analysis of variance test using ordinal data. This provided a composite measure of attitude attributes for each of the three groups. The results were significant at the .001 level, suggesting that the three respondent groups (residents, entrepreneurs, and public providers of services and facilities) differed significantly in their overall attitude toward winter visitors.

Summary and Conclusions

The study had two specific objectives. The first was to develop a profile of the attitude of Corpus Christi residents toward winter visitors. This was accomplished by the use of semantic differential scales. (Graphic portrayal of the attitudes of the three respondent groups is displayed in Figure 1.) Results indicate that the people of Corpus Christi have a generally positive attitude toward winter visitors. The differences between the various respondent groups generally reflected different degrees of positiveness as opposed to any group indicating antipathy toward the visitors. This generally positive attitude suggests that the major publics in the community are supportive of the efforts of the state and city tourist agencies in promoting winter tourism. Support for efforts to entice more winter visitors to Corpus Christi through product development and promotion appears to be indigenous.

However, public service providers did feel that winter visitors placed some strain on community services. Since public providers are likely to be in closer proximity to winter visitors who utilize community services, they are likely to be most sensitive to visitor impacts upon these same services. Residents do feel that winter visitors tend to crowd fishing areas and beaches. These public areas are perhaps typical of locations where residents might come into direct contact with winter visitors. Since providers and citizens indicate some evidence of strain on resources, albeit relatively small, greater numbers of visitors might exacerbate this problem. Nevertheless, there does appear to be a harmonious relationship at this time between the perceived personal characteristics of winter visitors and Corpus Christi citizens.

The second objective was to investigate the differentiating attributes of attitude toward winter visitors by residents, entrepreneurs, and public providers of services and facilities. Some differentiating attributes and overall differences in attitude were identified between the groups. Not surprisingly, the attitude of entrepreneurs, the group most likely to gain directly from the visitors, was most positive. They perceived the personal characteristics of winter visitors most positively and perceived them to place least strain on city resources. They were also relatively dissatisfied with the level of visitor spending, reflecting their preeminent concern with direct expenditures. This finding confirms that of Rothman, who found that those who favored tourist development were more likely to be economically dependent upon vacationers.

It is anticipated that this study will serve as a baseline study to be replicated periodically in order to monitor changes in the attitudes of the host community over time, as the number of winter visitors increases. If there is any validity to the concept of saturation levels, psychological saturation resulting from increasing numbers of winter visitors may ultimately be reached, and this would result in loss of goodwill and support by Corpus Christi residents toward tourists. Although the attitudes of all groups are generally positive at this time, there are some tentative indications of stressful contact. Periodic monitoring of these primary constituent groups will alert agencies to any changes in temperaments of the community toward winter visitors and enable them to initiate appropriate corrective action.

8. Brooks Peterson, "Sought-after winter visitor may be rarer (snow) bird," Corpus Christi Caller (December 2, 1973).
11. Bill Walraven, "Old folks welcome, with or without cash," Corpus Christi Caller (February 27, 1975).
14. Ibid.
17. Rothman, loc. cit.