



COLLEGE OF HOSPITALITY, RETAIL, AND SPORT MANAGEMENT

**African-American tourists boosting South Carolina's economy**  
*The SmartState Center of Excellence in Tourism and Economic Development  
at the University of South Carolina.*

African-American tourists are responsible for a whopping \$2.4 billion in economic impact for South Carolina. That is just one of the findings from a study recently completed by USC's SmartState Center of Economic Excellence in Tourism in partnership with JC & Associates. The study, jointly funded by the Center and SCPRT, also found significant potential to grow this segment, along with high interest from travelers of *all* races outside of the state wanting to explore our African-American cultural experiences. For example, a 5% increase in visitors interested in this niche would produce an impact of \$118 Million.

Other interesting findings include the fact that there are significant differences between African-Americans and other tourists on the cultural experiences they would like to explore in the state. African-Americans, for example, have no interest in visiting plantations, whereas this is high on the list for other groups of travelers. What *all* travelers have in common is the desire to taste African-American cuisine. So keep serving up that Low Country Boil, oyster roasts, Frogmore Stew, shrimp and grits, and barbecue! Visitors interested in this niche want authentic experiences. In other words, visitors interested in niche, regardless of race, want to live it. The study finds that many of the sites and locations that could satisfy these needs are marginal in need of modernization, technology, and capital improvements, pointing to the need for local and state governments to invest in product development so that tourists can get the experiences they desire. The dollars they spend not only impact our region but also bring dollars to underserved communities as new businesses are created from opportunity.

We know that travel decisions of African-Americans are closely related to their perceptions of welcome and racial acceptance, and this study confirmed that: 50% of African-Americans who have not been here before actually fear racial discrimination if they travel here. This number is slightly less (40%) for those who have already visited this year, but is still a barrier to growing this market. An investment into branding, product development, marketing and promotions will send a welcoming message to come share our experiences in the way a visitor to New Orleans shares her experiences- let visitors experience Charleston and South Carolina in all of our uniqueness- from the lowcountry to the upstate.



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