

teaching note

Craven County: In pursuit of sustainable tourism

Summary of the Case

This case focuses on issues regarding the promotion of sustainable tourism in Craven County, North Carolina in the U.S. The county has rich assets, including numerous water resources and historical sites that can draw domestic and international tourists. A branding study was conducted in 2013 and in 2017 twelve interviews were conducted with relevant stakeholders in the county to determine opinions about the status of existing tourism products and identify obstacles related to the future development of water-related attractions in order to maximize waterway use in a sustainable manner. The interviewees noted that Craven County waterways are an underutilized asset with the potential to expand market share and attract visitors. They also noted that existing marketing materials demonstrate the lack of a strong unified message related to water-related recreational activities. The study gathered information regarding the perceptions held by tourism and hospitality stakeholders to identify strategic recommendations for Craven County destination managers to ensure that tourism products are developed in an economically, environmentally, and socially conscious manner. The interviewees have helped to identify best practice ideas to promote waterway access and activities in a sustainable manner through the development of a strategic marketing plan. The case provides background materials for studying the marketing and promotion issues related to furthering sustainable tourism initiatives. The county could use assistance with its planning with regard to sustainable tourism and asks students to consider ways to help it promote sustainable tourism.

Teaching and Learning Objectives

Below are the teaching and learning objectives for this case.

- 1. Teaching Objective:** Provide students with an opportunity to gain an understanding of sustainable tourism destination marketing
Learning Objective: Students will be able to explain concepts related to sustainable tourism destination marketing in their own words.
The case achieves this objective by:
 - Using language related to tourism destination marketing
 - Having Craven County serve as an example of a tourism destination with marketing and promotion needs with regard to sustainable tourism.
- 2. Teaching Objective:** Offer students' current information about planning and marketing tourism for a destination with regard to strategic marketing for sustainable tourism.
Learning Objective: Students will be able to explain tourism

marketing analysis and tactics needed for developing strategic marketing initiatives to enhance sustainable tourism.

The case achieves this objective by:

- Providing relevant information about tourism facts and figures.
 - Presenting some of the considerations and issues that tourism planners and marketers need to consider when planning, marketing, and promoting sustainable tourism
- 3. Teaching Objective:** Stimulate student discussion regarding sustainable tourism planning and marketing.
 - 4. Learning Objective:** Students will be able to critically examine and evaluate different aspects of the sustainable tourism planning and marketing environment of a destination.

This case achieves this by:

- Focusing on the natural, economic, and social-cultural environments of the destination provided in the case study example.

Suitability for Use

This case is suitable for use by instructors and students in undergraduate and graduate courses related to tourism in classroom settings where the instructors want to provide students with opportunities to expand their knowledge of tourism planning, marketing, sustainability, and promotion. Classes focused on sustainable tourism or destination marketing class would be best suited for this case.

Sources and Methods of Collecting Information for the Case

Information for this case was collected via observations, interviews, and reading website materials, books, and articles related to the topics presented in the case study.

Teaching Approach and Suggested Sequence of Timeframe

Instructors may use this case study in various ways. For example, it can be used as an individual assignment, a group assignment, a combination of individual and group activities, and as a class discussion tool. If it is used as an individual assignment, students can read the case and then answer the discussion questions in writing as an assignment outside of class. Then, as a suggestion, during a face-to-face class session or in an online discussion forum, students can discuss and compare their answers. If it is used as a group assignment, students can also read the case study and answer the discussion questions in groups. In addition, groups could be asked to find another example of tourism planning and promotion and then write their own

case studies. This case also lends itself to a large class discussion session that occurs over one or more face-to-face class sessions or online discussion forums. In addition, this case could be used as the basis of a semester long project to develop a strategic marketing plan to address sustainable tourism in the county.

A Possible Lesson Plan

As a suggestion, before class, students could be asked to read the case and summarize it in their own words to clarify their understanding of its focus and contents. Then, during several class periods of 60 -75 minutes, students could get into small groups of two to four students to come to consensus on their ideas to the answers to the questions about the case and each group could be asked to provide their summary of the case's issues and their ideas regarding the case to the class (approximately 25 minutes). Alternatively, each group could be assigned a question or questions to answer, be given time outside of class to prepare their answer(s), and then present them to the class (approximately 25 minutes). During the presentation period, the instructor should allow for questions and further discussion. For the remainder of the class (10 minutes), the instructor could ask the students to react to the case and provide the instructor with their original summary of the case and whether their thoughts and ideas regarding the topics changed as a result of the group discussions.

Discussion Points and Questions

The discussion questions are grouped according to how they might be used most effectively.

Individual Assignments

1. *What is sustainable tourism? Define the concept in your own words.*

Answers may vary, especially if an instructor might consider asking students to write the definition in his or her own words. According to the United Nations Environment Programme and the World Tourism Organization (UNEP, UNTWO, 2005, p.12), sustainable tourism can be defined as, *"Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities."*

2. *What are stakeholders, what is stakeholder theory, and why do stakeholders matter?*

Stakeholders are those parties with an interest in an issue. The stakeholder approach and theory focuses on the tenet that the management of resources needs to consider the interests of all parties involved. The answer about why stakeholders matter may vary; however, attending to stakeholders matters because the achievement of an organization's goals, and in this case effective tourism planning, marketing, and promotion, depend

on "satisfying key stakeholders according to their definition of what is valuable" (Bryson, 2004, p.25).

3. *Briefly describe Craven County in terms of its location and its current tourism offerings.*

Craven County, North Carolina is located in the United States (U.S.) between the Piedmont area of North Carolina and the beaches of the Crystal Coast. Craven County was established in 1712, is the birthplace of Pepsi-Cola, and home to much history and many historical sites. Craven County had a population of 105,466 people according to the 2014 census data with approximately 46,000 households with an annual household income of \$48,786, and is home to eight municipalities. The Department of Defense is the largest employer in the county followed by the Craven County Schools and the Carolina East Health System/Regional Medical Center. Craven County ranks 36 out of 100 counties in North Carolina regarding tourism expenditures. New Bern hosts the popular Mum Fest festival in mid-October and for that event, the New Bern tourism website lists 12 lodging properties, including 7 chain hotel properties, 4 bed and breakfast inns, and 1 campground (Visit New Bern, 2017). New Bern is home to several independent restaurants, including seafood places and brewpubs, in its historic downtown area. Nearby, Havelock has six lodging properties (five chains and one independent property) listed on hotels.com (2017), a popular online booking site, and also is home to a few restaurants located within close proximity to the lodging properties. With regard to transportation, the area is serviced by several highways and a regional airport with direct flights to cities such as Charlotte, NC, Raleigh-Durham, NC, and Atlanta, Georgia. The county has extensive natural resources, including waterways and national forest lands. It has a minimum of 24 publicly accessible boating access points and 5 National forest beach access areas along the Neuse River. Fishing is a popular activity in the county and it also has numerous dedicated paddle trail launch sites, ranging in difficulty from easy to moderate to demanding.

In-Class Activities

4. *What are the steps needed to effectively plan and promote a strategic marketing plan for tourism in an area?*

Answers will vary. However, a strategic marketing plan can be helpful to a destination and creating one includes several steps. These steps include: developing a vision statement; developing a mission statement; identifying and developing goals, objectives, strategies, and tactics; and then the market analysis and the statistics necessary to understand the context of marketing a destination need to be developed.

5. Complete a SWOT analysis of Craven County as it relates to tourism.

A possible SWOT analysis list for this case could look something like the following (remember that answers may vary):

Strengths:

- Abundant natural resources
- Climate
- Historic/Heritage sites/assets (such as Tryon Palace)
- Civil War History
- State/National Park assets – Croatan National Forest, Flannerys Beach/Neuse River Recreation Area
- Events and festivals (such as Mum Fest)
- Airport
- Waterways – confluence of Trent and Neuse Rivers
- Natural habitats – abundant fishing and hunting
- Military influence
- Fishing
- Strong reputation – quality experiences
- Weaknesses
- Roadway transportation – Highway 17 and 70
- Lack of a populous urban center
- Cultural resources lacking
- Workforce shortages
- Environmental concerns, regulatory constraints
- Geographic constraints
- Comparatively limited retail and entertainment options
- Tax base/tourism revenues in comparison to Carteret County
- Perceived poor water quality
- Lack of clearly marked paddling and hiking trails
- Communication of water activities/access points
- Opportunities
- Roadway improvements – DOT projects to improve Highway 17 and 70, future Interstate 43
- Retail/entertainment development – commercial business growth
- Proximity to beaches of the Crystal Coast
- Development of long-term multi-faceted tourism strategy
- Retirement destination
- Outdoor recreation - natural resource promotion
- Dining/culinary experiences
- Ecotourism experiences
- Public access docks/pier in downtown New Bern
- Education about water and natural resources

Threats

- Popularity of beach destinations nearby
- Outmigration of young populations
- Lack of coordination amongst local, state, and federal enti-

ties

- Lack of inventory of available buildings/lots along waterways
- Lack of existing retail/restaurants along waterways
- Geographic location – susceptibility to weather events/natural disasters
- Environmental sensitivity – restrictions in terms of land developed
- Lack of trail connectivity, access points, available parking

6. What would be possible vision and mission statements for Craven County?

Answers will vary. An example vision statement could be the following: Craven County tourism, enjoying a rich past and a bright future." A mission statement could read, "Craven County will grow its tourism market share by immersing visitors in the history of the area and showcase natural beauty in a manner that influences stewardship of the rich ecological, historical, and cultural assets that have thrived for 300 years and will live on for future generations." Stakeholder opinions and viewpoints should be incorporated, along with the place image that is most influential and branding messages that can easily promote travel, to accomplish the goals of increasing revenue and market share.

Group Assignments

7. What suggestions do you have for new branding for this area and why?

Answers will vary. However, Craven County could leverage the importance of water assets to the region's image and use water as a branding tool for recruiting tourists and increasing market share. Although Craven County does not feature beaches and lacks a centralized tourist draw, the county has beautiful scenery and numerous options to appeal to the most casual and extreme adventure-seeker. Itineraries should be created to appeal to families, active retirees, and eco-tourists. These itineraries could help assemble the activities in a manageable and easily accessible manner for guests. Using these itineraries, destination and front-line tourism associates could more easily promote activities and encourage longer visits. The county-sponsored website, visitnewbern.com, is viewed by many potential visitors. These individuals should be able to visualize themselves partaking in water activities and planning trips to the destination. An "eco" section of the website could highlight trips for target markets, using vivid imagery of the scenery and people, as well as videos. Social media could be used to further promote the imagery and special events.

8. What general and specific recommendations do you have for Craven County with regard to enhancing sustainable tourism in general

in the county, and water-based, sustainability tourism specifically?

Answers will vary. Suggestions might include the following: Craven County has the potential to market its destination to the 48.2 million trips taken in North Carolina annually. North Carolina features an abundance of activities, many of which are present in Craven County. The exceptions would likely be urban sightseeing, nightclubs, art galleries, and zoos/aquariums/aviaries. For the coastal region, Craven County incorporates most activities in its inventory set, except traditional beach, urban sightseeing, art galleries, and zoos/aquariums and aviaries. Offerings with room to improve include biking and cycling, along with overall improvement and connectivity of trails. Clearly designating public docks in downtown New Bern would enhance retail and dining options. Public piers and walkways would connect visitors to the waterways. Historic exhibits on the waterfront, especially near Tryon Palace, to educate visitors about maritime history and military significance of the waterways, would improve the features of the waterfront. Story-telling is an important part of eliciting a positive visitor experience and tying into cultural heritage aspects of the local waterways would reinforce the importance of the region in the state and nation's history.

To assist with efforts related to sustainable tourism, including water-based tourism activities, a collaborative management approach in local government can be helpful for increasing tourism demand through marketing a destination, building infrastructure, facilitating investment, and developing products in a manner that reflects the interests of the local people (Dredge, Ford, & Whitford, 2011). In addition, identifying opportunities to optimize tourism by increasing consumers' expenditures on tourism, securing a longer length of stay, and balancing seasonality factors can help lead to a more sustainable tourism model for a destination (Gössling, Ring, Dwyer, Andersson, & Hall, 2016).

As noted, New Bern features Tryon Palace, the History Center, Convention Center, shopping and restaurant options, as well as the historic district with homes dating back 300 years. This adds to the local charm of the area and city ordinances have height restrictions for buildings, which are intended to protect the aesthetic and historic charm. These developmental limitations help protect the cultural identity that make the area unique and could potentially be challenged in the future to attract large-scale economic development. Thus, policy-makers must be aware of these perceptions to ensure that the quality of the experience in New Bern is not eroded. Previous studies have shown that parking is a concern among stakeholders, so this issue may need to be addressed in the future. A recent

study conducted about a possible expansion of the Convention Center stated that better communication of available public parking may solve this issue in the interim, as well as communicating with local businesses and employees to use off-site parking (Brand Print Report, 2013).

The military base provides a strong economic base, serves as the largest local employer, and provides an influx of new residents and visitors. The local tourism economy is benefited by the presence of the military service members, as well as their dependents. In general, the base is a source of curiosity and tourism inquiries. This adds to the overall history of the region and provides an additional historical draw. The Havelock Tourist & Event Center provides visitors with a timeline of MCAS Cherry Point's history and an aviation exhibit to view the lineage of various aircraft and their mission-related importance in the nation and world.

Group or Individual Semester or Term-long Projects

9. *Create a strategic marketing plan for Craven County (this could be an extended class project).*

Answers may vary. A plan could potentially include content such as the following types of information.

- **Messages.** Information on current marketing messages including the results of the stakeholder survey conducted in 2013 (North Star Destination Strategies, 2013).
- **Vision and mission.** Ideas for vision and mission statements could be mentioned. For example, the current county-sponsored tourism website, visitnewbern.com, does not feature a comprehensive mission or vision statement. Further stakeholder participation could help identify possible vision statements, but possible Craven County vision statements could include the following:
 - Explore Craven County's charm where history lives and thrives in a beautiful natural environment; Explore Craven County's charm, where history and nature come together...and flow throughout our community... in a thriving cultural and ecological hub of activity;
 - Explore the charm of Craven County where history and nature come together like the confluence of our rivers to showcase our rich past and vibrant future;
 - Explore Craven County where charm flows throughout our historic streets and natural waterways.

The key for Craven County is to not to get stuck in the past, for while history is an important draw for tourism, the vision should communicate how it leads the region into the future. The connection to nature and water is imperative to the county's identity and stakeholders felt it was a draw for both

residents and tourists.

- **Goals.** Possible goals include the following:
 - Increase occupancy tax revenues
 - Build awareness and increase recognition as a coastal destination
 - Increase responsible use of waterways and nature areas
 - Strengthen branding messages surrounding water activities
 - Update policies to reflect a focus on sustainability and preserving the historical, cultural, and environmental assets for the enjoyment of future generations
 - Build stakeholder networks related environmental, maritime and cultural needs
- **Objectives.** Possible objectives include the following:
 - Promote hotels and bed and breakfast destinations to ecotourists, retirees, and young families
 - Create a branding campaign to highlight water access and proximity to coastal waters
 - Create itineraries to promote water access points, public parks, and state and federal lands
 - Implement education programs to highlight sustainability efforts
 - Create water –related marketing messages on the website and social media to reach target audiences
 - Develop a committee of stakeholders to address environmental concerns and development of water activities.
- **Strategies.** Possible strategies include the following:
 - Design leisure travel packages to promote visitation to water and nature enthusiasts
 - Build itinerary maps and highlight various trails
 - Promote the use of outfitters to help tourists accomplish travel goals
 - Develop a follow-up survey for visitors using water attractions to gauge opinions and future expectations
 - Develop clean-up initiatives with local non-profit and government organizations
 - Schedule dates and advertise for volunteers to clean waterways, trails, and forests
 - Create annual awards to recognize environmental stewardship in local ceremonies
 - Fund social media and website promotion that target audiences with water interests
 - Set quarterly meetings at various locations to bring stakeholders together to discuss water attractions, successes, failures, opportunities, threats, visitor concerns, and future plans
- **Tactics.** Possible tactics include the following:
 - Set committee agenda and update guest lists

- Track survey results
- Quantify metrics for social media and web campaigns
- Update maps with travel details, concerns, hours, closings, etc.

Specific recommendations will also vary. Tactics discussed in the case can be expanded to include the following additional kinds of information:

- **Imagery.** Include people and water connectivity in marketing materials. A review of existing marketing materials shows the use of beautiful pictures of local waterways, but little promotion to demonstrate how to connect directly. Imagery currently consists of waterways serving as a scenic backdrop. More images of various activities may strengthen the brand image of Craven County.
- **Outdoor dining.** Waterfront dining establishments are popular and Craven County does not have many of these options. Stakeholders mentioned that it is difficult to obtain permits to develop restaurants on the water due to restrictions from the North Carolina Coastal Area Management Act (CAMA), which seeks to provide coordination between state and local entities to mitigate environmental concerns (Craven County, 2009). Waterfront development is very restrictive, requiring buffer zones, and subject to additional guidelines. These restrictions and how development could address the restrictions and still add to the county's offerings could be explored.
- **Boat rentals/Scenic tours.** Accessibility to water is a key to connecting visitors to the natural resources in Craven County. Options should be more clearly marketed to the general public, so they can take advantage of existing waterway activities. There are few captains offering regularly-scheduled scenic tours on the river ways. Tours could provide guests with views of the natural areas up and down the rivers (the Trent and Neuse), as well as residential areas, such as the home of famous novelist, Nicholas Sparks.
- **Key waterfront attraction area.** A destination should be created in Craven County where visitors could learn, eat, and play. Many activities throughout the county are currently fragmented; thus, it is hard to find one place where a tourist can spend the day or an afternoon. A more centralized plan for activity could help to provide better waterfront parks, restaurants, retail shops, overnight accommodations, public access areas, and docks to improve the overall tourism experience.
- **Itineraries.** Create itineraries online so tourists can pre-plan and map activities along waterways. This should include transportation, outfitting, dining, and lodging options. Paddle and hiking itineraries could increase the length of stay for visitors. Connecting visitors to public parks and businesses in the re-

gion that can support their nature experience makes sense. The MST trail, Croatan National Forest, state sites, municipally-owned sites, and county-owned sites are tremendous. Without a meaningful process to understand the opportunities, potential market share is lost.

- **Expand arts and cultural options.** Downtown New Bern hosts a monthly art walk to encourage residents and visitors to frequent local galleries and retail stores. There are also smaller community theater productions and historical programs at Tryon Palace. The North Carolina Symphony also performs in New Bern on a quarterly basis; however, the region lacks a cultural hub for artistic expression.
- **Expand festivals to connect to waterways.** Recently a couple of new events have connected visitors to waterways, including a historic boat show in New Bern and a seaplane exhibition in Bridgeton. These types of festivals and events can draw tourists to the area and create educational opportunities to immerse the audiences in the importance and history of local waterways. Mum Fest is the largest festival occurring annually in downtown New Bern, but it has little connection with the Trent and Neuse River. The expansion of events could incorporate this aspect in more ways.
- **Strengthen maritime history.** There are few educational opportunities to connect to Craven County's maritime past. Development could seek to highlight this history and the importance of the Neuse River, Trent River, and their tributaries in the past boom of the community since its inception in colonial times. One stakeholder mentioned adding a battery park at the site of Tryon Palace to improve upon this effort, much like Charleston has at its historic Battery Park. History exhibits on the waterfront, especially near Tryon Palace, to educate about maritime history and military significance of the waterways, would improve the features of the waterfront. Story-telling is an important part of eliciting a positive visitor experience and tying into cultural heritage aspects of the local waterways would reinforce the importance of the region in the state and nation's history.
- **Riverwalk / Improve walkability.** The City of New Bern has plans to improve walkability and connect to the exiting Riverwalk, to extend it from Lawson Creek Park along the river through downtown and the riverside historic district (New Riverwalk Extension Opens, n.d.). Clearly designating public docks in downtown New Bern would enhance retail and dining options. Public piers and walkways can connect visitors to the waterways.
- **Improve public fishing access.** There are few fishing piers in the downtown area of New Bern that are publicly promoted. Several state and federal parks have access points to local waterways, but are somewhat off the beaten path. There are few

public piers for fishing in the freshwater and brackish waters. Ample boating opportunities exist, but a centralized communication strategy for fishing opportunities could improve outlying areas. Havelock features a small fishing pier that could be expanded at the newly created Slocum Creek Park.

10. *Who could be target markets for tourism for this county? Describe at three market segments and explain why they might be targets for tourism marketing in the county.*

Answers may vary. Three possible target markets, based on work by Williams and Page (2010), include the following:

- **Active retiree.** The active retiree is a target customer that is aged 55-65 years old and seeks an outdoor and active lifestyle. This individual may make several trips to a destination and ultimately decide to relocate. This person has a high disposable income and may start a second or third career during retirement. This individual is seeking connectivity to the community, historical and cultural opportunities, quality dining, and volunteer networks, and is concerned with sustainability initiatives. This person is interested in the local real estate market and quality of life factors for residents, including accessibility to quality health care. This person has a Facebook account and subscribes to lifestyle magazines and reads the newspaper online or in print.
- **Young eco-tourist.** This person is aged 25-35 years old and is seeking authentic opportunities to connect with nature and get off the beaten path. This individual is highly concerned with sustainability initiatives and reducing his or her carbon footprint. This individual may seek alternative lodging options and invests in high-quality outfitting supplies. This person may spend a longer duration in the community. This individual will spend money at local retailers and may special order products to suit his or her needs. This person identifies with well-known outdoor clothing and equipment brands and uses Instagram and Twitter accounts.
- **Family of four.** This is a young parent, typically a mother, aged 35-45 years old, seeking to provide a quality vacation for her family, to include a spouse and two children. This person is cost-conscious and seeking recreational activities. This individual wants educational and entertainment options. This person seeks lodging and dining options that are affordable. This individual is socially-conscious, but not particularly concerned with sustainability issues. These person likes to visit historical destinations, but prefers hands-on activities for kids. This person identifies with family-oriented brands and uses social media on Instagram, Pinterest, and Facebook.

Suggestions for Additional Reading Material

- Edgell, D. L. & Swanson, J. (2013). *Tourism policy and planning: Yesterday, today, and tomorrow*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Hassan, S. S. (2000). Determinants of market competitiveness in an environmentally sustainable tourism industry. *Journal of Travel Research*, 38 (3), 239-245.
- Simpson, K. (2001). Strategic planning and community involvement as contributors to sustainable tourism development. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 4(1), 3-41.
- Waligo, V., Clarke, J., & Hawkins, R. (2013). Implementing sustainable tourism: A multi-stakeholder involvement management framework. *Tourism Management*, 36(3), 342-353. doi: 10.1016/j.tourman.2012.10.008

References

- Craven County (2009). Craven county CAMA core land use plan. Retrieved February 13, 2019 from <http://digital.ncdcr.gov/cdm/ref/collection/p16062coll9/id/155178>.
- Hotels.com (2017). Retrieved March 19, 2017 from <https://www.hotels.com/de1491094/hotels-havelock-north-carolina/>.
- North Star Destination Strategies (2013, October 13). New Bern final brand print report. Retrieved March 1, 2017 from: <http://www.newbernncc.org/files/8714/0793/9294/>.
- New Riverwalk Extension Opens. (n.d.). Retrieved March 1, 2017 from <http://www.newbern-nc.org/news/new-riverwalk-extension-opens/>.
- Visit New Bern. Charming hotel discounts (2017). Retrieved March 1, 2017 from https://www.visitnewbern.com/special-offers/#gf_11.
- United Nations Environmental Programme and World Tourism Organization (2005). Making tourism more sustainable - A guide for policy makers*, UNEP and UNWTO. Paris, France & Madrid, Spain.
- Williams, K.C. & Page, R.A. (2010). Marketing to the generations. *Journal of Behavioral Studies in Business* 11 (1), 8-10.