Tourism in Savannah

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Tourism Profile

- Visitors: 13.7 million
  - 7.8 million overnight
  - 5.9 million day trippers
- Total Overnight Spending: $2.13 billion
- Hotel/motel tax collections: $19.3 million
- Each Chatham County household would need to be taxed an additional $1,036 per-year to replace taxes generated by tourism economic activity

1 Longwoods International, 2015
2 City of Savannah, 2016
3 Georgia Department of Economic Development, 2015
Tourism Management & Ambassadorship Department

Established in 2014 to:
• Take proactive steps to balance residents’ quality of life while sustaining the tourism industry;
• Support a fair regulatory environment aimed at protecting neighborhood integrity and tourism industry; and
• Improve the downtown experience

Four key areas:
1. Tourism Management
2. Enforcement & Compliance
3. Community Improvements
4. Ambassadorship

28 person staff
Vacation Rentals

• 67% of travelers planned to stay in a rental in 2016, up from 59% in 2015 and 52% in 2014. *Tripadvisor, 12/2015*

• The average owner grosses $28,000 in annual income. *Homeway, 6/2016*

• 87% of U.S. Respondents more likely to book due to increased availability of online information. *Tripadvisor, 3/2015*
Short-Term Vacation Rentals

• **Short-term Vacation Rental:** An accommodation for transient guests where, in exchange for compensation, a residential dwelling is rented for lodging for a period of time not to exceed 30 consecutive days. Such use may or may not include an on-site manager. For the purposes of this definition, a residential dwelling shall include all housing types and shall not include group living or other lodging uses.

• **Transient Guest:** A person who resides at a place other than his usual place of residence for no more than 30 consecutive days in exchange for compensation.
Zoning Text Amendment

- Defined short-term residential rentals
- Established in mixed-use zoning districts where “inns” were already permitted
- Created occupancy requirements
- Limited visible evidence of rental
- Provided parking requirements
Established certification process:
- Application
- Business Acceptance Approval (Zoning Verification)
- Sworn Code Compliance Verification Form
- Written Exemplar between property owner/rental management company and tenant
- Proof of ownership & insurance
• Require Business Tax Certificate
• Remit hotel-motel tax remittance
• Require posting of STVR certificate number on any advertising
• Pay annual fee
  • Initial application fee: $150 to $300
  • Renewal fee: $50 to $150
Regulatory Ordinance

- Define responsibilities of rental agent
  - Respond within two hours after notified by City of issue(s)
  - Monitor the STVR for compliance

- Provide process to address violations
  - City must notify owner of citation for a code violation
  - Three-tiered fine structure:
    - $500 first offense
    - $750 second offense
    - $1000 third offense
  - Three code violations for property within 12 months result in the City revoking certificate for one year
Number of STVRs

- Savannah Historic District: 517 (76%)
- Victorian District: 148 (22%)
- Mid-City District: 13 (2%)

678 as of April 14, 2017
STVR Ownership

Jan 1, 2015 – Mar 31, 2017

249 (37%)

429 (62%)

- Inside Savannah-Chatham County
- Outside Savannah-Chatham County
STVR Complaints
Jan 1, 2015 – Mar 31, 2017

- Noise: 21 (25%)
- Compliance: 27 (33%)
- Parking: 12 (15%)
- Quality of Life (trash, tree lawns, etc): 22 (27%)
TMAD: STVR ENFORCEMENT

Jan 1, 2015 – Mar 31, 2017

- Uncertified STVR: 83
- SVR #: 83
- Occupancy: 5
- Document Required: 21
- Exterior appearance: 48
- Tax Rate: 15
- Expired STVR: 1
- Agent Info: 2
“…make policy recommendations to the Tourism Management & Ambassadorship Department, City Manager and Mayor and Aldermen in the areas of parking and the routine of tourism-related traffic activities, the qualification and licensing of tour guides, and the enforcement of tourism management regulations and other related issues.”

- Uphold restrictions on double decker buses
- Golf cart shuttle service
- Ordinance Revisions:
  - Tour Service for Hire
  - Horse-Drawn Carriage
  - Quadricycles
- Tourism Management Plan
- Economic Impact Study for Tourism
Tour Service Enforcement

Trolley

Walking

Motorcoaches

Carriages

Segways

Quadricycles

Bicycles
Preservation Fee

- Used in Charleston, SC and Savannah, GA
- Collection of preservation fee for each person on sightseeing tour within Historic District
- Remitted by tour service companies
- Supports tourism-related capital projects
Preservation Fee Collections

- 2013: $639,230
- 2014: $693,096
- 2015: $745,222
- 2016: $744,016
Downtown Enforcement

- Code issues related to zoning, property maintenance and sanitation
- Outdoor Cafes & Menu Boards
- Street Vendor Permits
Ambassador Program

- Provide the highest level of public safety and enhanced services for downtown users
- Support crime prevention, public safety and security
- Provide information and hospitality services to residents, businesses and visitors
- Promote a high-quality environment by identifying and reporting maintenance problems and needs
- Supplement existing City services
• Tourism Hotline: 525-1500
  – Monday-Friday, 8AM-11PM
  – Saturday, 11AM-11PM

• **Tourism@savannahga.gov**

• 311 Call Center