



The Qualitative and Quantitative Benefits of Film-Induced Tourism in Georgia



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Film Tourism in Georgia

The State of Georgia has long recognized the economic impact of film production, i.e. the money spent on equipment, crews, location fees, hotels rooms, etc. where location shooting takes place. Its value to the tourism sector, however, has gone largely unacknowledged and has never been truly quantified, but an attempt should be made to study the economic impact of 'film induced tourism.' It is shortsighted to concentrate on the money spent in film and television production without regard for the tourism and advertising effects generated. As acknowledged by Riley, Baker and Van Doren in the study "Movie Induced Tourism,"

"In the arena of research, movie-induced tourism data has been less apparent. Riley and Van Doren (1992) suggested this phenomenon by assessing visitation increases at locations of selected motion pictures. They used this information as justification for film commissions who actively promote the use of locations in their vicinity. Until this time, film commissions had justified their existence by documenting money spent by companies while filming on location." (p.922)

In a 1984 study on tourism by Ritchie, it is acknowledged that there is tourism that stems from what is defined as 'hallmark events,' which are 'major one-time or recurring events of limited duration developed to primarily enhance the awareness, appeal, and profitability of a destination in the short and/or long term. These events rely for their success on uniqueness, status, or timely significance to create interest and attract attention.'"(p.4)

In a later study, however, it was determined that while these 'hallmark events,' did enhance tourism numbers, motion picture locations did it better. From the article "Movie Induced Tourism,"

"According to Riley and Van Doren, motion pictures had several advantages over hallmark events when inducing people to visit: longer periods of location exposure when compared to the advertising and promotion of hallmark events and locations; vicarious involvement and identification with locations through movie storylines which allow greater personal meaning to the beholders of the gaze, enhanced location images through the use of special effects, movie stars, and picture perfect camera angles; enhanced location awareness by different market segments through a universally popular medium such as movies; movies as a non-sales form of communication that allowed discovery of the location as opposed to the hard sell of advertising, and in-home access to the locations shown in the movies." (p. 922)

Additionally, the advent of new technologies promulgates the reinvention of the images. As movies and television shows are rereleased for Special Edition DVD packages, internet streaming, MP3 players, etc. the locations are once again given exposure, unlike paid advertising.

On average, according to a study of 12 movie locations with prerelease and post release quantifiable tourism statistics, the 'span of movie inducement lasted for at least four years and increased (tourism) between 40 and 50%.'(Riley, Baker and Van Doren p. 932) While there has been little attempt in the past to quantify this phenomenon, there are several examples of long-term film location attractions in the State of Georgia.

Deliverance

On October 26, 2007 in the New York Times, there was an article entitled "Riding the Rapids on 'Deliverance' River." The article is about a group of friends who traveled from Libertyville, Ill. to the Chattooga River in Georgia for a whitewater rafting trip. Asked why the long trek, one of the

businessmen explained “Deliverance, that’s why we’re here.” 35 years have passed since the 1972 release of this Academy-Award nominated film, and 35 years of whitewater tour groups on the Chattooga have profited off the back of the film. As reported by Sue Beeton, author of the book “Film-Induced Tourism,”

“Despite the story being a frightening and dangerous experience of three men on a river trip, the movie was the catalyst for the introduction of numerous raft and expedition operations in the county. It seems that the beauty of the scenery and inherent adventure provide people with enough motivation to overcome the negative aspects of the storyline.”

After production was completed, three of the stunt doubles in the movie- Payson Kennedy, Claude Terry and Doug Woodward- set up rafting operations to exploit the newfound interest in whitewater rafting after the release of “Deliverance.” In fact, Payson Kennedy’s Nantahala Outdoor Center which has rafting expeditions on both the Chattooga and Nantahala rivers, reports income of \$15 million per year, with 600 part time employees, and 200,000 annual visitors.

Due to the cult status of the film, a 35 year anniversary deluxe edition DVD was released, including special features such as:

- “A commentary by John Boorman: Director Boorman takes a journey down the river and discusses the adventures, the team, the controversy and what it took to make Deliverance a classic film.”
- “The Dangerous World of Deliverance: The original behind-the-scenes documentary on the difficult conditions and challenges of making this film.”
- “The Journey: From the early stages of filming to the creation of classic moments, such as the Dueling Banjos scene.”

- "Betraying the River: The making of one of the most controversial and ground-breaking sequences in film history."

In addition to the money generated by the movie "Deliverance," the filming of the deluxe edition special features, and the 35 years of business of wild water rafting on the Chattooga River, there was a book published entitled "Chattooga: Descending into the Myth of Deliverance River." While the budget of the film was negligible, about \$2 million was spent in production; the tourism money generated by "Deliverance" continues to be quite substantial.

Warm Springs

On April 30th of 2005, HBO aired a movie made in Warm Springs, GA about Franklin Delano Roosevelt's belief in the healing powers of a South Georgia spa resort and his work to turn it into a center for the aid of polio victims. The film starred Kenneth Branagh as Roosevelt, Cynthia Nixon as Eleanor Roosevelt, Kathy Bates as physical therapist Helena Mahoney, and Tim Blake Nelson as Tom Loyless. The film was directed by multiple Emmy award winner Joseph Sargent.

The majority of the film was shot in Warm Springs, Georgia and surrounding areas. The producers strove to make sure that many of the physical details were as authentic as possible. For example, Kenneth Branagh, as Roosevelt, is seen driving the very same specially-equipped automobile that FDR was taught to drive at Warm Springs. The cottage that Roosevelt stays in during the film is one of the cottages FDR actually stayed in, and the swimming pool in which the patients swim is the actual therapeutic swimming pool at Warm Springs, refurbished by the production team specifically for the film. The film was praised by the critics, and won five Emmy Awards out of an astounding sixteen nominations, including Outstanding Made-for-Television Movie, Best Supporting Actress in a Made-For-Television Movie and Best Original Score.

While the Little White House, where FDR spent much of his time, and the Warm Springs pools were already tourist attractions, both the Georgia Department of Economic Development and the town of Warm Springs understood that there were great potential film tourism benefits from the

airing of the film. Consequently, a study “Economic Baseline for Warm Springs, GA 2005” was done by Cassey Parker of Georgia Southern University. The study created a baseline to track tourism benefits as well as the overall growth of the community of Warm Springs over the next several years. The expectations are that tourism, the population (491 residents as of May, 2005) and the numbers of businesses will all experience growth as a result of the HBO film “Warm Springs.”

In addition to the baseline study, there was a study entitled “Analysis of Film-Induced Tourism for the Little White House, Warm Springs, GA,” conducted by Derek Alderman and Caleb Parker, Department of Geography, East Carolina University.

In the study, 351 visitors to the Little White House from June to October 2005 completed a survey about their decision to visit the historical site. Of the visitors, 62.2% of the people stated that the importance of the movie to their visit was “very important,” and another 25.6% stated that it was “somewhat important.” Only 7.1% of visitors felt that the movie was “not important” as a factor of their visit. Additionally, the conclusions of the study were that the impact of the movie led to

- a) an increase in visitors that already knew about the Little White House
- b) an increase in ‘return visitors’ to the Little White House
- c) an increase in visitors who don’t normally come to historic sites.

The factors that did not change due to the viewing of the film were the amount of money spent on the visit, the amount of time spent, the reasons for coming, and the visitors’ places of origin. In the Addendum Questions Results from the study, the following comments were made by visitors:

Storey: “I was headed to Columbus, GA. My mother’s cousin lives there. I would never have know (sic) or been interested in visiting Warm Springs had I not seen the movie!”

Hamm: “I had a planned trip to visit friends in Atlanta, GA. After seeing the movie, I made plans to do a day trip to Warm Springs. I probably wouldn’t arrange a special trip to visit a place I saw in a movie, but I would add a place to my itinerary on a pre-existing trip or visit places nearby by

home. For example, if I visit Savannah, I'd like to see the house on which *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* was based."

Coppolino: "My husband was attending a conference at Callaway. I had seen the movie a few weeks before and made it a point to see Warm Springs while there. I have lived most of my life in Georgia and never been to the Little White House and the movie was a direct impetus to my making the effort to see the site in person."

While it is too soon to determine the possible long term benefits of the filming of "Warm Springs" on location in Georgia, this study does show a positive correlation between the film spectators and the desire to visit the historical location.

Fried Green Tomatoes

Perhaps the most pure example of the power of film tourism is the town of Juliette, Georgia and "Fried Green Tomatoes." By the early 1990's, Juliette, GA had dwindled down to a population of 4 when film producer/director Jon Avnet found the perfect location for his film in the kudzu covered main street village. After deploying construction crews to rehab the entire town at considerable expense, "Fried Green Tomatoes" was shot almost entirely in Juliette. After achieving a box office gross of over \$80 million dollars, the film became an instant icon. To this day, all of the businesses in the small town of Juliette capitalize on the success of the movie. According to the study "Movie Induced Tourism," by Riley, Baker and Van Doren,

"In at least one case, a movie has made a small town into a boutique of movie memorabilia (Fried Green Tomatoes). Location officials with an entrepreneurial spirit have packaged their sites with additional attractions to extend the stay and spending potential of visitors. The packaging strategy appears particularly wise because the pulling power of movies tend to fade as other events capture the viewing public's eye." (p.931)

Juliette, GA affords a rare opportunity to observe film tourism from ground zero. Unlike most other cases, there was no business in Juliette, GA from the early 70's until the making of the film in 1991. Because the town is somewhat remote, the tourism in Juliette is destination driven—tourists come specifically to experience the “Fried Green Tomatoes” phenomenon. “Whistle Stop Café” owner Robert Williams estimates that the annual number of visitors to Juliette, GA is around 100,000. Not only does the “Whistle Stop Café” still do a booming business after 15+ years, but all of the shops carry “Fried Green Tomatoes” shirts, cookbooks, hats, food products, movie memorabilia, etc. Because Juliette is such a phenomenon, in 2006, The Old Man and the Sea Productions completed the documentary “Fried Green Tomorrows: Juliette, GA Lives!” describing “A Kudzu Covered Ghost Town Saved by Hollywood.”

Savannah, GA

Although is impossible to extricate the tourism dollars generated by the movie “Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil” from the book on which it is based, or from the booming industry of the historical district of downtown Savannah, nonetheless the dollars are there. Although Savannah has been home to many motion pictures, it is perhaps “Midnight” which has been the best calling card for the city. The book and movie are all about the mystique of the city of Savannah and the somewhat eccentric characters that call it home. Following the success of the best selling book, the film “Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil” was lensed in Savannah in 1996. Directed by Clint Eastwood, with a cast of Kevin Spacey, John Cusack, and Jude Law, the filming itself generated substantial press for Savannah. From 1992-1995, the number of guests at the Savannah Visitor’s Center went from 881,221 down to 810,041 and back up to 894,709. For the 1996 and 1997 years, however, during the highpoint of the ‘Midnight’ craze, the numbers jumped to 1,089,165 in 1996 and 1,170,853 in 1997. Because of this jump in visitors to Savannah, the number of Georgians employed in ‘visitor supported jobs,’ (i.e. tourism) jumped from 17,994 in 1995 to 23,402 by 1997. Over 85 other films were made in Savannah as well, including 10 Academy Award winners. Ron Higgins, owner of “Savannah Movie Tours” reported that in 2007, 4360 people went on a tour of Savannah to see “where Forrest Gump sat on the bench, Paula

Deen's Lady & Son's, Clary's Cafe, Leopold's Ice-Cream, the Mercer House from 'Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil,' the Six Pence Pub from 'Something to Talk About,' to name a few." Prices of these tours range from \$25 for 90 minutes to \$253 for 'an in depth 4 hour tour.' As a side note, the 'Forrest Gump' bench is no longer on the square; it was added to the park for the scene. The bench is now an exhibit at the Savannah History Museum. As noted in the study "Movie Induced Tourism,"

"In most cases, the residents were not prepared for the influx of people or for their unceasing curiosity. For example, after the release of "Forrest Gump," visitors besieged the Savannah Chamber of Commerce when Forrest Gump's bench could not be found." (p930)

Today in Savannah, it is local celebrity chef Paula Deen that is the biggest tourism magnet for the city. Deen serves an average of 1,100 customers a day at her restaurant "The Lady and Sons," due to the popularity of her two Savannah-lensed Food Network television shows. While in 2007 the "Paula's Home Cooking" television show spent less than \$2 million in actual production dollars, the tourism effect has been invaluable. Between Paula Deen and her brother's restaurant "Bubba Gump's," the revenue is a staggering \$30 million annually. As noted in the MSNBC article "Deen Fattening up Savannah's Tourism," Old Savannah Tours has also capitalized on 'Paula mania,'

"Old Savannah Tours hasn't had trouble filling buses for its Paula Deen tour, even at \$53 per ticket. Since the tours started in 2005, more than 15,000 tourists have taken the four-hour, 20 mile trip devoted to Deen trivia. Others gladly pay \$250 apiece to attend Deen's cooking classes."

Consequently, as of November 2007, competing company Savannah Movie Tours has also added a "Foody" tour which highlights Savannah restaurants featured on Turner South and the Food Network, including "The Lady and Sons."

The Dukes of Hazzard

It is not just feature films that draw tourism to an area, but television shows as well. Although Covington, GA has been a location for numerous motion pictures including “Sweet Home Alabama,” “The Fighting Temptations,” “Remember the Titans,” and “My Cousin Vinny,” it is the TV shows for which it is best known– “I’ll Fly Away,” “Heat of the Night,” and most importantly, “The Dukes of Hazzard.” The show first shot in Covington in 1979 and later moved to a Los Angeles back lot, but “Dukes” fans make pilgrimages to Covington annually to revisit the show’s locations. Although “Heat of the Night” still has somewhat of a tourism draw, Covington CVB Director Clara Deemer estimates that 65-70% of all of the tourism in Covington, GA is “Dukes of Hazzard” related. There are numerous fan websites devoted to the show, as well as “Dukes Fests” and General Lee (the Duke’s car) enthusiasts’ shows in Covington. For the release of the 2006 movie version of “The Dukes of Hazzard,” which was unfortunately shot in Louisiana due to their tax incentives, MTV came to Covington to do a kick off festival and jump the original car from the television show. In April of 2008, the annual “Dukesfest” will return to Covington to revisit the locations in the pilot episodes, and most importantly, to spend money on food and lodging.

Summary

In addition to numerous qualitative benefits of filmmaking in an area including enhanced regional image, the rise of the Georgia creative class, and development of film and arts programs, filmmaking is big business for Georgia. Historically, The Georgia Film, Video and Music Office has concentrated solely on the value of actual production dollars spent instate and the economic impact of those dollars. In the future, municipalities selected for productions should be educated and prepared to exploit the long term impact of hosting film projects, rather than concentrating solely on the relatively short production time. Through this effort, communities should work to put in place methods of determining increased revenues and tourism after filming takes place in a region. While there is little numerical data of the amount of film tourism dollars in Georgia, it exists

nonetheless. When considering the economic impact of film making in the State, one must take into account this important factor.

For more information, please contact the Georgia Film, Music & Digital Entertainment Office at 404-962-4052 or film@georgia.org.

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