A PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION OF SHOPPING PATTERNS AT A TOURIST FOCUSED OUTLET CENTER

Andrew Holdnak, Associate Professor
Hospitality, Recreation and Resort Management
University of West Florida
1100 University Parkway
Pensacola, FL 32514

Abstract

Shopping is considered an important part of the tourist experience. This paper seeks to increase the understanding of the shopping experiences of visitors to a large outlet shopping mall in a major coastal tourism destination in Northwest Florida.

Overall, shoppers tended to be from the southern area of the country, shopped in family groups, visited five to ten stores and stayed about 3-4 hours. When the visitors were grouped into permanent residents, tourists and seasonal visitors, specific differences emerged with the permanent residents being different from the other groups.

1.0 Introduction

Shopping has long been recognized as an important part of the tourist experience and it is often used as a foundation for regional tourism development. (Che 2004) In recent studies released by Visit Florida (Florida's official tourism marking organization) it was shown that shopping was the second most popular activity for domestic tourists (35.6%) and the leading activity for international tourists (90.2%). Though Florida may be most famous for it beaches and amusement parks, shopping is, in fact, the more popular statewide tourist activity.

Nationwide, there are about 46,990 shopping centers serving about 203 million shoppers annually. Shopping centers generate $2 trillion in annual sales and employ 17.6 million people (International Council of Shopping Centers 2003).

In Walton County Florida, (the location of this study) it is estimated that tourists visiting the area spend $33 million annually in retail sales which reduces to an average of about $35 per person. The retail sector claims 2,839 employees which is about 21 percent of county employment (HASS Center 2001).

2.0 Purpose

Though the impacts of shopping on tourism are well documented, shopping mall managers' understanding of the tourism enterprise is more limited. This paper is part of a larger study conducted at "one of the nation's largest designer outlet centers", located near Destin, FL. The purpose of this paper is to present the data collected during an October 2004 survey period.

The data collected includes shoppers' home towns, local area visitation patterns and shopping patterns. Also included is an importance/performance analysis of the shopping center operations. Of particular interest were comparisons between shopping patterns of local residents, seasonal residents, pleasure travelers and business travelers.

3.0 Methodology

Data was collected using personal surveys of randomly selected shoppers visiting the Silver Sands Factory Stores during the study period. In order to meet the overall data collection goals, researchers were asked to attempt to complete 30 surveys per day. During some mid-week days, they fell short of the goals but additional surveys were collected during the weekends to make up the difference and to better represent the normal flow of business.

Each day, student researchers rotated through the different sections of the complex asking random visitors if they would be willing to be surveyed. As an incentive, students offered a packet containing Silver Sands information and discount coupons usable at Silver Sands Factory Stores and the shops at Grand Boulevard, a nearby shopping complex managed by the same organization.

The questionnaire used was generally based on previous surveys done at the outlet center but was modified based upon comments and suggestions from the marketing staff. The questionnaire contained sections asking about demographics, visitation patterns, familiarity with promotional campaigns and advertising, shopping patterns, reasons they visited the area and how they felt about different parts of the silver sands operation. Responses were both forced choice and open ended.

After data was collected, it was entered into the SPSS statistical program for analysis.

4.0 Findings

In total, 311 completed and usable questionnaires were entered and analyzed. Responses were first descriptively analyzed then comparisons were run.

Table 1 indicates that respondents tended to be predominately female (64.3%), under age 29 (36.1%), and visited as part of a family group with the most common party size being two people. Most of the respondents were from the southern part of the United States (about 83%) with most people being on pleasure trips (58%) though 26 percent of the respondents were local residents.

As seen in Table 2, shoppers at the outlet mall were most often repeat visitors. About 77 percent of the respondents visited the shopping mall previously and about 62 percent and visited the mall more than once in the last year. While at the mall, shoppers tended to visit 5-10 stores and stayed about 3-4 hours.

Table 1.—Profile of Respondents

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	111	35.7
	Female	200	64.3
	Total	311	100.0
Age	<29	112	36.0
	30-39	56	18.0
	40-49	67	21.5
	50-59	40	12.9
	60+	35	11.3
	Total	311	100.0
Type of group	Individual	54	17.4
	Family	139	44.7
	Friends	75	24.1
	Family & Friends	43	13.8
	Total	311	100.0
Reason in the area	Permanent resident	83	27.1
	Seasonal resident	16	5.2
	Own a vacation home	13	4.2
	Pleasure trip	178	58.0
	Business trip	17	5.5
	Total	307	100.0
Frequency of visits	1	50	16.8
	2	96	32.2
	3	38	12.8
	4	57	19.1
	5	16	5.4
	>5 visits	41	13.7
	Total	298	100.0
Home State	Florida	129	41.5
	Alabama	52	16.7
	Tennessee	24	7.7
	Georgia	20	6.4
	Mississippi	15	4.8
	Kentucky	13	4.2
	Ohio	11	3.5
	Arkansas	5	1.6
	Michigan	5	1.6
	Texas	5	1.6
	Other	23	7.1
		311	100.0

Table 2.—Shopping Profile

		Frequency	Percent
How often have they visited?	First visit	64	23.0
	2 times	71	25.5
	3 times	53	19.1
	4+ times	90	32.4
	Total	278	100.0
Visits to SSFS in a Year	1	103	37.5
	2	54	19.6
	3	22	8.0
	4	24	8.7
	5	15	5.5
	6 - 19 visits	48	17.4
	20+	9	3.3
	Total	275	100.0
Visit how many stores today?	Less than 5 stores	68	22.2
	5-10 stores	105	34.3
	11-20 stores	71	23.2
	20+ stores	62	20.3
	Total	306	100.0
Length of stay today	Less than 1 hour	30	9.9
	1-2 hours	90	29.7
	3-4 hours	121	39.9
	5+ hours	62	20.5
	Total	303	100.0

In order to investigate differences that might exist between shopper types, the variable "Reason you are in the area" was recoded to describe the type of resident/visitor the respondents were. "Permanent residents" remained "permanent residents" while "Seasonal residents" and "Vacation home owners" were recoded as "Seasonal visitors", and people on "business" and "pleasure" trips were recoded as "Transient tourists." Table 3 indicates there are significant differences in every case except gender and length of stay at the shopping mall. Permanent residents tended to be younger that the seasonal residents and tourists and they were more likely to visits in smaller groups—with a high proportion visiting as singles. Permanent residents tended to shop at fewer stores that the other two groups.

In order see if there were differences between business travelers and pleasure travelers who visited the shopping mall, an independent samples t-test was run. The only significant variation was in age – where the business traveler (mean 1.85) was younger than the pleasure visitor (2.80) (t=2.645, df=196, p=.009).

Additionally, an Importance/Performance Scale was developed to identify specific areas for the mall to focus their management and marketing efforts. Respondents were asked to rate issues such as "quality of merchandise", "savings on merchandise", "variety of stores", "store service" and cleanliness and availability of specific facilities. As seen in Figure 1, overall, respondents were satisfied with the shopping at the outlet mall. They rated

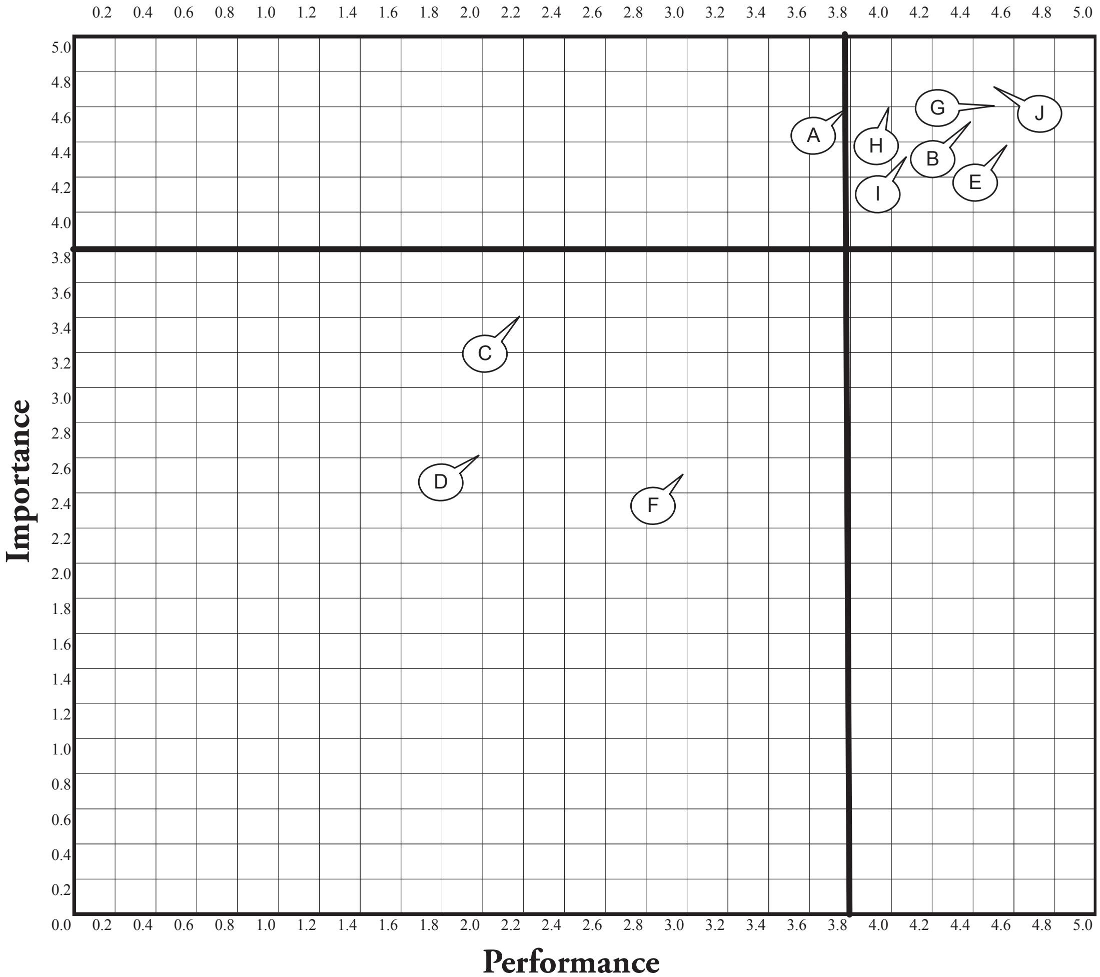
Table 3.—Comparison of characteristics by residence type

		N	Mean	F	Sig.
Gender					
	Permanent Resident	80	1.60	0.476	0.621
	Seasonal Resident	29	1.66		
	Transient Tourist	198	1.66		
	Total	307	1.64		
Age					
	Permanent Resident	79	1.91	9.327	0.000
	Seasonal Resident	29	2.93		
	Transient Tourist	198	2.62		
	Total	306	2.46		
Size of party					
	Permanent Resident	78	2.17	6.647	0.002
	Seasonal Resident	29	2.90		
	Transient Tourist	187	4.90		
	Total	294	3.98		
Party Type					
	Permanent Resident	80	1.86	16.353	0.000
	Seasonal Resident	29	2.62		
	Transient Tourist	198	2.50		
	Total	307	2.35		
Visit how many stores					
	Permanent Resident	78	1.83	17.759	0.000
	Seasonal Resident	29	2.66		
	Transient Tourist	196	2.61		
	Total	303	2.41		
Length of stay					
	Permanent Resident	78	2.51	2.579	0.078
	Seasonal Resident	29	2.69		
	Transient Tourist	193	2.79		
	Total	300	2.71		

items such as “variety of stores”, “quality of merchandise”, and “savings on merchandise” very highly. The areas that they felt were low were “entertainment areas”, “dining facilities” and “play area for children.” Since these last items were low on both importance ratings and performance ratings there seems to be little reason to change them.

5.0 Conclusions

Overall, several distinct groups were identified as visitors to the outlet mall. The largest group was transient tourists, followed by permanent residents followed by seasonal home owners and visitors. In general, the permanent residents tended to visit in smaller groups, visit fewer stores and stay a shorter period of time than the non



Importance Scores	
A. Availability of restrooms	4.4
B. Clean and maintained faci.	4.5
C. Dining facilities	3.4
D. Entertainment areas	2.6
E. Number of stores	4.4
F. Play area for children	2.5
G. Quality of merchandise	4.6
H. Savings on merchandise	4.6
I. Service from store staff	4.3
J. Variety of stores	4.7
Average Importance Score	4.0

Performance Scores	
A. Availability of rest rooms	3.8
B. Clean and maintained facil.	4.4
C. Dining facilities	3.0
D. Entertainment areas	2.6
E. Number of stores	4.6
F. Play area for children	3.0
G. Quality of merchandise	4.5
H. Savings on merchandise	4.0
I. Service from store staff	4.1
J. Variety of stores	4.5
Average Performance Score	3.8

Figure 1.—Importance Performance Grid

resident groups. This is consistent with the identification and marketing of the outlet center as a tourist destination. Permanent residents are more likely to have visited the mall before so they are familiar with the specific stores and merchandise. When they visit, they most probably have specific purchases in mind rather than just going “shopping” as a recreational or tourist activity. This raises a question about marketing the mall to different groups.

Since about 27 percent of the mall shoppers are local residents, who have different shopping patterns than the tourist and seasonal visitors, perhaps a specific marketing campaign should be developed for them.

Respondents were generally favorable toward the mall and the overall experience so relatively little should be changed in terms of mall operations.

It should be pointed out that this survey was conducted during a special promotions period in the fall of the year. This sample represents "shoulder season" visitors rather than "high season summer guests" or "off season winter guests". Additional samples should be taken at other times in order to better understand the overall visitor to the outlet mall.

6.0 Citations

Diane Sears. June 2004. **A Portrait of Florida's Visitors.** Florida Trend Magazine.

The Impact of Tourism on the Walton County Economy. 2001.Haas Center for Business Research and Economic Development.

International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC) http://www.icsc.org/rsrch/research.shtml

Deborah L. Che. March 2004. **Shopping/ Entertainment Complexes as Foundations for Regional Tourism Development: The Case of Great Lakes Crossing.** Journal of Travel Research.

Citation:
In: Peden, John G.; Schuster, Rudy M., comps., eds. Proceedings of the 2005 northeastern recreation research symposium; 2005 April 10-12; Bolton Landing, NY. Gen. Tech. Rep. NE-341. Newtown Square, PA: U.S. Forest Service, Northeastern Research Station