



# Center for Sustainable Tourism

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[www.sustainabletourism.org](http://www.sustainabletourism.org)  
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## Affects of Weather and Climate on Tourism Business Decision-Making

### The Case of Beaufort, North Carolina

#### Background

“Many tourism businesses either do not know exactly what their needs are or have weather and climate information needs that are specific to the unique activities they provide” (Curtis et al. 2010). “Climate change was regarded as potentially significant in the future but in the short-term ranked well below other business concerns” (Hall 2006).

#### Purpose

This study attempted to better understand the ways, and to what extent, tourism businesses are affected by weather conditions and fluctuations, as well as by climate change. In addition, the study gathered information on what strategies tourism businesses implemented to accommodate weather and climate circumstances.

#### Methodology

A focus group methodology was used to collect information from several Beaufort County tourism-related businesses. The focus group was meant to be a first step in preparation for a larger regional study of coastal communities heavily dependent upon tourism. A standardized set of questions were developed based on a review of the literature and discussion with community leaders to guide the discussion.

#### Study Area

Beaufort, North Carolina, is located on The Crystal Coast just east of Morehead City. It has a thriving tourism industry that is especially weather-dependent due to its east-west oriented coastline, surrounding sounds and barrier islands. Beaufort is known as the “*Second Best Wreck Diving in the World*” and has a rich coastal history.



<http://www.copelandrealestatenc.com/>

#### Survey Objectives

1. Determine types of tourism products and services provided.
2. Identify weather conditions that affected the destination and each individual type of business.
3. Identify how business operators communicate with clients regarding weather conditions.
4. Identify how business decisions will be guided by changing climate and weather conditions.

#### Tourism Sectors Studied



#### Study Findings

- I.
  - A wide range of complimentary tourism offerings, both indoor and outdoor, are offered in the Beaufort area that attract and serve the needs of a traveling public seeking a coastal and historic experience.
- II.
  - Weather conditions today are different than in the past
  - Today's conditions are described as ideal for a tourism-dependent coastal environment
  - Conditions differ over open water from over land
  - Differences frequently exist between what is forecasted by the media and actual weather conditions
  - Rainfall is highly variable across the immediate region
  - Weather is influenced by the “airstrip” effect of the neighboring Air Force base
  - Lack of any observable strong trends due to climate change
- III.
  - Telephone and email as well as through websites primarily for cancellation and travel insurance policies
  - Most offer alternative suggestions when weather precludes their activity but could utilize advertising more strategically
  - Somewhat sensationalized weather forecasts affect cancellations despite efforts by tourism businesses to communicate actual weather conditions; weather assessments by individual travelers are also problematic
  - Seasonal based responses to tourist' daily weather questions
  - Boaters and pilots are the savviest about weather
- IV.
  - Weather and climate do not appear to be changing dramatically
  - Increased storm surges are being observed and the wind seems to blow more now than before
  - An observable increase in jellyfish, fewer hurricanes and more erosion and deposition on nearby shoals and banks
  - Tourism businesses desire a realistic forecast, less hype over hurricane season, and weather language that indicates more “mostly sunny” days than “partly cloudy”

#### Future Research

Expand pilot study to include tourism sector representatives from other coastal towns and counties.  
Develop online instrument to systematically capture information on an ongoing basis.

#### Key Resources

Curtis, S., Arrigo, J., Long, P. and Covington, R. (2010). Climate, Weather and Tourism: Bridging Science and Practice. Publication of the Center for Sustainable Tourism, Division of Research and Graduate Studies, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC

Hall, C.M. (2006). New Zealand tourism entrepreneur attitudes and behaviours with respect to climate change adaption and mitigation. International Journal of Innovation and Sustainable Development, 1(3): 229-237.

