Undiscovered places highlights of tourist campaign

BY BRUCE SMITH
ASSOCIATED PRESS

CHARLESTON — Tourism officials want to attract visitors to what they're calling undiscovered South Carolina — rural areas away from such well-known tourist destinations as Charleston, Myrtle Beach and Hilton Head.

A $2.5 million media campaign gearing up next year is aimed at attracting visitors to such lesser-known areas, state Parks, Recreation and Tourism Director Duane Parrish said Friday.

While the state also provides marketing funds to the major coastal destinations as well as Columbia and Greenville, state money for the rural destinations will help boost the industry, he said.

"At PRT we have to be more effective with our dollars and rural areas are places where we could do that," he said.

The campaign is designed to help draw tourists to places such as Conway and Walterboro near the coast. Visitors often pass by the areas on their way to more well-known tourist spots.

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>
> **Duane Parrish**
> Director, S.C. Parks, Recreation and Tourism Department

"There's a lot of Upstate outside of Greenville," Parrish added. "There's the Cherokee Foothills Trail and the Jocassee Gorges and places like that we are in a position to help."

Parish noted that the agency worked with Spartanburg this year to promote the Carolina Panthers pre-season training camp at Wofford College and there was an estimated 30 percent increase visitors.

One undiscovered place is Colonial Dorchester State Historic Site near Summerville, just 20 miles from busy Charleston.

The site, which includes ruins from a once-prosperous 18th century community, gives visitors a chance to do hands-on archaeological work, said archaeologist Larry James.

The experience is unique, he said, because after the site was abandoned in the late 1700s, it's been largely untouched. So those digging in the loamy soil can go back several centuries without having to dig through more recent history, he said.

The media campaign will work to attract visitors more apt to be interested in outdoor activities, shopping, antiquing and exploring the state's history and cuisine.

"We have some great hunting lodges in rural areas we'd like to get more people, too," Parrish said. "The state also has two drive-in theaters — one in Monetta and one in Beaufort. They are both what I would call undiscovered South Carolina."

Tourism officials say that this past summer was a solid season for the state's tourism industry. But tourism still has not recovered to the levels of 2007 before the Great Recession.

Tourism is a $15 billion industry in the state.



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Archaeologist Larry James poses Friday at the site of the excavation of a colonial house at the Colonial Dorchester State Historic Site in Summerville. A new tourism campaign by the state of South Carolina's Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism is aimed at drawing visitors to such sites that tourism officials call undiscovered South Carolina.