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It takes more than sun, sea and sand: The case of tourism in the Tampa Bay region, circa 1970-2000

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It Takes More Than Sun, Sea and Sand:
The Case of Tourism in the Tampa Bay Region,
Circa 1970-2000

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of Geography
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Mass Tourism

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ABSTRACT

Coastal counties in the United States have placed a new emphasis on tourism related employment. The shift away from normal maritime work, such as fishing and import/export shipping has ushered in an era of service-oriented economies and communities scattered along the US coast lines. This trend which is associated with the transition from Fordism to post-Fordism can be seen most prevalently in Florida's Tampa Bay region. The counties that make up Tampa Bay include Citrus, Hernando, Hillsborough, Manatee, Pasco, Pinellas, and Sarasota.

The lure of sandy beaches and blue seas are the obvious tourist draws to any tropical locale, including the Tampa Bay region. But it is blatantly shortsighted to pinpoint locational attributes as the only factor in creating a tourist economy. This study hopes to make a contribution to the tourism literature in human geography by considering the role of non-locational attributes which are crucial to the growth and development of tourism-driven economies along the coastal US.

Chapter 1

1.1 Introduction

“Tourism is not destiny. Beach resorts, alligator farms, no less than paper mills and power plants, involve human decisions” (Mormino 2005, 6). This quote from Gary Mormino’s Land of Sunshine: State of Dreams (2005) goes against the popular perception that tourism is an industry that sells itself. It is no secret that people are drawn to warm weather climates like the one found in the Tampa Bay region. Even more, people can mix the warm weather they find in this area with trips to the beach. But what the lay person does not realize is that for a region to sustain a thriving tourism industry a wide variety of entertainment opportunities must either be available endogenously, or be produced *de novo*. A tourism economy that relies completely on a favorable geographic location, such as being close to the ocean, cannot hope to be sustainable let alone successful.

This being said, tourism is one of the defining industries of our time. In 1993, Americans spent \$341 billion on recreation and entertainment which was \$71 billion more than the total spent on education (Hannigan 1998, 60-61). In 2002, tourism accounted for 5 percent of the nation’s Gross Domestic Product, equaling \$582 billion (Kubiak 2002, 18). Klein *et al* (2004) reported similar numbers for the time period between 1991 and 2000 in which travel expenditures grew from \$360 billion to \$582

billion (Klein *et al* 2004, 1083). The numbers seem to show that the tourism industry is growing exponentially.

Unfortunately, these numbers are not based on a unified representation of the tourism industry. The fact remains that the US Census does not have a set criteria to calculate tourism. This can result in some ambiguities amongst studies. Any statistical information presented by the tourism industry is therefore open to criticism. This being the case, Greg Kubiak (2002) refers to travel and tourism as the “Rodney Dangerfield of industries”, because “[i]t simply gets no respect” (Kubiak 2002, 18; brackets added). There are many inconsistencies within the tourism literature regarding what methods are best for calculating and measuring the tourism industry. Unless and until the industry adopts a uniform set of indicators for tourism, it will continue to be overlooked and denied the respect that it desires.

The Bureau of Economic Analysis (or the BEA) (www.bea.com) has attempted to improve the standing of tourism statistics by establishing a standardized set of indicators for analysis. The BEA measured the total earnings within a study area’s tourism industry to try and determine the extent to which different municipalities are impacted by the presence of tourists. One example that used the BEA method to calculate tourism was a 2004 study by Klein *et al*. This study concluded that “tourism-related earnings, as a percent of total earnings, are concentrated in counties that lie within forty km (25 miles) of the Atlantic, Gulf and Pacific coasts of the United States” (Klein *et al, ibid*). While the BEA’s measure of tourism is not universally recognized within the industry, it does offer a standardized set of numbers that provided some valuable insight into Klein *et al*’s study.

1.2 Starting Point – Disproving Klein et al (2004)

This study on the Tampa Bay region considered those external factors beyond the sandy beaches that allow for a continuous flow of tourists into particular areas. What the Klein *et al* study (2004) did not consider was the presence of other attractions and entertainment amenities that might have contributed to the success of one coastal area over another. It seems that they placed too much emphasis on the proximity to coast lines in determining strength of tourism by regions. While this might be valuable on the national scale, there are more distinguishing factors to sort out amongst the many counties that have access to coast lines.

Klein *et al* (2004) used the location quotient (Figure 1.0) to determine if a county's closeness to the Gulf of Mexico, the Atlantic Ocean, or the Pacific Ocean predicted the strength of its tourism industry. In terms of the case of Tampa Bay, the issue of proximity to the coast was more of an afterthought. All of the counties within the study group bordered the Gulf of Mexico, therefore it was assumed that they would draw in large numbers of tourists.

Figure 1.0: Location Quotient used by Klein *et al* (2004).

$$LQ(I) = \left[\frac{\left(\frac{\text{travel and tourism earnings in county I}}{\text{total earnings in county I}} \right)}{\left(\frac{\text{travel and tourism earnings in the U.S.}}{\text{total earnings in the U.S.}} \right)} \right]$$

Klein *et al* (2004) explained “importance” by stating that “for a county in which travel and tourism is relatively unimportant, the location quotient will have a value less

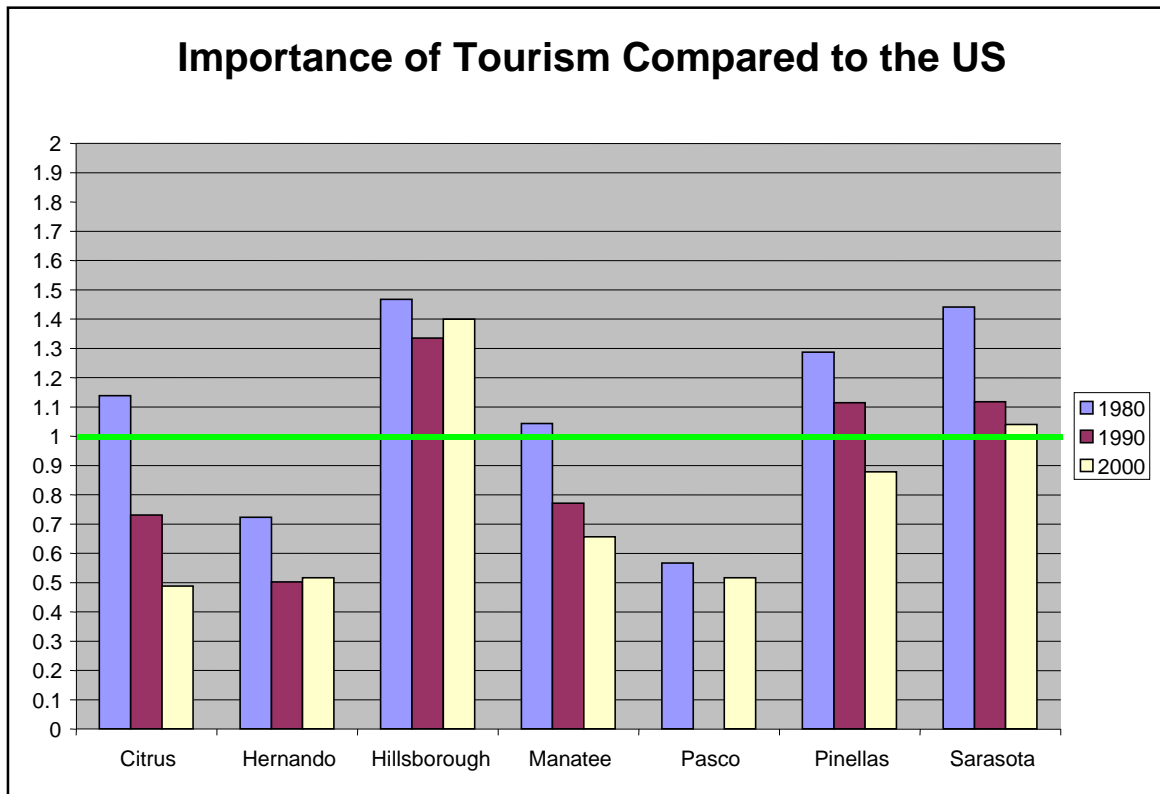
than 1; for major travel destinations the location quotient will be greater than one” (Klein *et al* 2004, 1085). For example, Sioux City, Iowa, had a location quotient of 0.43, while Peoria, Illinois had a level of 1.00, and Honolulu, Hawaii had a score of 2.58 (*ibid*). As these examples showed, Honolulu placed much greater emphasis on tourism than both Sioux City and Peoria. Applying the location quotient to the study area helped exhibit the level of social, cultural, and economic dependency that each county had compared to one another.

The quantitative data for this study was gathered from the Bureau of Economic Analysis or BEA (www.bea.gov). The data was compiled on an excel sheet and then calculated to coincide with Klein *et al* (2004). This study, like Klein *et al* (2004), determined the importance of travel and tourism by combining earnings in Eating and Drinking, Hotels and Lodging, along with Amusement and Recreation industries (*ibid*). All of these classifications were the same for each of the three study years of 1980, 1990, and 2000. Once the data was calculated it was compiled into a figure to show the changes in the strength of tourism within each of the Tampa Bay counties.

Figure 1.1 offered the graphic representation of the importance of tourism in Tampa Bay when compared to national statistics. This figure showed that the overall level of importance that tourism has held in the Tampa Bay region has been on the decline since 1980. The only county maintaining a high level of importance in the industry was Hillsborough County, which was also the largest county. Despite the discrepant results of the Klein *et al* (2004) study with respect to the Tampa Bay region, it was unrealistic to claim that tourism was a dying industry. The rest of Tampa Bay, absent Hillsborough County, were still relatively popular with tourists, and the region’s

beaches, resorts, shopping malls, and all of the other attractions in the region were holding their own.

Figure 1.1: Importance of Tourism in Tampa Bay counties compared to US (Pasco data from 1990 unavailable). (*Bureau of Economic Analysis 2006*)



The Klein *et al* (2004) study provided little more than a jumping off point for this thesis. Their sources and methods do not match those being applied to the study of Tampa Bay. Their work wished to break down the tourism industry into neatly organized and defined bodies in an attempt to prove that geography was the defining feature of locating strong tourist economies. The goal of this particular study was to push aside those bland mathematical ways of looking at tourism, and to uncover the tangible pieces that defined the tourism industry. Therefore, this study did not use the results or methods

of Klein *et al* (2004). But, their study did act as the spark into exploring the tourism industry in Tampa Bay.

1.3 Defining the Tourist

Before entering into further discussion regarding the case study for this research, it was important to establish a working definition of tourist. The underlying theme of this study was to discover the strategies being applied by those within the tourism industry to attract tourists to the Tampa Bay region. Therefore, to adequately analyze the methods being applied by the tourism industry, it was critical to understand the wants and needs of the potential tourists being targeted. The following section will take a step by step approach to create a working definition of tourist for this study.

The Klein *et al* (2004) study combined three different Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) groups together to create a quantifiable definition of the tourism industry (Klein *et al* 2004, 1085). The three SIC groups chosen included ‘Eating and Drinking’:

This SIC major group includes establishments selling prepared foods and drinks for consumption on the premises; and also lunch counters and refreshment stands selling prepared foods and drinks for immediate consumption. Restaurants, lunch counters, and drinking places operated as a subordinate service facility by other establishments are not included in this industry, unless they are operated as leased departments by outside operators (www.bea.gov),

‘Hotels and Lodging’: This major SIC group includes commercial and noncommercial establishments engaged in furnishing lodging, or lodging and meals, and camping space

and camping facilities (www.bea.gov), along with ‘Amusement and Recreation’ industries:

This major SIC group includes establishments engaged in providing amusement or entertainment services, not elsewhere classified. Establishments primarily engaged in operating motion picture theaters are classified in Industry Group 783, and those operating museums, art galleries, arboreta, and botanical and zoological gardens are classified in Major Group 84 (*ibid*).

The three SIC groups definitions are the same throughout the years studied which included 1980, 1990, and 2000. Therefore, the working definition of tourist for this study featured items pertaining to ‘Eating and Drinking’, ‘Hotels and Lodging’, ‘Amusement and Recreation’, along with other interpretations.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defined a tourist as “one who makes a tour or tours; *esp.* one who does this for recreation; one who travels for pleasure or culture, visiting a number of places for their objects of interest, scenery, or the like” (www.oed.com 2006). Similarly, Urry (1990) defined a tourist as someone “breaking with established routines and practices of everyday life and allowing one’s senses to engage with a set of stimuli that contrast with the everyday and the mundane” (Urry 1990, 2).

Without completely disregarding the definitions of tourist by Urry (1990) and the *Oxford English Dictionary*, we can look to international tourism organizations interpretations of the term. In 1968, the World Tourism Organization (or WTO) adopted the International Union of Official Travel Organization’s definition of (international) tourists as “temporary visitors staying at least 24 hours in the country visited and the

purpose of whose journey can be classified under one of the following headings (a) leisure, (b) business” (Cohen 1984, 374). This definition was adaptable to non-international tourists as well, simply by replacing “the country visited” with ‘the city/town/county/region/state visited’.

Whether the goal of the visit was ‘leisure’ or ‘business’, anyone who partook in the local amusement and recreation activities and/or facilities of an area should be considered a tourist. The SIC group of ‘Amusement and Recreation’ fulfilled this identifying feature by being able to quantify the strength or weakness of an area’s tourist draw. Combining the SIC code for ‘Amusement and Recreation’, the *Oxford English Dictionary*, and Urry along with the WTO definitions, a tourist was defined as a ‘temporary visitor staying at least 24 hours in a county or region who breaks with their routine of everyday life.’

This new working definition of tourist can be further improved by considering recent amendments made by the WTO. A change in their definition of tourist came about for purposes of gathering statistics. The WTO’s new definition of tourist replaced “visitor staying at least 24 hours”, with an “overnight visitor” (www.world-tourism.org 2005). This temporal issue was quantifiable when considering the SIC codes used by the BEA in defining earnings by the ‘Hotels and Lodgings’ industry (www.bea.gov).

The issue of eating and drinking tied in closely with fulfilling the needs of an overnight guest. Beyond meeting the needs for appropriate lodging, a tourist must receive sufficient food supplies for survival. It is inevitable that people eat. Even more, people on vacation were often left with no other alternatives than to eat out. Therefore, the definition should include a mention of eating and drinking as an important indicator

in identifying the tourist. This finalizes the temporal issue of what constitutes a tourist by including only those individuals who stay the night in or around their vacation destination and who eat at the local restaurants.

The final issue to address was the minimum distance that must be traveled to a destination to consider an individual as a tourist. Careful study of tourist related material made it clear that there was no declarative stance on how geography should be included in its definition, or if it should be included at all. An example of this can be found in a college level textbook by Davidoff *et al* (1995), Tourism Geography, that failed to include a working definition of tourist, let alone one that was geographically based. It seemed that avoiding the geographic dimension in creating a definition of tourist was a common theme throughout tourist related literature.

The recent development of mass tourism created a uniform tourist experience across the globe where people can experience the same sights and sounds of home in almost any location. This brought about the development of “placeless” destinations (Johnston *et al* 2000, 841). If the geographic location of a destination loses its importance (considering that destinations have become “placeless”), then distance traveled should not take precedence in identifying a tourist. In 2002, the WTO addressed the issue of distance traveled in identifying tourists, but all that was determined was that to be considered a tourist an individual had to experience displacement outside of their usual environment (www.world-tourism.org). This still did not give an exact geographic understanding of what made a tourist.

The WTO was debating issues such as the minimum distance traveled, and the crossing of administrative borders in trying to make their definition of tourist more

geographically based. But for now, the WTO suggested that any trip to “escape the daily routine of life, and thus leave the usual environment” makes someone a tourist (www.world-tourism.org). Considering all of these factors, the working definition of tourist for this study was as follows; ‘temporary visitor staying overnight who breaks the routine of their everyday life by partaking in that county or region’s entertainment and dining opportunities.’

1.4 Tourism and the Case of Tampa Bay

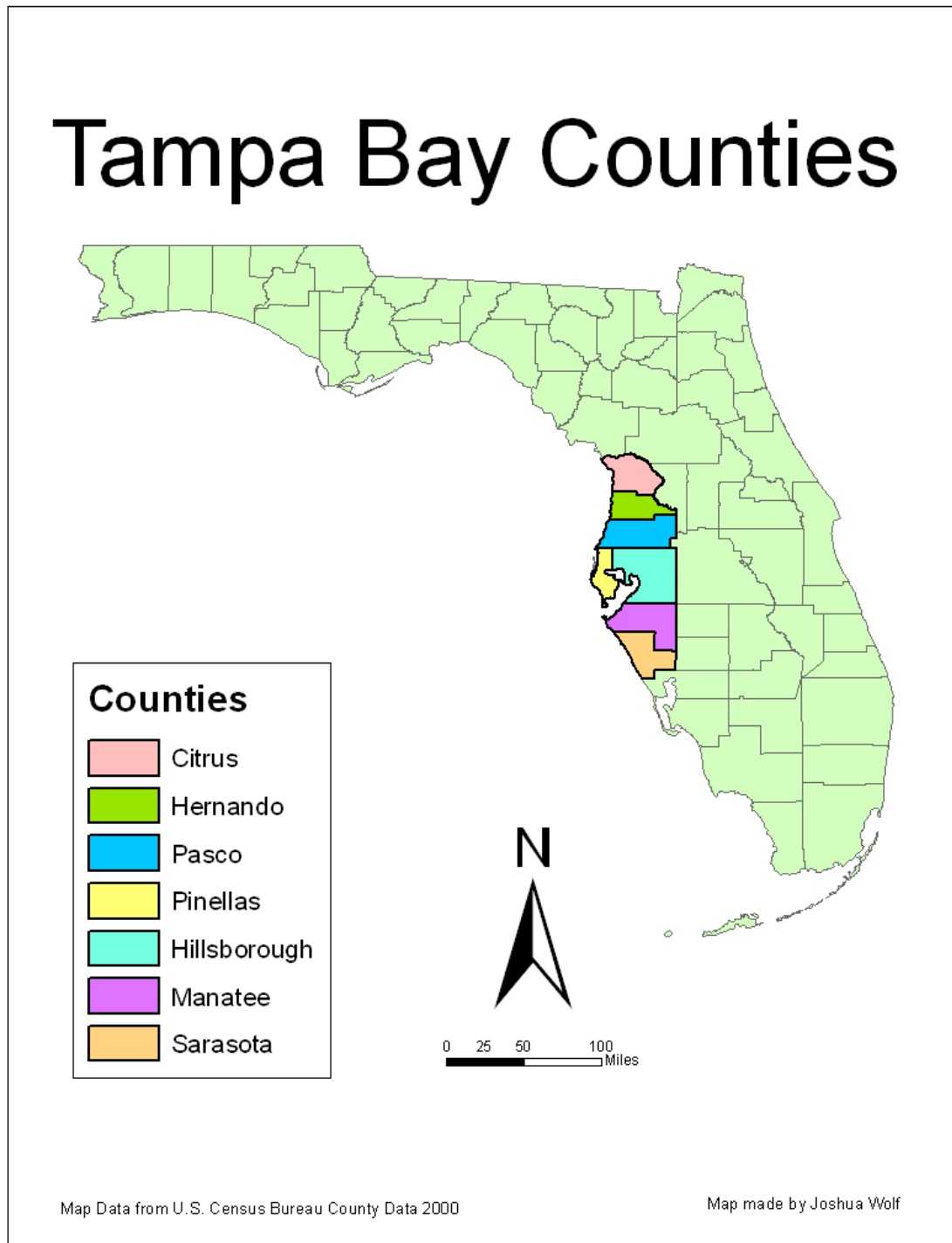
Seven counties were chosen to make up the Tampa Bay region for this study. These counties included Citrus, Hernando, Hillsborough, Manatee, Pasco, Pinellas, and Sarasota. All of the counties were selected based on two basic characteristics. The first was that they all share a border with the Gulf of Mexico. This decision was based on the desire to disprove the idea that being adjacent to the coast ensured a strong tourism industry. The second was that they must all be connected by at least one county to create a single geographic region.

Notwithstanding several joint tourism marketing campaigns, each of the seven counties within Tampa Bay (Figure 1.2) seems to be defining its own tourism niche. First of all, Pinellas County marketed itself as an internationally known beach resort destination with its “37 miles of Gulf shoreline and 28 miles of classic beaches” (Mormino 2005, 330). Citrus County emphasized its ecotourism resources such as its large manatee population during the winters. Manatee County promoted its resort islands situated in the Gulf of Mexico. Pasco County focused its tourism industry on outdoor activities such as canoeing, camping, and biking. Hernando County followed suit by

utilizing the natural landscape with a focus on enjoying outdoor activities. Hillsborough County, the largest county in the region, was known both for its family fun during the day and adult entertainment attractions at night. Finally, Sarasota County attracted wealthier visitors with their “own ballet, opera company, botanical gardens, and renowned art museum” (Mormino 2005, 38).

One municipality that did not appear in this study was Polk County. It was unquestionable that Polk County played an important role in the tourism industry in Florida. The county’s annual Strawberry Festival brought tourists and locals in by the droves. Maybe even more important was the presence of Interstate 4 which ran through Polk County, connecting Tampa Bay to Orlando. But, the purpose of this study was to examine the variations within the tourism industries of coastal counties. Therefore, the reasoning behind not including Polk County in the Tampa Bay region was that it did not border on the coast and thus cannot be included in a study of coastal counties.

Figure 1.2: Study counties making up the Tampa Bay region.



The Tampa Bay area provided a good example of a region with a mixed approach to the tourism industry. The proximity to the beaches along the Gulf of Mexico did act as a magnet for vacationers, but the variety of entertainment opportunities available within the region acted to stimulate a wider market for potential visitors. The Klein *et al* (2004) study did a good job of isolating major tourist regions in the country, but it did not explain how one coastal area can distinguish itself from another. This study uncovered how tourist regions try to set themselves apart in an era of growing “interlocal competition” (Peck and Tickell 2002, 387).

The following section offered a brief history of the tourism industry in Tampa Bay. For the purpose of this study, the story began in the 1970s during a time when the region was undergoing massive infrastructure changes and growth. Then the 1980s brought along a new type of tourism to the area that focused on conventions and tradeshow. Finally, the 1990s saw a growth in the nature tourism industry which helped establish some of the smaller tourism economies within the region.

1.5 History of Tourism in Tampa Bay

The history of the tourism industry in the Tampa Bay region was one that was marked by a wide variety of marketing strategies. As already mentioned, for this study the story of tourism in Tampa Bay began in the 1970s. The bulk of this history was told through the dealings of the Tampa Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber’s dealings with other entities in Tampa Bay including visitor bureau and private organizations, provided useful insight into the workings of the tourism industry in the region.

The 1970s was a time of rapid growth of the transportation infrastructure in Tampa Bay. The focal point of the growth was in Hillsborough County, in particular, the City of Tampa. One of the first pieces to the infrastructure development in the region came with the expansion of Tampa International Airport, or TIA. During the 1970s, TIA took dramatic steps at establishing itself as a major player in air travel in the southeastern U.S. In 1972, one year after opening a new terminal complex, the number of passengers to TIA rose by four million (www.tampaairport.com). In 1973, the number of passengers increased by 14.1 percent (*ibid*).

The increase in the number of passengers willing to use TIA encouraged more and more airlines to make stops there. By 1975, nine airlines were flying in and out of TIA allowing Tampa to emerge “as the Florida Gulf Coast regional air terminal” (Christopher 1993, 305-306). Finally, in 1978, TIA expanded its main runway from 8,700 feet to 11,000 feet for trans-Atlantic flights (www.tampaairport.com). This development helped to solidify TIA as a hub for international tourism.

The next step in making the Tampa Bay region more accessible was the interstate roadway development that began in the early 1970s. The three pieces that make up the major interstate system throughout the region includes I-4, I-75, and I-275. Construction on I-4 actually began during the 1960s to provide a direct route from Tampa to Daytona Beach (www.interstate275florida.com). The beginning of I-4 was built to match up with I-75 near the city of Tampa (www.interstate-guide.com), while construction on I-75 began in the early 1970s to provide a direct route from Tampa to Miami (www.interstate275florida.com). In 1973, I-275 was created when I-75 was changed from a St. Petersburg-Tampa route to the Tampa Bay bypass ([14](http://www.interstate-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

guide.com). By 1981, I-75 was completely pulled back from the main part of Tampa to an area near Lutz (www.fl-interstate.com). This step invariably made I-275 and I-4 the major corridors to the Tampa Bay region.

The final piece to transportation development in the Tampa Bay region was the introduction of cruise ships. In 1973, the Tampa Chamber Port Council conducted a cruise market study to see if the Tampa Bay region would be a viable option for cruise ship companies (Christopher 1993, 294-295). They sent out 250 questionnaires to travel agents located in the southeastern parts of the United States and received 60 replies, with 59 of them indicating that they would “actively support, promote, and sell cruises from Tampa” (*ibid*). By 1975, it was decided that Hooker’s Point berthing facilities would be the best location for cruise ships because of the excellent air services found at the nearby Tampa International Airport (*ibid*).

In 1972, the Tampa Holiday Diplomats, a branch of the Tampa Chamber of Commerce, sent a group of delegates to Detroit, Windsor, and Toledo in an attempt to lure northerners to Tampa Bay for vacations (*ibid*, 284). They marketed Tampa as the “Treasure City” to tie in with the region’s past that included stories of pirate invasions. To emphasize this point to their northern hosts, the Diplomats created a mascot to represent the area. Annette Johnson became “Miss Treasure City” and greeted groups at the Diplomats’ events dressed in a pirate costume (*ibid*). These early marketing campaigns showed the aggressive hands-on style with which the region was portrayed to potential visitors.

In the mid 1970s, the Chamber began offering annual celebrations called “Treasure Days” or the “Familiarization Tour” in which more than 800 travel agents were

brought to Tampa (Christopher 1993, 306). The purpose of these visits was to encourage travel agents to promote the area to their customers back in their home cities. Once again, the early marketing strategies that were occurring during the 1970s showed the need for person-to-person interaction amongst representatives of the tourism industry and the people of Tampa and the Tampa Bay region.

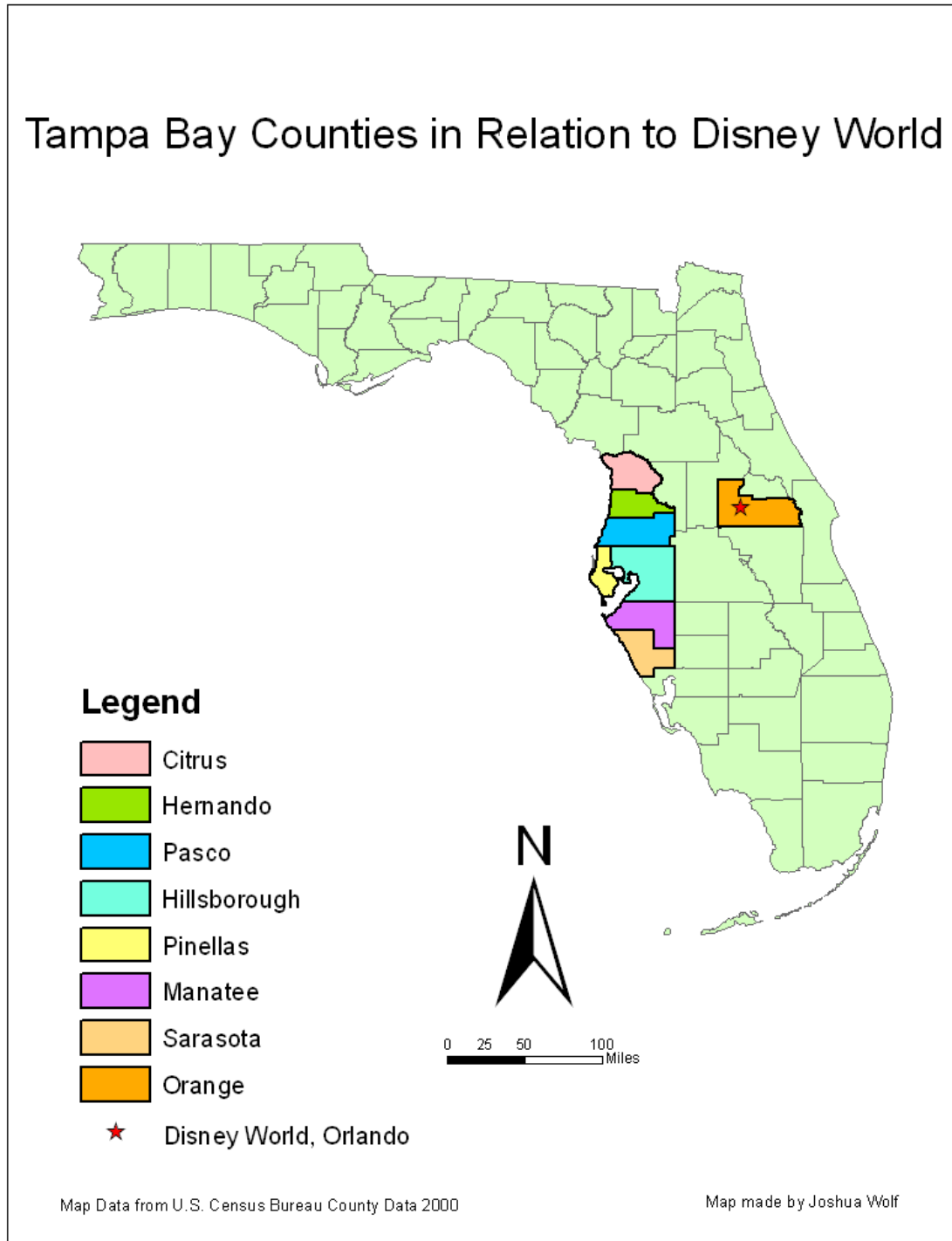
In the 1980s, Tampa Bay became a part of the emerging tradeshow and convention industry. In 1982 Tampa became the “Trade Show Capital of the South” (*ibid*, 364-365). In fact, the event that earned the area this moniker was the American Hardware Trade Show that brought in 1,583 exhibitors, thousands of visitors, and the occupation of 3,413 hotel rooms (*ibid*). This type of tourism created a need to accommodate large numbers of adult visitors. Eisenger (2000, 321) notes that “an estimated 80% to 95% of convention-goers stay overnight in the host city, paying hefty room taxes in the process.” The development of Tampa Bay as a home to convention and tradeshow resulted in a shift away from family oriented vacations, towards the need to provide for more adult-oriented tourist attractions. The rest of the 1980s saw continued growth of the convention and tradeshow industry in the Tampa Bay region.

The 1980s and into the 1990s saw the Tampa Bay region become host to several large sporting events. In 1984, the National Football League awarded the area its first of four planned Super Bowls with Super Bowl XVII (www.superbowl.com). The Tampa Bay region was then chosen as the site for Super Bowl’s XXV in 1991, XXXV in 2001, and XLIII in 2009. The area also received a major college football bowl game in 1986 when the Outback Steakhouse Corporation chose Tampa as the permanent site for its annual Outback Bowl (www.outbackbowl.com). This game featured teams from the Big

Ten and South Eastern Conferences, both of which have storied traditions that included large and loyal traveling fan bases. In addition, the City of Tampa has been the Spring Training home of the New York Yankees since 1996 and has attracted over 200,000 fans each year to the area (www.legendsfieldtampa/newyanks.htm). Not to mention that the entire Tampa Bay area was sprinkled with other Major League baseball teams and their spring training facilities.

Also during the late 1980s and early 1990s Tampa Bay counties began to try and lure tourists visiting Disney to the region. The thought was that families visiting the Orlando area (Figure 1.4) would make the drive about an hour west to visit the beaches and other amenities offered in the region. As Charlie Phillips, the executive director of the Greater Tarpon Springs Chamber of Commerce commented “Most of the people on the West Coast of Florida have accepted the fact that Disney is going to bring the people. We don’t compete with them. We want to get a portion of that business” (Jackson 1990). An increase of 100,000 visitors to Pinellas County from 1989 to 1990 was credited with a marketing campaign aimed at Disney visitors (Stidham 1990).

Figure 1.3: Location of Walt Disney World in Orlando in relation to Tampa Bay region.



The 1990s saw the emergence of nature or eco-tourism as a viable option for less established tourist destinations beyond the City of Tampa. Nature or eco-tourism allowed the counties that did not have an established tourism identity to help attract visitors without having to incur the cost of extensive infrastructure. As noted above, the sunk-costs were already absorbed by the City of Tampa. Citrus County ran an advertisement in the mid-1990s that embodied the nature/eco-tourism movement in the Tampa Bay region. The copy of the advertisement read: “We have rivers, forests and miles of coastline. We have alligators, bald eagles and manatees. It’s sort of like different sections of a theme park. Call it Mother Nature’s Theme Park” (Millar 1995). In particular, Citrus, Hernando, Manatee, and Pasco Counties embraced the nature/eco-tourism industry as a means of capturing some of the tourism dollars being generated in the Tampa Bay region.

Interestingly, Pasco County has served as a prime destination for nudists since the 1940s (Mormino 2005, 113), but this hardly was the type of nature tourism that the region was trying to promote to Disney vacationers. While nudists still found their way to the west coast of Florida, they were being outnumbered by the influx of fully clothed outdoor enthusiasts. Nature tourism has given the counties outside of Hillsborough and Pinellas a viable identity within the tourism industry of the region. As Sue Rope, Hernando County’s tourism director, put it, “I think we’re finally finding our niche, which is outdoor recreation, I look at us as being a bicycle and trail Mecca of Florida” (Schatz 1999). Nature tourism opened up the untouched tourism markets throughout the Tampa Bay area.

Pasco County created its tourism board in the early 1990s with a focus on nature tourism. Yvette Pollens, the first director of the Pasco County Tourist Development Council, distributed 50,000 brochures at interstate rest stops that promoted the area as “Nature’s Playground” where people could enjoy “canoeing, fishing, scuba diving, and sky diving after leaving Orlando” (Arellano 1992). The leaders of Pasco County realized that their beaches were not comparable to those found in the other counties in Tampa Bay, such as Pinellas County. Instead, they chose to focus on promoting other outdoor activities where they had a comparative advantage vis-à-vis the rest of the region. In fact, when Visa ran an advertisement highlighting Pasco County’s beaches, County Commissioner Ed Collins was upset because he felt that the ad was misleading to potential visitors (Horridge 1994). Ed Collins annoyance with the Visa ad stemmed from the fact that Pasco County was trying to lure nature tourists and not beach guests.

The Tampa Bay region also initiated a few joint tourist campaigns conducted amongst a few of the counties. The most publicized marketing relationship was between Hillsborough and Pinellas Counties. In 1993, Busch Gardens Theme Park, located in Hillsborough County, brought together the convention and visitor bureaus from Hillsborough and Pinellas Counties in an attempt to market the Tampa Bay area as a cohesive region. The marketing campaign consisted of a six week advertising run on television throughout the United Kingdom, costing the area around \$400,000 (Riley 1993).

Unfortunately, the joint effort failed to produce the return on the investment for some of the parties involved. In particular, Busch Gardens removed itself from the coalition because they felt that they needed to create a tourist campaign that focused only

on their park because of new theme parks opening in Orlando (Albright 1998). In the end, Tampa hotel chains seemed to be the only ones that had been benefiting from the failed joint marketing campaign.

The mid-1990s also brought along a new marketing medium in the form of the Internet. At first, many within the tourism industry were unsure of how popular the Internet would become. In 1995, Mary Craven, Citrus County's tourism-business facilitator expressed her uncertainty about the Internet by saying, "I know it's the latest rage. But I just wonder how effective it would be. If you are a diver and you are planning a trip, are you going to pick up a diving magazine or turn on your computer?" (Ellis 1995) Clearly, people like Mary Craven could not have forecasted the overwhelming power of the Internet today as a marketing tool for the tourism industry.

1.6 Problem Statements

First of all, other than distance to the coast as a primary reason for a successful tourism destination, what were the other likely pull factors that can make a coastal area's tourism industry more successful? Secondly, since very little has been written in the scholarly geographical literature about tourism in Tampa Bay, and because no comprehensive data source of the region's tourism industry exist, how had the accumulated history of tourism impacted the current marketing strategies of the various tourism boards and other agencies among the counties across Tampa Bay? Finally, the goal of this study was to create a primary document for any future geographic research on tourism in the region.

1.7 Research Hypothesis

To forge a truly vibrant tourism sector, coastal regions must develop non-locational advantages, as well as provide a range of entertainment amenities.

1.8 Research Questions

- A. How has the evolution of the Tampa Bay region as a tourist destination translated into how the area was marketed?
 - i. What types of festivals, tradeshow, and sporting events have been brought to the region?
 - ii. How was the Tampa Bay region being marketed through the Internet medium?
 - a. What were the visual images used to represent the area?
 - b. What were the key words being used to inform potential guests about the area?

1.9 Expected Results

The results of this study served to answer the unaddressed issues in the Klein *et al* (2004) study, namely, what were the other factors that lead to the higher incidence of success for the tourist industry along the coasts of the Pacific, Atlantic, and the Gulf of Mexico in the U.S. This study hoped to show that a vibrant tourism industry relied on more than just proximity to large bodies of water. The data collected showed the types of attractions and advancements that communities have taken to draw in tourist dollars. The

Tampa Bay region served as an excellent case study because of the variety of contributions to the tourism industry found in the seven different counties.

1.10 Conclusion

This chapter laid the groundwork for the study on tourism in Tampa Bay. First of all, we have defined what it means to be a tourist. Then, after identifying the study counties, a brief history of tourism in the region was given. Finally, the hypothesis and problem statements were identified to give this thesis strong scientific grounding. In the upcoming chapter, the theoretical framework will be established as a theoretical grounding for claims of the study.

Chapter 2

2.1 Theoretical Overview

The modern state of the tourism industry offers a vast departure from earlier views of tourism and the tourist experience. In this regard, in 1973, MacCannell saw tourism as “the modern equivalent of the religious pilgrimage: the two are homologous in that ‘both are quests for authentic experiences’” (*cited in* Cohen 1984, 377). While I would agree that some people do go on vacation to learn about different cultures and exotic dishes, the majority tend to be drawn towards a more prepackaged experience. The modern day mass tourists are often uninterested in the culture and history of the places they are planning on visiting.

Tourism and the tourist have evolved into economic development instruments for the growth and sustainability of local, state, and national economies across the globe. The evolution of the tourism industry has come about due to the ever increasing demand for the tourist experience. This transformation has come about through the advancement in media and technology such as the worldwide web, which has allowed for quicker, cheaper, and easier ways of making a vacation a reality.

In the past, planning a vacation took a lot of time and effort. Now, people simply have to visit one travel website such as Expedia or Travelocity to acquire hotel rooms, a rental car, and plane tickets. Increasing access to tools of the travel industry merely

increased the spontaneity with which people planned their vacations and decreased the chance of acquiring an “authentic experience”. As vacation information has become more accessible, people were more inclined to seek short getaways from their everyday lives.

Tourist-dependent economies have developed all over the world as people gravitated towards the need to conveniently ‘get away’ more and more. The increased demand from potential tourists was one of the major factors that brought about the growth of mass tourism. To accommodate the growing influx of guests, the tourism industry began offering a ‘prepackaged’, if not a ‘disposable’ experience that has been created to stimulate large influxes of tourists without offering them anything ‘foreign’ or ‘uncomfortable’. Turner and Ash (1975) noted that this has created “a small monotonous world that everywhere shows us our own image...the pursuit of the exotic and diverse ends in uniformity” (*cited in Urry 1990, 8*). Today, people have become more interested in getting away from their everyday lives than they have with absorbing a new culture or a new environment, and mass tourism has facilitated this demand.

Peter Eisenger (2000) believed that “tourism is a way of importing spending and exporting the tax burden” (321). Specifically, tourism provided a region with an outside source of revenue from visiting spenders and hotel guests. It also created the need for a low-wage service-oriented workforce able to accommodate large influxes of tourists. But more importantly, a tourist economy relied heavily on the ability to attract a wide variety of visitors. A brief list of the different types of tourists included families, spring breakers, sports fans, art and music enthusiasts, and conventioneers. A thriving tourist

economy relied on the ability to not only accommodate the traditional family and couples on vacation, but also professionals and conventioners.

Drawing in a large amount of different types of visitors required that a tourism industry provided a wide variety of attractions. John Hannigan (1998) outlined the basic structure for creating a well-rounded tourist economy in his book Fantasy City. While the book makes cities the focal point of discussion, the terms and ideas presented are equally applicable to regional tourist economies. Moreover, Hannigan focused on what it took to create an “entertainment economy” or one that depended highly on providing for services and tourists (Hannigan 1998, 60). He noted that tourist cities and regions were modular in that a standard formula has been developed amongst markets to include a basic mix of attractions that were merely arranged in different ways (*ibid*, 4). The desired outcome was to create a tourist-friendly location that could facilitate all types of potential visitors.

Oftentimes, the focal point of an entertainment economy was sports arenas that were referred to as “signature properties” (Turner and Rosentraub 2002, 489) and were built to act as a catalyst for future growth. The common makeup of an entertainment economy also included aquariums, museums, themed restaurants, bookstores, and movie theaters. This formula created uniformity of experience from location to location. Hannigan (1998) argued that this trend was creating a standardized tourist experience across a growing number of economies and societies. Within this modular formula across the different tourist markets, Hannigan has identified three notable trends that have developed. These trends included “shopertainment”, “edutainment”, and

“eatertainment”. Clearly, Hannigan has taken shopping, education, and eating and added the element of entertainment.

The following sections examined Hannigan’s tourism development strategies that included shoptertainment, edutainment, and eatertainment. In addition, other major trends that have developed throughout the tourism industry will be discussed. The other trends of interest included the passportization of experience, event tourism, nature tourism, and the creation of tourist bubbles. These trends have had a bearing on further understanding of the marketing strategies being applied throughout the tourism industry in the Tampa Bay region.

2.2 Shoptertainment

Shoptertainment called for the creation of tourist-like settings in which consumers were drawn to retail centers by the expectation of being entertained while they shop. More and more, shopping was being marketed as a recreational activity that stimulated all of the senses. It was a common occurrence to find a “signature property”, such as a merry-go-round or children’s playground, within a modern mall. Shopping centers were being designed as inviting destinations for friends and families to congregate and be entertained. At the same time, shoppers were being completely surrounded by commerce. This trend can be linked with the development of shoptertainment along with the cooperation of retailers in accommodating today’s vacationing shopper.

Kozinets *et al* (2002) believed that “through the use of lavish décor, sleek finishes, and attention to the smallest of details, consumers are presented with a stage behind the storefront” (*ibid*, 20). This type of setup transformed shopping from a

mundane activity into a form of entertainment. Tourists and locals are drawn to shopping centers merely for the experience of being there. The changes mentioned by Kozinets *et al* encouraged trips to shopping centers regardless of whether or not purchases needed to be made. The consequences of spending money have become secondary to the enjoyment of the shoppertainment experience. The result of the shoppertainment movement has been a rise in the creation of theme park style malls as a tourism development strategy.

Kent *et al* (1983) noted that “surveys of tourists which ask the purpose of the trip rarely find shopping mentioned, but when asked what they did, visitors list shopping as one of the most important activities” (cited in Law 1993, 119). This quote was even more interesting when considering another study released by *Consumer Reports* (1998) that revealed that “from an economic perspective, shopping is now the most popular activity sought while on vacation by US consumers” (cited in Snepenger *et al* 2003, 567-568). What was compelling about these statements was that tourists often shopped at stores similar to those found in their home towns. Seeing that people viewed shopping as a major part of their vacation, it seemed that they were willing to justify spending money on goods and services that were available in every mall in America.

In North America, three major examples of shoppertainment included the West Edmonton Mall in Alberta, Canada, the Mall of America in Minnesota, and Citrus Park Town Center Mall in Tampa, Florida. The West Edmonton Mall had 40% of its footage dedicated to entertainment attractions (more than any other mall at that point in the early 1980s) that included a full-size ice rink and a 2.5 acre lagoon that held a replica of the *Santa Maria* (Hannigan 1998, 91). In addition, the Citrus Park Town Center Mall in

Tampa, Florida featured a large merry-go-round along with a streetscape theme throughout (Figure 2.0). Atmospheres such as these went a long way in establishing malls as theme parks of commerce that attracted tourists and locals alike.

Figure 2.0: Citrus Park Town Center Mall (picture taken by researcher).



2.3 Edutainment

Another strategy discussed by Hannigan was edutainment. This type of tourist development called for the creation of an attraction or event that served to entertain its guests while at the same time teaching them something new. This strategy was most commonly associated with aquariums and museums. Hannigan noted one example of an exhibit on dinosaurs at the Museum of Natural History in New York that played on the popularity of the movie *Jurassic Park*. The exhibition called “The Science of Jurassic Park” was immensely popular and coincided with the opening of the movie. When the sequel to the movie came out, the museum opened another exhibition that featured dinosaur replicas provided by the movie’s production company.

Edutainment has been a development strategy targeted at families of tourists. The hands-on exhibits and interactive learning sessions were ideal forms of entertainment for families with children. As noted above, edutainment manifested itself mostly in the creation of aquariums and children's museums. Places like COSI, the Center of Science and Industry, in Columbus, Ohio, and MOSI, the Museum of Science and Industry (Figure 2.1), in Tampa, Florida, offered hands on science experience. These centers have attempted to make science appealing by adding the element of fun. The end result was an arena in which tourists can be entertained and at the same time educated.

Figure 2.1: The Museum of Science and Industry (MOSI) in Tampa, Florida. (www.mosi.org).



2.4 Eatertainment

Eatertainment called for the creation of themed restaurants that attracted patrons not only by providing quality food, but also for the sights and sounds found within. Like shopping, dining was another experience that tourists were willing to spend more on than they would at home. In fact, Pyo, Uysal and McLellan (1991) found that out of all of the expenses included in a vacation, “tourists were least likely to make cuts in their food budget” (cited in Au *et al* 2002, 819). This created an ideal opportunity for companies within the food service industry to attract free spending tourists to their restaurants. Eatertainment has been a measure that restaurants have taken to capture food-related tourist dollars.

Examples of eatertainment offered by Hannigan included the Hard Rock Café and Planet Hollywood restaurant chains. Two examples of eatertainment destinations in Tampa Bay were the Hard Rock Casino (Figure 2.2) near Tampa and the gambling boats that were based out of Tarpon Springs. These land- and water-based themed restaurants often played on the cult of celebrity, in particular celebrity memorabilia, to create dining experiences which people chose more for the ambience and less for the food served.

Figure 2.2: Seminole Hard Rock Hotel and Casino located in Tampa, Florida (www.seminolehardrock.com).



Although, the Hard Rock Café chain still remains intact today, the Planet Hollywood chain has since declared bankruptcy. It might be the case that the return on eatertainment establishments may not be as profitable as Hannigan postulated. This may tell us something about the advisability of eatertainment as a separate tourism development strategy. This does not mean that this type of development strategy has been completely abandoned, but that shopertainment and edutainment might create a stronger entertainment economy than one that focused on eatertainment. While eatertainment might not be the best development plan for a tourist economy, the fact remains that tourists need to eat, and they are ready to spend!

2.5 Passportization of Experience

An offshoot of eatertainment was the concept of the “passportization of experience” in which people collected fake, prepackaged “cultural” capital from different locations to denote their visits to such destinations. The example of the Duchess of York, popularly known as ‘Fergie,’ helped to illustrate this point with her coined phrase “been there, done that, got the T-Shirt” (Hannigan 1998, 69). Snepenger *et al* (2003) described this desire for collecting memorabilia and other artifacts of tourist visits thus, “The social-psychological dimensions are complex and multi-dimensional as tourists often make their experience tangible by purchasing souvenirs and also acquire gifts for loved ones as a way to share their experience away from home” (Snepenger *et al* 2003, 568). The mementos collected by tourists served to remind themselves and others of their travels.

The Hard Rock Café chain was a clear case of the “passportization of experience”. For example, people seek out the Hard Rock Café in different cities so that they can buy the t-shirts that conveyed they were there. In the Tampa Bay region, tourists have purchased shirts that say that they have been to anywhere from Busch Gardens, the aquarium, and even to the original Hooters restaurant in Clearwater (Figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3: Hooters memorabilia from Clearwater, Florida (www.ebay.com).



2.6 Event Tourism

Event tourism was another important piece to understanding the growth of the tourism industry. Getz (1991) related that event tourism was a “short lived, organized activity in which visitors may participate, watch, view, learn from, and enjoy” (*cited in Carmichael 2002, 314*). This applied to conventions, festivals, and other ‘short lived’ events held in a region. C.M. Hall (1992) saw special events as “the image builders of modern tourism...[The] promotion of an event is not just concerned with the event but to convey images of the destination and region within which the event is located” (*cited in Holcomb 1999, 59*).

More and more tourism experts have focused on capturing visitors looking for a quick getaway from their daily lives. This has led to the term the “localization of leisure”, which was coined by Rubin and Gorman (*cited in* Hannigan 1998, 61). It meant “a shift away from long summer vacations to other travel alternatives, notably extended weekend retreats and short holiday visits to urban centers within several hours by air of one’s home” (*cited in* Hannigan 1998, 61). Accordingly, tourist destinations needed to work harder to provide more specialized events so that they could capture as many potential short term visitors as possible.

Law (1993) explained the evolution of event tourism by saying “In the past, most special events were conceived as purely local celebrations, but today the tourism motivation is often being added, and sometimes events are deliberately being created to attract tourists” (Law *ibid*, 98). Examples of event tourism in the Tampa Bay region included the annual Clearwater Jazz Festival in Pinellas County, and Gasparilla (Figure 2.4), the mock pirate invasion in Hillsborough County.

Figure 2.4: Gasparilla (www.sptimes.com)



An international example of event-tourism was found in Kim and Chalip's (2003) article concerning attendance at the 2002 FIFA (*Fédération Internationale de Football Association*) World Cup in which they considered soccer fans as tourists at a special event. They claimed that "if the fan is motivated to travel to the event, then the event should be more attractive, whether travel to attend is feasible or not" (Kim and Chalip 2003, 697). By hosting a large event, be it sport or some other type of festival, the attractiveness of simply 'being there' superseded any other external difficulties, including cost and distance. Motivation could only be enhanced by a special event's location in an area with a favorable climate and sufficient tourist attractions and amenities.

Two examples of special major sporting events that have been held regularly in the Tampa Bay region included the Outback Bowl (Figure 2.5) and the Outback Steakhouse Pro-Am golf tournament. Both events annually have drawn in sports

enthusiasts who came to watch their favorite teams or individuals compete. While the region has yet to host major international sporting events, such as the Olympics or the FIFA World Cup, it has been home to one of the nation's biggest sporting events, the Super Bowl. The National Football League's Super Bowl has been held on three separate occasions (1984, 1991, and 2001) in the Tampa Bay region (www.superbowl.com).

Figure 2.5: Outback Steakhouse sponsored Outback Bowl held annually in Raymond James Stadium Tampa, Florida (www.outbackbowl.com).



2.7 Nature Tourism

Another emerging trend within the tourism industry was nature tourism. This type of tourism provided an outlet for “people wishing to see wildlife or plants in their natural surroundings” (Vaughan 2000, 285). Quite often this term was mistaken as being interchangeable with ecotourism. The fundamental difference between these two was that eco-tourists were strict environmentalists while nature tourists were merely casual observers of nature. Eco-tourists chose to enjoy nature while using “low environmental impact infrastructure (including community lodging), [and] a recognition of local culture, [with] a willingness to forgo some Western comforts in the interests of sustainable development” (*ibid*; brackets added). For the purposes of this study, ecotourism was

treated as a subset of nature tourism. So, whether it was called ecotourism or some other form of nature tourism, there was a large financial reward for regions which were involved with this burgeoning tourism niche market.

Nature tourism offered mass tourists an alternative to the long lines and crowds associated with theme parks and other high volume activities. One study of Phuket in southern Thailand showed how “overlaps between ecotourism [nature tourism] and mass tourism are not only possible, but also vital in cases where ecotourism [nature tourism] companies must draw on the tourist markets and channels of mass tourism in order to survive financially” (Kontogeorgopoulos 2004, 9; brackets added). For a nature tourism industry to flourish, it was important to have other mass tourism attractions located nearby. An example of nature tourism in the Tampa Bay region was found in Pasco County where they have offered scenic views, horseback riding (Figure 2.6), and other outdoor activities to Disney vacationers in need of escaping traffic and crowds found in Orlando. This furthered my contention that nature tourism and mass tourism feed off each other.

Figure 2.6: Horseback riding offered by the J.B. Starkey’s Flatwoods Adventures in Pasco County (www.flatwoodsadventures.com).



2.8 Tourist Bubbles

Providing a safe environment and experience may be as important as creating entertainment opportunities for potential visitors. Judd (2003) related how the 1980s brought about the beginning of the creation of tourist bubbles “around a cluster of facilities and amenities (new waterfronts, atrium hotels, festival malls, convention centers, sports stadiums, entertainment districts), a space or series of spaces segregated from the remainder of the city” (Judd 2003, 27). The purpose of these bubbles was to separate tourists from the ugliness of a city, such as crime and poverty, so that they could enjoy a carefree tourism experience.

‘Tourist bubbles’ made tourist spaces solipsistic or isolated from undesirable parts of a tourist region (Hannigan 1998, 4). People can encapsulate themselves in safe and undisturbed environments where they can feel secure to move amongst people and places that they were comfortable with. According to Christine Boyer (1993), these ‘tourist bubbles’ were creating what was termed a “city of illusion” that was, a “metropolis which ignores the reality of homelessness, unemployment, social injustice and crime, while eagerly transforming sites and channels of public expression into ‘promotional space’ (*cited in* Hannigan 1998, 4). These areas have served to shield tourists from the harsh realities of the places they were visiting so as not to discourage them from making a return trip to that location.

A similar, if more sinister, term for this phenomenon was coined by Mike Davis (1992) as the ‘Fortress City’ (*cited in* Turner and Rosentraub 2002, 491). Here, the ‘tourist bubble’ became a place of extreme exclusion where surveillance reached Orwellian proportions. Monitoring of a tourist bubble could include the presence of

anything from security cameras to gated resorts. In fact, many cruise lines, such as Holland America Lines and Princess Cruises, have gone to great lengths, including purchasing their own islands (Jaakson 2004, 47), to cater to their guests' safety. These islands provided a safe place for travelers to enjoy prepackaged experiences created by corporations. It also of course created a captive market for tourist corporations and thereby created what might be termed "entertainment-security complexes."

Another description of a tourist bubble was a place where people were isolated from outside cultures and were inundated with a 'standardized' tourist experience. Rojek (1995) described such a destination as a place that "provides the same aesthetic and spatial references wherever one is in the world" (cited in Judd 2003, 23). These can include festival malls, all-inclusive corporate chain hotels, etc., that shielded visitors from the outside cultural forces in a region. The most obvious example of a tourist bubble found in Tampa Bay is the Hard Rock Hotel and Casino. This was an example of an all-inclusive tourist destination where a person could spend their entire vacation within the Hard Rock's property which included a hotel, pool, dance club, casino, restaurants, and shopping.

Another term that has developed related to the creation of tourist bubbles was the idea of "riskless risk". Russell Nye (1981) believed that what visitors were interested in was the idea of "riskless risk" which meant that most tourist destinations "package our fantasy experiences within a safe, reassuring and predictable environment" (cited in Hannigan 1998, 71). A fantasy experience could include any variety of things to different types of tourists. For example, a fantasy experience for an individual from a rural community might be to spend time in an urban setting. It was important for that

individual to feel a level of safety when entering that environment, therefore, the establishment of a tourist bubble was vital in allowing that particular fantasy experience to happen.

2.9 Conclusion

The concepts and terms presented in this chapter were designed to define and describe the climate of today's tourism industry. There seemed to be a complementary relationship between mass tourism and nature tourism that developed during the study period. The rise in tourist bubbles was a direct result of the explosion of mass tourism. As the amenities offered at mass tourist locations became more uniform, so did the need to create the same level of safety in the designated areas. The tourism industry has adjusted to fit the modern day needs of a high-tech society that lacked the attention span necessary to merely sit and stare at the sea for an extended period of time. Therefore, tourist destinations have adapted to accommodate the entertainment needs of today's fast paced society.

Chapter 3

3.1 Methodology – Using Qualitative Methods

The use of qualitative methods can often be challenged by readers and skeptics as being unscholarly. The issues of bias along with a lack of rigor can cast a shadow over qualitative sources. In particular, media references, such as websites and newspapers, used by themselves can be perceived as insubstantial sources. But, by combining three or more corroborating pieces of evidence, a researcher can attain legitimacy through what is called “triangulation”. Guion (2002, 1) described triangulation as “a method used by qualitative researcher to check and establish validity in their studies.” When considering the qualitative methods applied in this study, it was important to understand that triangulation was used to strengthen their meaning.

3.2 Triangulation

Triangulation was the most important method for the qualitative portion of the study. For purposes of scientific rigor, it was imperative that this researcher provided supporting evidence to allow for an argument to be qualified. The goal of using triangulation was to allow the reader to determine if a declarative statement made in a study was sufficiently supported by evidence within the text. For example, one of the statewide tourism websites might claim that the majority of the tourists who came to Florida visited the ocean. It was then up to the researcher to find supporting evidence for

this claim in an at least two other sources such as an academic journal, a newspaper, etc., before this assertion can be sufficiently qualified. Hence, the use of qualitative data for any study required the coordination of several different sources to verify a knowledge or ‘truth’ claim.

It should be understood that triangulation of sources does not necessarily guarantee complete philosophical and methodological cohesiveness between the three or more sources used by the researcher in making a truth claim. According to Patton this idea is as follows “As with triangulation of methods, triangulation of data sources within qualitative methods will seldom lead to a single, totally consistent picture” (Patton 1984, 331). But, it was important to find the linkages between sources that helped to legitimize a bigger argument. An example of this would be three different articles about the state of the tourism industry. Each article may have taken a completely opposing view of the industry today, but they may all have agreed on a common definition of what tourism was. Triangulation allows for combining of all different types of sources, media or journals that could lead to the development of a cohesive qualitative study.

3.3 Historical Narrative Sources

The use of historical narratives was an important piece to constructing a well-rounded qualitative study. This type of source provided both context and an intimate look into what was happening at a certain place in time, oftentimes from the perspective of the people making history. Unfortunately, like any other source, there was always a measure of doubt concerning the authenticity of the data being provided. Stories of similar events could have been construed in different ways to benefit the motives of one

group over another. William Cronin (1992) pointed to the doubt that can be created amongst historical texts by saying, “they make us wonder how two competent authors looking at identical materials drawn from the same past can reach such divergent conclusions” (Cronin 1992, 1348). For example, two authors may have written tourism books about the same location with one offering a positive account of the location, while the other author’s book may have portrayed that location in a negative light. With this being said, the use of triangulation was a must when using historical narratives.

For this study, the benefits of using an historical text greatly outweighed the negatives. These sources put tourism, or any other subject, into the context of the place and time being studied. For example, drops in tourism revenue could be contributed to current events such as high gas prices or natural disasters. Smith and Lux (1993) built upon the importance of historical narratives by noting that “[c]onsumer attitudes toward business, government regulation, and advertising can change quickly, shift slowly, or show remarkable persistence of form” (Smith and Lux 1993, 595; brackets added). Historical texts were an ideal source for illustrating the long-term changes in tourism and the people and events affecting those changes.

There were two historical narrative sources used in this study that discussed the tourism industry in Tampa Bay. Unfortunately, no comprehensive historical text on the tourism industry in the region existed. In fact, this study was the first text of its kind for the region’s tourism industry. Nevertheless, the two texts being utilized did offer comprehensive insights into the selective aspects of tourism in the Tampa Bay region.

W.S. Christopher’s book, Tampa’s People with a Purpose (1993), provided a first hand account of the work of the Tampa Chamber of Commerce in shaping the tourism

industry in the region. This text served as the main historical narrative for Tampa Bay. The text focuses primarily on the city of Tampa, but it also considered the Chamber's dealings with other cities and counties in the region. Christopher's book was the only text that offered a modern day history that attempted to include all of Tampa Bay.

Gary Mormino's Land of Sunshine – State of Dreams (2005) served as the other historical narrative source for tourism in Tampa Bay. The main text of this book described the growth and development of Florida's tourism industry as a whole. The only drawback to using Mormino's book was that it covered a much broader geographical scale than the counties of Tampa Bay. The information pertaining to those counties in this book did play a vital role in reconstructing a history of Tampa Bay's tourism industry.

These texts were keys to constructing the history of tourism in Tampa Bay. The history was created by combining the historical narratives and several newspaper articles. Also, the historical narratives were used as criteria for the specific categories chosen in the website analyses portion of the study. This was accomplished by linking the historical narratives with the tourism literature in an attempt to draw similarities between the real world happenings in Tampa Bay with the writings found in scholarly journals. For instance, the 1990s saw the growth of nature tourism as a viable industry for counties outside of the normal tourist destinations. This was the case of most of the Tampa Bay counties surrounding Hillsborough County. Therefore, it was important to look for images and keywords related to nature tourism when studying the websites of the Tampa Bay region.

3.4 Newspapers

Michael A. DuBick (1978) believed that “businesses providing leisure services generate significant advertising revenue for newspapers, and may well facilitate a more complex news media” (DuBick *ibid*, 421). DuBick said that the tourism and leisure industry gained influence by buying advertising space from newspapers. Plainly speaking, an area heavily involved in tourism and leisure was more likely to influence the local media to print tourism related stories. Tampa Bay was no exception when it came to a region marked by a strong tourism industry.

Geographers have long sought out newspapers as valid sources of data for research (Hoelscher 2003; Penrose 2003; Hayter 2003; Che 2005). Newspapers have provided geographers with historical context, first person accounts and quotations, along with numbers and statistics. Hoelscher used the *New Orleans Times Picayune* (1950) to display the firsthand sentiments concerning the Jim Crow era. Similarly, Penrose used the *Calgary Daily Herald* (1912) to deliver the historic messages from the people who were phasing out the importance of cowboys. Roger Hayter took excerpts from the *Vancouver Sun* (2001, 2002) to help tell the story of a battle over land between indigenous people and the government. Che used *The New York Times* (2003) as a source of statistics for the number of African Americans being incarcerated.

The examples listed above analyzed excerpts from newspapers as snapshots of history. In this way, newspapers acted like a time capsule containing pictures and facts that help piece together a series of interconnected events. In the case of this study, newspaper sources were analyzed as a time capsule of the tourism industry. Data collection for newspaper sources involved web based search engines. The most likely

search engine was through Lexis-Nexis and the local newspaper links, including the *St. Petersburg Times* and the *Tampa Tribune*, found on the University of South Florida's library website.

The reasoning behind using these two particular publications was that they were the widest circulating papers within the study counties. This was not to say that these were the only newspapers printed throughout the region. There were other local newspapers to choose from in the Tampa Bay region, including the *Sarasota Herald Tribune*, the *Tri-City Herald*, and the *Bradenton Herald*, just to name a few. But for this study, the researcher thought that utilizing the two largest papers of the region would give a fair enough picture of the tourism industry in Tampa Bay. This being said, ignoring the papers with smaller circulations most likely showed a bias towards the happenings in Tampa and St. Petersburg.

Another important factor when using newspapers was determining the significance of the story compared to the other daily news. Plainly speaking, a 200 word article hidden in the middle of the paper was seemingly not as significant as a front page article with a color photo. Unfortunately for this study, the size and location of the articles did not play as prominently a factor. This was due to the search engines being used to identify the newspaper data. Lexis-Nexis and the other newspaper search engines used by the University of South Florida's website did not give a visual context to where and how the articles were situated. As a result, it was difficult to determine which articles carried more significance compared to the other news of the day. Therefore, the information gathered from the newspapers was based solely on the content of the articles.

Newspaper data covered the period from January 1, 1990 to January 1, 2000. The analysis of the newspaper data focused on several keywords that included: tourism, events, and conventions/tradeshows. Tourism was an obvious choice for a keyword as it cut to the heart of this study. The other keywords were chosen to coincide with the data compiled from the historical narratives by W.S. Christopher's Tampa's People with a Purpose (1993), and Gary Mormino's Land of Sunshine – State of Dreams (2005) along with the overall literature review. Christopher's and Mormino's books formed the groundwork for building a history of tourism in Tampa Bay. Combined with the historical framework of these two books and the theoretical framework outlined in the previous chapter of this study, it became clear that special events and conventions/tradeshows served as the umbrellas under which most of the non-locational advantages in the region reside.

The process of gathering information from the newspapers for this study was straightforward. After the newspaper search engines were located, one of the three keywords (tourism, events, and/or conventions/tradeshows) was placed into the search line under 'headline'. Searching for keywords in headlines was effective because it went after those stories that placed the greatest emphasis on the desired keyword. I considered searching through the main text of the articles, but felt that this would lead to stories that were too generalized and diffused for a study of this scope.

The next step was to set the search parameters to include stories between January 1, 1990 and December 31, 2000. This time period was selected because most of the available search engines only went as far back as 1990. The cut-off date of December 31, 2000 was chosen to coincide with the historical parameters of the study which were

focused on tourism in Tampa Bay from 1970 to 2000. After searching for all of the keywords in both of the newspapers it was time to group the stories by county. Once this data was organized by county it became an easily accessible source of quotations and facts that went into recreating a geographic history of tourism in the Tampa Bay region. When undertaking an analysis of a newspaper source, it is imperative to double check references and quotations. This is where triangulation comes into effect and finding supporting arguments from different newspaper articles is important.

The use of newspaper sources was outlined in accordance with the historical narrative section of this paper. To summarize, newspaper sources provided key quotes in reconstructing a history of tourism in Tampa Bay. In addition, this history was combined with scholarly tourism literature to help designate specific keywords and images in the analyses of websites.

3.5 Websites

Jackson and Purcell (1997, 221) believed “that analysis of communicative and spatial elements of the Internet provide a unique context for the definition and conveyance of place.” Tourism websites shape an outsiders’ perception of a place by playing upon their preconceptions of a location. While websites are more clearly a recent phenomenon than newspapers, geographers have begun to incorporate them into their research (Becker 2001; Ould-Mey 2003; Nunn 2003). Websites offer the same benefits as newspapers by providing quotations, historical context, and statistics. What sets websites apart from newspapers, however, is the up to the minute updates and the capability to deliver breaking news. The three examples discussed below analyzed

websites much the same way as geographers did with newspapers, that is, using them as snapshots of history. The difference of course was the frequency with which those ‘snapshots of history’ were updated.

Becker utilized the Pan-African News Agency website (2000) to find statistics on the amount of firewood annually used by the Malian people. Ould-Mey used the BBC news website (2001) and CNN.com (2000) to find quotes from Madeline Albright and Bill Clinton, respectively. Finally, Nunn used the website Volcano World (n.d.) to compile data for a chart of shallow-water volcanoes. These researchers used websites to acquire important quotations for their work. For this study, the researcher focused on the visual keys as well as the items found within the websites tables of contents.

Researchers (Larson and Ankomah, 2004; Rayman-Bachhus & Molina, 2001) have taken notice of the importance of websites when it came to luring perspective tourists. The tourism industry has fully embraced the use of websites to help keep up with the ever-changing needs of today’s tourists. Larson and Ankomah (2004) described the modern tourists desire “to reduce the risks in purchase decisions by increasingly seeking extensive, up-to-date and reliable pre-purchase information in their destination evaluation process” (Larson and Ankomah 2004, 24). The Internet provided such an avenue for tourists to acquire tourism information.

Similarly, Rayman-Bacchus & Molina (2001) looked to the Internet as a key to unlocking “a vast amount of quantitative (destination weather conditions, currency rates, ticket prices, and flight tracking) and qualitative (cultural events, political conditions, and visual imagery) information just with a click of a mouse” (*cited in* Larson and Ankomah *ibid*, 25). People now rely upon the use of websites to plan and purchase vacations. The

Internet provided the perfect medium for accommodating to these needs and it also provided a perfect medium for researchers to study the vagaries of the tourist industry.

Some of the basic principals of Classical Content Analysis were used to examine a selection of tourism websites in the Tampa Bay region. The concept of Classical Content Analysis can be described as “qualitative coding of content elements to obtain quantitative assessments” (Schwartz 9, 2004). This means that a coded system of (1)’s and (0)’s was applied to each category studied. A (1) signifying the presence of a category, while a (0) was given if that particular category was absent. The totals for each category were added up and compared against each other for further analysis.

One flaw in this method of analysis was the ‘all or nothing’ identification process. There were no control factors to determine the size, style, and placement of each of the categories. This problem was similar to the issue that arose with the newspaper analysis in which the placement of the article, in relationship to the rest of the newspaper, could not be considered. While a category may be present on several websites, it might not figure as prominent from site to site.

Another issue with this method was that it did not account for the websites that had multiple examples of the same type of category. Therefore, categories that were featured on one particular website more than once would not be counted differently than websites that had only one occurrence of that category in question. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this study the 1 and 0 identification process gave a basic and fair representation of the websites and their visual imagery.

Schedit and Wright (2004) used classical content analysis to identify visual design trends found within weblogs (<http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/>). These researchers

identified 23 categories within weblogs using the grounded theory as a guide. This theory included a process of developing lists of potential categories by interviewing others and through the independent study of texts. Here, keywords were searched for on the Internet in an attempt to identify the most prevalent categories. This concept was referred to as computer-mediated discourse (Herring 2003). The process was repeated until the researcher felt substantially 'grounded' in their choice of categories (Ryan and Bernard 783, 2001). In the end, Schedit and Wright (2004) looked for visual categories that included color banners, scrolling headers, smilies, colors that clash, etc. (<http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/>). Their study also chose to identify age and gender of the bloggers.

For this study, a method similar to Schedit and Wright (2004) was applied to do a visual analysis and a keyword analysis of the seven county travel sites for Tampa Bay. First of all, instead of interviewing others, the researcher did a preliminary visual survey of seven websites to get a general understanding of their layouts. This process included identifying potential categories as well as tallying the amount of websites that utilized those categories. Then, like Schedit and Wright (2004), the literature gathered for the study was considered in the narrowing down of potential categories. The history of the Tampa Bay region, created from analyzing newspapers and historical narratives, was used to contextualize the literature as a list of keywords was taken from the literature and history review. Categories were chosen that had a strong connection to tourism literature and the history of tourism in Tampa Bay. This method was applied to analyses of table of contents keywords as well as to visual imagery related to tourism in the region. Like Schedit and Wright (2004), this study also examined demographic content to determine

what types of people were being targeted, although, the demographic analysis only occurred on the visual imagery portion.

3.5.1 Website Visual Imagery Analysis

Before the actual visual image collection began, the theoretical overview and historical context of the study were reviewed to create a list of corresponding images to try to identify. The list developed included eatertainment, edutainment, event tourism, nature tourism, passportization of experience, shopertainment, signature properties, art and music enthusiasts, families with children, middle aged and elderly people, spring breakers and/or young adults, sun, sea, and sand. Eatertainment, edutainment, event tourism, nature tourism, shopertainment, and signature properties all were major themes outlined in the theoretical overview section of the study and thus earned a spot in the preliminary stages of the visual analysis.

The inclusion of art and music enthusiasts, families and/or children, middle aged and/or elderly people, and spring breakers and/or young adults, was an attempt to address the claim made in the theoretical overview in response to the growing need to accommodate a wider variety of guests. With mass tourism on the rise, the literature pointed to the need for tourist destinations to provide for wider segments of the population (Hannigan 1998, MacCannell cited in Cohen 1984, 377; Turner and Ash cited in Urry 1990, 8).

For this particular segment of visual analysis, determining age differences was entirely left up to the discretion of the researcher. Nevertheless, this part of the analysis was important in identifying if any differences could be found amongst the types of

people being targeted by each website. Finally, the inclusion of images of sun, sea, and sand allowed for the study to show the hold that the locational advantages of the Tampa Bay region had on the visual appearance of their travel websites.

A final note on the preliminary analysis of the visual images was that two tourism sites, Pasco County and Pinellas County, had a slideshow. The images pictured in these slideshows were counted along with the other images present on each website. The list of images for each county can be seen in Table 3.1. The actual analysis of these images could be found in the next chapter.

Table 3.0: Preliminary Visual Imagery Analysis

| Citrus | Hernando | Hillsborough | Manatee | Pasco | Pinellas | Sarasota |
|---------------|-----------------|---------------------|----------------|---------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Birds | Weather | Boating | Beach | Animation | Beach | Beach |
| Boating | Mermaids | Bowl Game | Birds | Carriage Ride | Fishing | Featured Artists |
| Children | Rodeo | Busch Gardens | Boating | Fishing | Golfing | Hiking |
| Fish | Sunshine | Christmas Lights | Flowers | Hiking | Ocean | Ocean |
| Lake/River | | Palm Trees | Local Weather | Old Buildings | Older Man | Older Couple |
| Manatees | | Pool | Manatee | Older Couple | Shopping | Sightseeing |
| Older Couple | | | Ocean | Young Family | Sunshine | Sunshine |
| Sunshine | | | Sunset | | Weather | Young Couple |
| | | | | | Young Adults | Young Family |
| | | | | | Young Couple | |
| | | | | | Young Family | |

3.5.2 Website Table of Contents Keyword Analysis

The purpose of the imagery analysis was to see what visual triggers were being applied to attract the eye of potential guests. Simply, the visual imagery was the eye-catching storefront to the websites, while the table of contents served to direct viewers to the actual contents of the tourism industry, such as the different parks, restaurants, etc.

Metaphorically speaking, the tables of contents served as virtual roadmaps for websites and their keywords represented the major ‘exits’ on that Internet highway.

It was important, therefore, to go beyond merely analyzing the actual keywords, and it was necessary to uncover what clicking on that particular link would produce. For example, after clicking on ‘lodging’, the issue of concern was what types of lodgings were offered by that website? Were they all chain hotels? Or perhaps did they include other options such as bed & breakfasts? This piece of information could give a stronger link to the case of tourism in Tampa Bay and the theoretical overview in this study. Basically, the goal of the table of contents analysis was to both identify the keywords used, as well as what those keywords represented.

For the most part, the methodology for the analysis of the tables of contents mirrored that used in the visual analysis. First the theoretical overview was examined to identify particular keywords that could be found on a tourism website. Secondly, the websites tables of contents were examined and recorded in a Table 3.2. Then, unlike the visual imagery analysis, the items within the tables of contents were clicked on to discover what information they represented.

The keywords identified from the theoretical overview included; travel deals, lodging, eatertainment, edutainment, shopertainment, event tourism, nature tourism, sun, sea, and/or sand. Travel deals was chosen to coincide with the literature concerning the important role played by the internet in facilitating today’s mass tourist (Larson and Ankomah 2004; Rayman-Bacchus & Molina 2001, *cited in* Larson and Ankomah 2004, 25). Lodging and eatertainment were chosen to follow the definition of tourist for this study which followed the formula set forth by the BEA. To review, the BEA’s definition

of the effects of tourism included the earnings from ‘Eating and Drinking’, ‘Hotels and Lodgings’, along with ‘Amusement and Recreation’ establishments (www.bea.gov). Edutainment and shoptertainment were chosen in relationship to Hannigan’s formula outlined in *Fantasy City* (1998). Event tourism (Getz 1991, *cited in* Carmichael 2002; Hall 1992, *cited in* Holcomb 1999) along with nature tourism (Vaughan 2000; Kontogeorgopoulos 2004) was included because of their strong presence in the literature. Finally, mentions of sun, sea, and/or sand were measured, as a single category, to quantify their hold on the tables of contents for the Tampa Bay tourism websites.

Table 3.1: Preliminary Table of Contents Keyword Analysis

| Citrus | Hernando | Hillsborough | Manatee | Pasco | Pinellas | Sarasota |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Contact Us | Christmas Ornaments | About the CVB | About the Area | Contact Us | Area Map | Dine |
| Fun Stuff | About Hernando | Area Info | Contact | Dining | Communities | Explore |
| Home | Attractions | Calendar of Events | Events | Fishing History & Culture | Consumer Tips | Order a Guide |
| In the News | Beaches | Fun Stuff | Home | Home | Contact Us | Play |
| Meetings and Group Travel | Bike Trails | Gift Shop | Places to Stay | Links | Discover Us | Services |
| Special Packages and Promotions | Camping | Hot Deals | Search | Media Room | Events | Stay |
| Tourism Partners | Canoeing | Packages Request | Specials | Natural Attractions | Hot Deals | Travel Industry |
| Travel Information | Directions | Visitor Info | Things to See and Do | Parks & Beaches | Places to Stay | |
| Where to Play | EcoTourism | Site Map | Travel Manager | Shopping | Things to Do | Visitors Guide |
| Where to Stay | Entertainment | Sports Commission | | Sports | | |
| | Event Calendar | Things to Do | | Suggested Itineraries | | |
| | Fishing & Boating | Where to Stay | | Water Recreation | | |
| | Golf | | | What to Do | | |
| | Hiking | | | Where to Stay | | |
| | Home | | | | | |
| | Hunting | | | | | |
| | Lodging | | | | | |
| | Meeting Calendar | | | | | |
| | New Resident | | | | | |
| | Parks & Recreation | | | | | |
| | Press Releases | | | | | |
| | Request Info | | | | | |
| | Restaurants | | | | | |
| | Shopping | | | | | |
| | Skate Park | | | | | |
| | Submit Your Event | | | | | |
| | The Arts | | | | | |

Chapter 4

4.1 Introduction to the Study Websites

The previous section outlined the seven counties tourism websites. The purpose of this overview was to paint a picture of how each county presented itself visually and contextually. The collection of data for this overview was done in a purely observational fashion. The researcher adopted a basic descriptive study method in which he did not click on any links or interact with the websites in anyway except for recording the visual stimuli presented.

Citrus County's visitor bureau website (www.visitcitrus.com) immediately welcomed its viewers with a postcard-like popup that said "Greetings from Citrus County, Florida!" The popup provided potential visitors with a daily report on the weather, the traffic intensity, the amount of manatees prevalent, and the fishing conditions in the area. Each category was assigned three unique levels of description. For example, the manatee population was described as being either "about", "abundant", or "everywhere".

Finally, at the bottom of the postcard-like popup was the phrase "Wish You Were Here!" Playing on the notion of eco-tourism, the actual website introduced Citrus County as "The Water Lover's Florida". This declaration was supported by the homepage that was dominated by a picture of a smiling pair of young children enjoying the underwater adventures available in the county. Other features found on this site included a still

photo gallery along with an easily navigable table of contents that directed potential guests to the outdoor amenities found in Citrus County.

Hernando County's visitor bureau website (www.hernandocounty.us/visit) was overloaded with text which gave it an uninviting tone. The banner at the top of the homepage displayed two cartoon-like mermaids encircling the greeting "Welcome to Hernando County". But beyond that, a visitor to the site was bombarded with three single-spaced paragraphs of text. While the content might have given a fair assessment of the tourism industry in the county, it did little to attract the eye of potential guests. The table of contents section on the site needed to be condensed to make it easier to navigate. As it currently stands, the table of contents included 28 items, while most other sites averaged between eight and ten items.

Manatee County's visitor site (www.flagulfislands.com) was a little different than the other sites in the region as it focused exclusively on three municipalities that included Anna Maria Island, Longboat Key, and the Bradenton area. The website was definitely eye-catching as it greeted its guests with a flock of large birds placed against a bright orange sunset. The next item that drew attention was a moving advertisement for a free visitors guide. Possibly one of the clearest and most straightforward of the visitors' sites, Manatee County did a good job of creating a warm and inviting feeling for potential guests.

Pasco County's visitor site (www.visitpasco.net) offered only a small step up from the level of quality found on Hernando County's site. Despite the introductory music played when the website was opened, along with a brief slide show of people doing crafts and outdoor activities, the site was anything but inviting. Dark colors and

spooky graphics (there appears to be a storm rolling in on top of a black background) made Pasco County appear to be as unappealing as a vacation to the fabled Amityville horror house in New Jersey. While the table of contents included too many items for this researcher, fifteen, they are presented in a compact and easy to read format.

Pinellas County's visitor site (www.floridasbeach.com) filled the screen with blue skies and sea, along with sandy beaches. A first glance made it clear that this site was the most interactive visitor site of the Tampa Bay counties. The homepage featured a slideshow of images that played most heavily on the natural beauty of the area. All pertinent information for potential visitors to the area was clearly laid out on the site. This site made it clear that the Pinellas County visitor bureau was intent on not only maintaining, but expanding its niche as a prime destination for beach guests.

Sarasota County's visitor site (www.sarasotafl.org) was both colorful and easy to navigate. While there were no dynamic graphics or musical introductions, the site did include stunning photographs that depicted the natural beauty found in Sarasota County. The next item that caught the eye was a listing of local events. This was a dramatic shift away from the other visitor sites that tended to start the body of the homepage with several paragraphs of background information on the tourism industry in the area. Finally, located next to the list of events in the county was a link to locating the "Featured Artists" in the Sarasota County area, hinting that their website was trying to connect with upper class art lovers.

Hillsborough County's visitor bureau website (www.visittampabay.com) stood out as being one of the best of its kind in the region. Besides being colorful, Hillsborough County's visitor bureau website was extremely user friendly with easily

navigable links found in a well organized table of contents. What is most interesting about this site was the fact that it attempted to represent all of Tampa Bay. The welcome found on the homepage made this point by saying, “You want Florida, you want it all, and you only want to unpack once. No problem. You want Tampa Bay” (December 2, 2006).

4.2 Website Visual Imagery Analysis

The visual imagery analysis took place after taking a brief look at the study websites. The results of this analysis can be found in Table 4.1. In the following section can be found an in depth review of the results followed by an analysis of the results related to the history of tourism in Tampa Bay as well as the literature found in the theoretical overview section of the study.

Table 4.1: Visual Imagery Analysis Results of Tampa Bay Websites.

| | Citrus | Hernando | Hillsborough | Manatee | Pasco | Pinellas | Sarasota | TOTAL |
|--|---------------|-----------------|---------------------|----------------|--------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Eatertainment | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Edutainment | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Event Tourism | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Nature Tourism | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 |
| Shopertainment | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Signature Properties | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Art and Music Enthusiasts | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Families and/or Children | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| Middle Aged and/or Elderly People | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| Spring Breakers and/or Young Adults | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Sun, Sea, and/or Sand | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 5 |

Event tourism was an unpopular visual category amongst the Tampa Bay region as only two counties chose to include it in their websites. The first was Hernando County who included a colorful advertisement for their 31st Annual Rodeo and Barbeque Festival. The other was Hillsborough County who included a notice of the Outback Bowl which is played annually at Raymond James Stadium (www.visittampabay.com). This result ran counter to that presented in the literature review. As people become eager for more frequent getaways (Rubin and Gorman *cited* in Hannigan 1998, 61) it would behoove tourist sites to feature visuals of as many local or regional events as possible. Law (1993) even went as far as suggesting that tourist locations should create new events for the sole purpose of attracting outsiders (Law *ibid*, 98). It was possible that the circumstances of seasonality prohibited the websites from having a strong number of event tourism visuals. Perhaps, at different times of the year, such as during Major League Baseball Spring Training, there would be more events to advertise and thus more corresponding visuals.

Nature tourism appeared to be the most popular visual category for all of the selected Tampa Bay websites. It is true that nature tourism had a much larger umbrella under which visuals could fall under. As was the case, many of the websites had more than one occurrence of nature tourism visuals. Citrus County had five different examples of nature tourism visuals which included birds, boating, fish, manatees, and a lake or river. Manatee had the second largest total as they included birds, boating, and a manatee. Next in line with two examples was Pasco County who featured fishing as well as hiking visuals. Finally, Hillsborough County (boating), Pinellas County (fishing), and Sarasota County (hiking), all had one visual of nature tourism each.

The results of the nature tourism visual analysis were supported by the theoretical overview. Having six out of the seven counties choosing to utilize visuals of nature tourism activities proved how that type of tourism has exploded. Pasco County and the other counties with less established tourism industries in the region have grabbed onto nature tourism as a means of capturing some of the tourist dollars. Much of this had to do with the areas outside of the mass tourism traps, like Tampa, Clearwater, and even Disney located to the east of the Tampa Bay region.

Shoptertainment was only visually represented in one of the websites. That singular site was Pinellas County that pictured a smiling group of people holding shopping bags. Strangely, the poor output of shoptertainment visuals corresponded nicely with the literature. Kent *et al* (1983) noted that people did not go on vacation with the intention of becoming shoppers, but invariably they assumed that role by spending the majority of their travel expenses shopping (*cited in* Law 1993, 119). It appeared that the tourism officials of Tampa Bay were aware of this inevitability when they failed to give shoptertainment a strong visual showing on their websites.

The signature properties category was also underrepresented in the analysis. Only Hillsborough County included visuals of a signature property. That image featured a group of upside-down rollercoaster riders at Tampa's Busch Gardens. The importance of signature properties on maintaining an "entertainment economy" in the literature was without precedence (Hannigan 1998, 60; Turner and Rosentraub 2002, 489). It was difficult then to justify why the counties of Tampa Bay would not have featured visuals of signature properties on their websites. For example, Sarasota County could have included an image of the Sarasota Opera House or the Golden Apple Dinner Theatre.

The analysis of the visual imagery showed that some of the expected items did not appear, including edutainment and eatertainment. First of all, the literature review would lead one to expect that edutainment would take a predominant position in the visual makeup of the region's websites (Hannigan 1998). This coincided with not only the literature on edutainment, but on mass tourism as a whole (Turner and Ash 1975 cited in Urry 1990; Hannigan 1998). A system is now in place with the mass tourism market in which it has become important to attract all different types of tourists, including families with children. One extremely easy and effective way of doing that was to feature eduatainment-focused 'signature properties' (Turner and Rosentraub 2002) such as the Florida Aquarium or the Museum of Science and Industry. It was difficult to understand why the Tampa Bay tourism industry failed to include an image of an edutainment facility.

The other visual imagery that did not appear on the websites was examples of edutainment (Hannigan 1998). The literature made it evident that tourists did not make cuts in their food budgets when preparing for a vacation (Pyo, Uysal and McLellan 1991, *cited in Au et al* 2002). In fact, the BEAs' embedded the earnings from eating and drinking establishments into their formula for measuring the tourism industry (www.bea.gov). On top of that, the working definition of tourist for this study included the use of these two types of establishments. It seemed that a tourist website would boast about the types of dining opportunities available by featuring eatertainment visuals. Maybe those within the tourism industry have taken for granted that tourists must dine out while on vacation, and therefore have ignored the importance of accentuating eating and drinking establishments.

The next category considered was sun, sea, and/or beach visuals. The total counted for this category was five out of the seven websites. It should be noted that this number was overshadowed by the presence of the sun as a visual, as Citrus, Hernando, Pinellas, and Sarasota Counties featured sunshine, and Manatee displayed a sunset. Three counties included images of the beach on their websites. These beach visuals were found on the websites for Manatee, Pinellas, and Sarasota Counties. Finally, Manatee and Pinellas Counties featured a visual of the ocean itself.

The strong presence of sun, sea, and sand visuals showed that despite all of the literature supporting the need for a diversified tourist economy, the Tampa Bay region featured their locational benefits equal to or above their non-locational attractions. These results seemed to support the claim made by Klein *et al* (2004) that distance to the coast was the most important factor in identifying a tourist location. But needless to say, measuring the amount of visuals present can not determine the strength of one county's tourism industry over another. What this result did show was that geographical beauty was one of the top hooks used to catch the eye of potential guests to the Tampa Bay area.

The remaining paragraphs of the visual imagery analysis focused on the demographics being pictured on the websites. Four counties included images of families and/or children. These included Citrus County who showed children, while Pasco, Pinellas and Sarasota had a young family. The middle aged and/or elderly people category also had a large number of visuals amongst the websites. Once again, four counties found it necessary to include these people. Citrus, Pasco, and Sarasota Counties all had older/middle aged couples present, while Pinellas featured an older man fishing alone.

The next group to consider was the spring breakers and/or young adults. This category was not as well represented as the previous two. Only Pinellas County (featuring young adults), and Sarasota County (featuring a young couple) made an impact on this demographic. Finally, a specialty group of tourists, the art and music enthusiasts, were only represented in one website. Sarasota County had an image to select on their site that directed viewers to locally featured artists.

What this visual demographic portion of the study proved was that the Tampa Bay region was making a concerted effort to include as many different types of people in their websites. As vacations have become more and more accessible through the use of internet travel sites and other forms of media, people have been getting away more frequently than ever. In this day and age of quick getaways, it was evident through the visual results, that tourist websites had made the attempt to make Tampa Bay as inviting to as many demographics as possible.

One flaw from this portion of the study was related to the time or seasonality of when the websites were viewed. First of all, the artist and music enthusiasts did not have a large visual output. But, every October, Clearwater in Pinellas County has hosted a widely celebrated jazz festival. It can be postulated that during that time of the year, Pinellas County's tourism website (www.floridasbeach.com) would feature visuals that pertained to said event. Another example of seasonality affecting the results would be the low number of spring breaks and/or young adults. Clearly, spring breakers would not be shown on the websites until closer to the spring time. That could be one reason why only a few of the sites included this demographic.

4.3 Website Table of Contents Keyword Analysis

The next stage in the visual analysis of tourist websites focused on the table of contents for each homepage. The table of contents served as a virtual road map for a website offering keywords that directed users to their desired information destinations. This portion of the visual analysis, therefore, is equivalent to a word- find exercise in as much as determining what words tourism websites in the Tampa Bay region feel adequately capture the needs of their potential visitors. The results of this analysis can be found in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Table of Contents Keyword Analysis Results for Tampa Bay Websites

| | Citrus | Hernando | Hillsborough | Manatee | Pasco | Pinellas | Sarasota | TOTAL |
|--------------------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------------|----------------|--------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Travel Deals | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 4 |
| Lodging | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 6 |
| Eatertainment | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| Edutainment | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Shopertainment | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Event Tourism | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| Nature | | | | | | | | |
| Tourism | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Sun, Sea, and/or Sand | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 |

The lodging category proved to be the most prevalent keyword found throughout the websites as it appeared in six out of the seven. Citrus County chose to use the phrase ‘where to stay’ to describe lodging. A further look into ‘where to stay’ showed that Citrus County was featuring bed & breakfasts, campgrounds and RV parks, hotels and resorts, along with condos and private rentals. Hernando County had two separate

categories devoted to lodging. The first category, 'lodging', included hotels and motels. The other category, camping, highlighted campgrounds and RV parks.

Manatee County described lodging as 'places to stay' and that included bed & breakfasts, condos, home rentals, hotels and motels, villas and cottages, along with campgrounds and RVs. Pasco County defined lodging as 'where to stay'. This website's lodging category included one of the more interesting set of options. The list included hotels/motels, RV parks/campgrounds, naturalist locations, vacation rentals and bed & breakfasts. The natural locations were another way of saying nudist resorts. Pinellas County's keyword for lodging was 'places to stay'. This category included bed & breakfasts, superior small lodging (hotels, motels, inns, and bed & breakfasts), weddings, along with condos and vacation homes. Pinellas County was the first and only website to market themselves as a prime location for weddings. Finally, Sarasota simply used 'stay' as their term for lodging. This website featured locations within Sarasota County (such as Sarasota, Longboat Key, Siesta Key, etc.) instead of being directed towards a type of lodging option like hotels, motels, etc.

The results of the keyword analysis for lodging corresponded directly with the theoretical overview of the study. In particular, one of the elements used by the Bureau of Economic Analysis' to describe the effects of tourism (Hotels and Lodgings) was a key element in the creation of a working definition of tourist for this study (www.bea.gov). Therefore, it was no surprise to see the high results of the keyword analysis for lodging.

Clicking on the lodging button for the table of contents did produce some other interesting results. It was important to see how closely the BEA's definition of Hotels

and Lodgings as “commercial and noncommercial establishments engaged in furnishing lodging, or lodging and meals, and camping space and camping facilities”, related to the actual tourism sites in Tampa Bay (www.bea.gov). It was obvious to the researcher that hotels, motels, and bed & breakfasts would be included under the lodging options. What was most intriguing was to see whether or not the ‘camping space and camping facilities’ would be recognized. Consequently, four out of the six websites that had a lodging option made some mention of these camping elements. This helped support the definition used by the BEA, as well as this researcher’s decision to use it as a vital part of the working definition of tourist for the study.

The next category for analysis of the tables of contents keywords was travel deals. Like lodging, the travel deals category could be defined in different ways by each website. Citrus County described travel deals as ‘special packages and promotions’. This category led to lodging, golfing, and manatee tours and scuba diving. Hillsborough County defined travel deals simply as ‘packages’. During the time of analysis (December 2006), the ‘packages’ included hotel deals, as well as ‘history buff packages’. Another package featured a trip to Busch Gardens and International Plaza, along with the Ellenton Prime Outlets, etc. The trip to International Plaza came complete with shopping booklets offering special deals at a number of its establishments. Manatee County defined travel deals as ‘specials’ which included golf, spas, outdoor & nature, and many other options. Finally, Pinellas County used the phrase ‘hot deals’ to describe travel deals. This category included airline packages, and a link to Visit Florida deals.

Not surprisingly, travel deals had the second highest number of appearances on the keyword analysis. The positive results were supported by the theoretical overview in

relationship with the rise of mass tourism along with the advancement of the Internet. The increased access to travel deals and tourism related materials through the World Wide Web has allowed people to move away from long, planned out vacations, and replaced that with a number of short retreats from daily life. This has led to the creation of “placeless destinations” (Johnston *et al* 2000, 841), where people have become uninterested in the culture of the places they visited and more interested in removing themselves from their normal routine. This idea has been related to mass tourism’s rise, which has helped the tourism industry of different locations, such as Tampa Bay, absorb the demand for more and more quick, and often last minute, getaways (Turner and Ash 1975 *cited in* Urry 1990, 8; Hannigan 1998, 60).

The next category of analysis was eatertainment. This category was found on three of the seven websites. Each of the counties referred to eatertainment with a different term; Hernando County as ‘restaurants’, Pasco County as ‘dining’, and Sarasota County with ‘dine’. Hernando County’s ‘restaurants’ along with Sarasota’s ‘dine’ led viewers to a mixture of locally owned and operated establishments, as well as to the more familiar national chains, such as Applebee’s. On the other hand, Pasco County’s ‘dining’, directed visitors to “new and interesting dining experiences” (www.visitpasco.net) which focused on ‘mom and pop’ run businesses.

The table of contents results for eatertainment agreed indirectly with the literature. Eating and Drinking establishments was part of the definition of the impact of tourism laid out by the Bureau of Economic Analysis. Even Pyo, Uysal and McLellan (1991) found that out of all of the expenses included in a vacation, “tourists were least likely to make cuts in their food budget” (cited in Au *et al* 2002, 819). If this was the case, many

would feel that dining options would have had a greater representation in the keyword analysis, much like the lodging results. But a closer look at the findings of Pyo, Uysal and McLellan (1991) showed that while dining was as fundamental a need for a tourist as eating and drinking, booking a hotel room in advance seemed like something that should be made further in advance than dinner reservations (*cited in Au et al 2002, 819*). Exceptions could have applied to this as some restaurants might be more selective and would require advanced notice. This being said, tourists were more likely to book a hotel before leaving home than they would be to make reservations at a place for dinner. It seemed then that the Tampa Bay tourism industry had decided to meet the more fundamental needs of a person planning a vacation by under-representing dining options, possibly casting them off as inevitable, not in need of prior arrangements.

Shopertainment was identified in two of the Tampa Bay websites. Hernando and Pasco Counties referred to this idea as 'shopping'. Hernando County's website directed viewers to antique shops and boutiques, while Pasco County offered everything from flea markets, malls, and boutiques. These low results may be in relationship to the types of shopping opportunities that the Tampa Bay counties felt set them apart from other regions.

It is absurd to say that these counties were not in possession of some large signature property-like malls and outlet shopping centers featured in the theoretical overview section of the study, such as the Ellenton Prime Outlets and International Plaza. But, seeing as though the literature also related that these shopertainment facilities offered the same major stores that were found at like properties across the country (Turner and Ash 1975 *cited in Urry 1990*), it did offer some meaning to the low results in

the keyword analysis. And as stated in the explanation of the results of shopertainment in the visual analysis, people become shoppers first, and tourists second on vacation (*Consumer Reports* 1998 cited in Snepenger *et al* 2003, 567-568).

Nature tourism was the next category to address and only two counties made such references. Hernando County had six categories available that were directly related to nature tourism. The list cited; 'bike trails', 'canoeing', 'ecotourism', 'fishing and boating', 'hiking', and 'parks & recreation'. Pasco County had several references as well for nature tourism, such as, 'fishing', 'parks and beaches' (beaches was excluded from this category), and 'water recreation'. The final category of 'water recreation' included canoeing and kayaking, as well as scuba diving. For the purpose of the count on nature tourism, the scuba diving element was ignored. Pasco County's nature tourism category was obviously intermingled with ocean activities. The researcher saw fit to make this exception for Pasco County due to the fact that even without including 'parks and beaches', as well as 'water recreation', nature tourism still would get a tally due to the presence of 'fishing'.

The results of the nature tourism keyword analysis were surprising because the history of Tampa Bay's tourism seemed to favor the rise of nature tourism within the region. The fact that only two of the counties within that area had a keyword related to this type of tourism was puzzling. Hernando County went above and beyond any expectations of this researcher with their inclusion of so many different types of nature tourism. But, Pasco County's ambiguity with respect to nature tourism seemed to not follow the lines of thought in the historical picture of that county. When researching the nature tourism phenomenon in the Tampa Bay region, Pasco County always was in the

forefront of the talks. County Commissioner Ed Collins (1994) went as far as to tell Visa not to tout the area as a beach resort, but as a place for outdoors adventurers (Horridge 1994). But as this was a study of the all-or-nothing type, Pasco County did represent itself in the keyword visual analysis for nature tourism.

The question of why the counties other than Pasco and Hernando chose not to provide links to nature tourism in their tables of contents was unknown. It would be understandable to say that since the visual analysis results were so strong for this category, with six out of seven sites, that the websites found it unnecessary to include any further mention of nature tourism.

The event tourism category was evident on three of the study websites. The first, Hernando County, referred to event tourism with their 'event calendar'. This calendar was extremely extensive giving a day by day listing of all the events between October and the end of December. Manatee County saw fit to include event tourism with the keyword 'events'. The events listed in Manatee County were a junior golf tournament, and a Christmas tree display, amongst others. Finally, Pinellas County merely used the term 'events' to attract visitors to a beachside pep rally for the teams playing in the Outback Bowl in Hillsborough County, an art festival, a civil war reenactment, and others.

The results for event tourism were rather disappointing when considering the amount of data in support of it found in the literature. C.M. Hall (1992) stressed the importance of events for tourist cities by calling events "the image builders of modern tourism" (*cited in* Holcomb 1999, 59). Law (1993) saw events as vital tools in attracting visitors to a location, even go as far as saying that places should create new events to

bring in more people (Law 1993, 98). The visual imagery analysis for event tourism was undoubtedly unsatisfactory, but the lack of results for the keyword analysis of this category was even more frustrating. The table of contents should act as an unwavering guide on websites, offering unchanging categories to search through. Therefore, the excuse of seasonality could not be contributed to the void in the keyword analysis of event tourism. Even if no events were scheduled for the upcoming time period, the option would still be available for future planned events. That was why it was so aggravating to see that so many of the Tampa Bay region's tourism websites failed to mention event tourism on their tables of contents.

The sun, sea, and/or sand category had two links in the tourism websites. Hernando County made direct reference to this category by listing 'beaches' on their table of contents. In relationship to the notes made in nature tourism about Pasco County's intermingling of land and sea activities, the 'parks and beaches' category, as well as the reference to scuba diving through 'water recreation', earned a tally to Pasco County for sun, sea, and/or sand.

These results came with little surprise to the researcher. It was expected that a high number of results would appear for sun, sea, and/or sand in the visual analysis, as it has become clear that visual triggers of a favorable geographic location are key to tourism marketing. With this in mind, it was evident that the 'other' non-locational advantages and travel necessities, such as lodging options, would take precedence on the tables of contents over the sun, sea, and/or sand of Tampa Bay. One surprising result was the lack of mention for this category in Pinellas County. It is common knowledge that Clearwater Beach has been one of the top ranked beaches in the country for several years.

In fact, it was voted America's top beach in 2005 (www.floridasbeach.com). This was an extreme case in which mentioning sun/sea, and/or sand in the table of contents would have been understandable.

The analysis of the table of contents keywords showed that one of the expected categories, edutainment, was actually not present on the websites. But, the researcher did not expect to find the word edutainment, as this is more of an academic term. Instead, words related to edutainment such as "education", "learn", "imagine", amongst others would have been accepted. This omission was difficult to understand as the literature review (Hannigan 1998) and the story of Tampa Bay's tourism industry would have led one to believe that is an important factor. Hannigan looked at edutainment as one of the cornerstones of a tourist city, along with eatertainment and edutainment. Even more, the presence of such important tourist edutainment attractions such as the Museum of Science and Industry, the Aquarium, and Lowery Park Zoo all within Hillsborough County alone would lead one to question why edutainment visuals would not play a more vital role on the websites.

Chapter 5

5.1 Conclusions

The website analysis provided a glance into how each of the Tampa Bay counties have been marketed and sold to potential guests. This allowed for the true identity of each county to be put on display. For example, a county could be shown as a natural playground or as a theme park thrill ride. The analysis also looked at the table of contents portion of each of the chosen websites. The purpose of this exercise was to identify what each county saw as the most important detailed information (lodging, shopping, etc.) that would capture their target tourist market. Both forms of analyses provided an interesting look into how counties identify themselves.

The upcoming chapter serves to bring this study to a close. This chapter summarizes the findings, identifies strengths and weaknesses, as well as offers ideas for future studies. The summary portion brings together the main points of the thesis and allowed for the tying up of any loose pieces of information. This final chapter concludes the study by discussing the weaknesses and shortcomings of the present project with a view to identifying opportunities for future research.

5.2 Revisiting the Hypothesis

The study that sparked this thesis was by Klein *et al* (2004) who concluded that distance to the coastline was the main determining causal factor in locating tourist rich

markets. By contrast, the hypothesis of this study was that for a region or locality to establish a lucrative tourist market it cannot rely solely on the draw of its coastal location. This was not to discount the obvious strength of sandy beaches as a tourist draw. Instead, for a more comprehensive answer, issues beyond location needed to be understood. The purpose of this study was to identify and explain those additional factors beyond location that played a role in the establishment of a thriving tourist economy. The final step then is to examine how those non-locational factors are used to maintain a tourism industry.

The poor ‘fit’ of the Klein *et al* (2004) study for the Tampa Bay region suggested that other causal factors were at play beyond geographic location. Indeed, all of the Tampa Bay counties chosen for this study bordered the Gulf of Mexico and were unable to reproduce positive levels of importance for tourism throughout the region. These findings spurred the search for other causal factors to explain why it took considerably more than a coastal location to have a strong tourist economy.

By studying a select number of websites related directly to the counties in question, as well as a few from the state at large, it was hoped that the identity of the Tampa Bay tourist economy would be uncovered. The website analyses showed that despite all of the literature in support of the importance of non-locational factors in creating a tourist economy, that locational factors still served as the overriding mechanism for attracting tourists.

5.3 Revisiting Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study was created to establish a geographic perspective for studying the formation of relatively successful tourism markets in Tampa

Bay. The initial point of departure was focused on the role of mass tourism as a driving force in the modern day tourism market. This was an attempt to steer away from the obvious draw of beaches as a tourist attraction, towards non-physical amenities needed to attract the maximum amount of tourist dollars to a location.

John Hannigan's Fantasy City (1998) served as the main theoretical strand for this argument. Hannigan focused on the rise of mass tourism and its implications for the landscape of America. The key elements of mass tourism, according to Hannigan, were shopertainment, eatertainment, and edutainment. These elements, amongst others, were keys to creating and maintaining a strong tourism industry. As this study has shown, these changes towards mass tourism have all played a fundamental role in the development of the Tampa Bay tourism industry.

In addition, the concept of the “passportization of experience” (Hannigan 1998, 69; Snepenger *et al* 2003, 568) showed another aspect of the rise of mass tourism in America. In particular, the idea here was that people could travel all over the world and still achieve the same satisfaction from a store, restaurant, theme park, etc. Even more, the “passportization of experience” allowed for people to collect artifacts, such as trinkets or clothing, to validate or authenticate their visits. In essence, the city name on the mug or t-shirt was the only new experience for a tourist. This concept showed the uniformity developing across the tourism industry as people became fixated on attaining prepackaged familiarity while on vacation (i.e., The Hard Rock Café). These ‘franchised’ attractions became a must for tourist regions in hopes of maintaining their hold on the market.

Event-tourism (Getz cited in Carmichael 2002, 314; Hall cited in Holcomb 1999, 59) had also been developed as a means of attracting a large number of tourists. This usually occurred through tradeshows, festivals, sporting events, and other special events. The driving force behind this idea was that they brought in large numbers of people for short periods of time serving as a quick boost to a tourist economy. Event-tourism has proved to be an important part of Tampa Bay's tourism industry, especially with the growth of the tradeshow industry. Unfortunately, the literature concerning the widespread existence of event-tourism in the region was not supported by the website analyses.

Nature-tourism (Vaughan 2000, 285; Kontogeorgopoulos 2004, 9) played a secondary role to mass tourism. This type of tourism fed off the draw of mass tourist locations by offering a brief escape from the prepackaged natural. This concept was not to be confused with people wishing to sunbathe on the beach. Instead, this type of tourism was directed at outdoor recreation such as horseback riding, fishing, and boating. Citrus, Hernando, Manatee, and Pasco Counties have embraced nature-tourism as a means of establishing themselves in the tourism industry. This idea of nature tourism was one of the most frequently utilized marketing tools found in the website visual imagery analysis.

5.4 Weaknesses of the Study

One flaw of this study can be found in the methods section. The issue arose during the Classical Content Analysis. This method, as used by the researcher, called for an "all or nothing" type of identification process. The problem was that this type of

analysis did not take into account several important features. First of all, for the visual analysis section, the analysis did not consider the size, color, movement, or placement of the image. Secondly, the table of contents analysis did not consider the location, size, font, color, or any other distinguishing feature of the keywords. Therefore, the results have no way of showing if one item took greater precedence over others.

A similar issue arose with the use of newspaper articles as sources. The problem was that the sources of the papers were electronic and did not allow for any way of contextualizing the importance of one story over another. Plainly speaking, there was no way of expressing to the reader where the stories ranked in importance to the rest of a paper's particular issue. Therefore, the information taken from newspapers was chosen by content alone, and without consideration for size, placement, photos, color, or other elements.

Another flaw to this study was the issue of seasonality. This problem pertained to the time of the year in which the websites were analyzed. The information from websites was meant to be dynamic in nature. In particular, the visual imagery analysis would most likely change from season to season to feature the different events and experiences offered in the Tampa Bay region throughout the year. It was believed that the information from the tables of contents would remain unchanged, although the data found after clicking on each keyword could also change from time to time. But by only analyzing the data at one point in the year, the story of the way the tourism industry in Tampa Bay used websites was incomplete.

Possibly the biggest weakness of this study was its 'Tampa-centric' theme, meaning that most of the information came from the perspective of the City of Tampa

along with Hillsborough County. Without the presence of the mass tourism facilities located in Tampa and Hillsborough County, the Tampa Bay tourism industry would consist of little more than a few small hotels lining the beaches of Pinellas County. In order to capture more of the local specificity within Tampa Bay would have required more intensive, ethnographic fieldwork. Thus, a Tampa-centric mentality shaped this study and thus gave less attention to the happenings in the surrounding counties.

5.5 Strengths of the Study

The website analysis proved to be the most substantial part of this study. The visual and table of contents analysis offered a new and exciting method to identify the ways in which locations are being marketed. The hypothesis was designed to uncover the other amenities featured in the Tampa Bay region beyond the sunshine and other natural beauty. It was interesting that while ‘the other’ proves to be essential in creating a well-rounded tourist market, the majority of the visuals used featured the natural. This was most likely related to the public’s knowledge of the area as a tropical retreat. The non-locational amenities found throughout the pages gives people the attractions they desire placed in front of a sunny landscape.

The literature utilized in this study offered a strong link between geography and tourism. It was imperative that this study had a base in the discipline of geography because tourism is a natural fit within the studies of socio-geographic landscapes. This is due to the forced interaction that tourists have had with foreign habitats and their populations. In fact, it is quite difficult to separate tourism and geography. One cannot have a tourist experience without encountering a geographic location outside of one’s

daily routine. Like all of the social sciences, geography has been interwoven into the fabric of our lives. The tourist experience is no different.

5.6 Future studies

A future study should be done to expand on the methods used in this study. In particular, the visual imagery analysis should have sub-categories developed to take into account issues of size and placement of the images. Addressing these two issues would give a better contextual picture to the tourism industry of not only what should be shown on a website, but how it should be shown. This way, images or keywords could be ranked not only by their frequency of use, but how they were used.

Secondly, a content analysis of the marketing strategies utilized by the tourism industry beyond Internet websites should be done. This study would outline the content of television, radio, billboards, and other forms of media in marketing a region. As with the future study of websites, there should be sub-categories developed to consider the frequency of the commercials or advertisements, their locations, etc. in the analysis. This would give a complete picture of how regions are marketing themselves as tourist locations.

Finally, all of these forms of media should be analyzed at seasonal points of the year. This way, the issue of seasonality could be considered as another method of analysis. Only after combining sub-categories of analysis, along with expanding the forms of media studied, and finally factoring in seasonality would the perfect study of tourism in Tampa Bay be available. Until then, this study has laid the foundation for a

better understanding of the website marketing strategies for the tourism industry in the region.

5.7 Key Findings

Sun, sea, and sand took a priority visually in the Tampa Bay area's tourism websites. This challenged the hypothesis to the study namely that a favorable geographic location, such as one with a tropical climate, was not enough to maintain a strong tourism industry. The visual analysis proved that pictures of a sunbathed beach were still powerful tools for attracting guests. It was thought that the non-locational attractions found in the Tampa Bay area would have taken a more prominent place on the websites.

Nevertheless, the literature did support these finding by pointing to the growth of "placeless locations" (Johnston *et al* 2000, 841) or tourist spots devoid of any real surprises to the modern tourist. This study offers support to Turner and Ash (1975) when they noted how the modern tourism industry has created "a small monotonous world that everywhere shows us our own image...the pursuit of the exotic and diverse ends in uniformity" (*cited in* Urry 1990, 8). Turner and Rosentraub (2002) built upon this idea by complaining of the modular formula of "signature properties" (*ibid*, 489) spread across the different tourism landscapes which has lead to this uniformity of place.

Through the study of the tourism industry in Tampa Bay, this researcher was able to identify the non-locational advantages, such as eduatainment facilities and special events. It must be emphasized that the non-locational advantages were in place in the Tampa Bay region. In fact, a majority of these facilities were located in the City of Tampa. To return to the point, the tourism industry of Tampa Bay must have realized

that their “entertainment economy” (Hannigan 1998, 60) was not that diverse from others across the country.

The next finding was linked by two categories of the analyses. Shopping and dining were seen as inevitable functions of tourists. The visual and table of contents analyses showed a lack of information pertaining to these two items. So much so, that the lack of results for shopping and dining were supported by the literature. It was shown that shopping was something done out of impulse by tourists, and in fact ended up being one of their major travel expenses (*Consumer Reports* 1998, cited in Snepenger *et al* 2003, 567-568; Kent *et al* 1983, cited in Law 1993, 119). The idea of shopping on impulse, and not without careful planning, showed that the tourism industry of Tampa Bay was wise to feature other functions of their region beyond their shopping centers. This idea was supported by the ideas of uniformity of place that has developed due to mass tourism (Johnston *et al* 2000, 841; Turner and Rosentraub 2002, 489), meaning that the shopping options were not that different for tourists when compared to their options found at home.

These issues of uniformity of place discussed above also play into the low results for dining options in the analyses. Because people have become less interested in the culture of a place, and more in the act of getting away, it seemed that tourists were more likely to eat foods that they were accustomed to while on vacation. This being said, the idea of marketing the Tampa Bay region’s restaurants was not explored much at all on the websites. Possibly, if the region was known for a certain food, like the fresh seafood markets found in Seattle, Washington, they might have featured images of that defining

feature. If the region was known for its seafood, beef products, or some other delicacy, visitors to the region's travel sites would never have known.

Another point on the poor results for dining options in the analyses was that, like shopping, it was *expected* that people would dine out on vacation. The literature found that while people might not be interested in trying local delicacies, they were willing to spare no expense when it came to dining on vacation (Pyo, Uysal and McLellan 1991, *cited in Au et al* 2002, 819). Therefore, it has served the Tampa Bay region well to supply all of the national restaurant chains for its guests. These were two cases in which visuals and table of contents mentions of important pieces to the mass tourism industry, namely, shoptertainment and eatertainment, were rightly absent from tourism websites.

These findings uncovered the dual roles played by vacation destinations in marketing their region. The first role is to play to the sensory needs of potential tourists by advertising each location as a natural escape from everyday life. The geographic beauty that defines an area was used by the tourism industry to elicit an emotional response from potential visitors. This meant offering warmth and sunshine to those trapped in the doldrums of winter, and/or fresh air and greenery to those overwhelmed by the noise and crowds in the cities. The desired response was to create a need to escape the monotony of home for the beauty of a different geographic location.

There must be alternative attractions to entertain tourists once the emotional response of leaving one environment for another diminishes. Therefore, the second role of a host community was to provide for all of the non-sensory needs of the people once they have been sold the idea of escaping one environment for another. These needs included amusement parks, shopping malls, dining opportunities, hotels, special events,

etc., all of which can be found in Tampa Bay. It should be understood that the tourism industry played on the sensory desires of visitors to attract them to a location, but the non-locational amenities of a place served to keep people entertained once they arrived.

5.8 Final Summary

It takes much more than sunny skies and picturesque beaches to make a tourism industry thrive. The case of the Tampa Bay region proved that point. It was clear that for the tourism industry to maintain itself it must constantly be growing and adapting to the needs of the modern guest. This meant adjusting to the influx of people interested in quick getaways, as well as the more traditional long term visitors. The Tampa Bay region's tourism industry has done a good job of keeping up with the demands of the modern tourist.

Notwithstanding its shortcomings this thesis has filled a major gap in the geographical history of the tourism industry in Tampa Bay, something that has not existed before. It is important that this is not the last study of its kind for the region. Tampa Bay's tourism industry is a dynamic and constantly expanding part of the regional economy and should be systematically studied over time and space. The contribution of the study has been to show how much the area has grown and changed over the past thirty-plus years. It stands to reason that the next thirty years will bring even more change to the region as the tourism industry continues to evolve.

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