

Overview

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on U.S. tourism, but its effects were not uniform across the country. A study conducted by researchers from Penn State and West Virginia University reveals that some rural communities actually experienced employment gains in the leisure and hospitality sector during this period. The research provides valuable insights for developing rural tourism and destination management strategies that enhance community resilience.

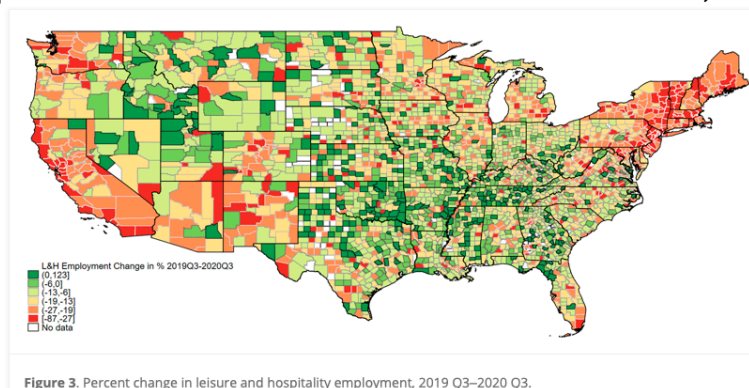


Findings and Impacts

- While leisure and hospitality employment declined by an average of 12% across all counties, 332 counties actually experienced an increase in employment in this sector.
- Rural counties were generally better able to weather the shocks of the pandemic than their urban counterparts in terms of the tourism economy.
- Some of the most rural and sparsely populated counties saw significant growth in tourism-related employment, with up to two-fold increases in certain areas.
- The study revealed that in places where employment losses were greatest, wages were more likely to increase, indicating that workers who retained their jobs in hard-hit areas received pay raises.
- These findings highlight both opportunities and challenges for rural community well-being, as sudden influxes of tourists can impact housing markets, quality of life, and environmental quality.

Additional Resources

- Han, L., S.J. Goetz, D. Eades, J. Entsminger, and D. Arbogast. 2023. An early assessment of COVID-19's impact on tourism in US counties. *Tourism Economics*, 29(5), 1355-1375.



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