



Scenic Byways

A Great Way to Generate Economic Impact in A Region



There is a huge visitor market in America that regularly seeks out new off-the-beaten-path experiences. They loved driving scenic byways across the country before the pandemic, and were joined by others, who during lockdowns, rediscovered these road trips big time.

Along with trips on scenic roads, the number of visitors to small towns is on the rise. This is especially true for visitors looking to discover an area's unique personality and heritage, qualities that byways feature and celebrate. In the view of

some experts, small towns are the new “it” destinations and most byways include small towns.

The Draw of Rural Areas

During Covid, Americans were looking for smaller locations with no crowds, just to get out of the house and rural areas where they could relax away from the hustle of larger urban areas. This fed into road trips to small towns, small cities and rural communities which are generally not located on interstate highways. More and more, the visitors began choosing alternative routes to enable slowing down to enjoy the scenic landscapes along the way. Now that they have been rediscovered, even within rising costs for everything, road trips to more rural and smaller scale locations are not going away. In fact, they are predicted to increase as travel moves back to 2019 levels.

A study conducted by Ford Motor Company revealed that 54% of drivers prefer to take the scenic route when they are on the road. Approximately 69 million could be considered “Byway Travelers,” those visitors who are particularly attracted to the cultural and heritage experiences along scenic routes. They enjoy themselves exploring various locations, leave the money they spend behind, and return home to tell their friends and family what a great experience they had, without requiring the area to spend for schools, hospitals or other community services.

Percent of Travelers Taking Each Trip Type



35.6%
VISITED A NATIONAL PARK OR MONUMENT



38.7%
TRAVELED WITH OWN CHILDREN



32.6%
VISITED A THEME OR AMUSEMENT PARK



32.0%
TRAVELED TO ATTEND A FESTIVAL OR SPECIAL EVENT

Road trips and scenic drives accounted for the fact that, even before Covid, 75% of all travel in the United States was within 4-6 hours from home with more than 60% of trips taken over a weekend or long weekend. “Laptop luggers,” those individuals who can work remotely from anywhere, have changed that dynamic a bit. They now fit leisure experiences between work weeks, and can explore mid-week when they visit a new destination. Travelers who break their leisure time off into 25 days of travel by combining vacation days with long weekends and holiday breaks, take multiple trips to multiple destinations.

Contrary to the assumption that scenic and historic road trips are only taken by those with limited incomes, road trips actually increase as household incomes increase. Travelers don’t want strict schedules and want to be able to pick and choose what they want to do, often spontaneously, while on the road. Research by Duke University revealed that participation immersed in experiences, is as effective at lowering blood pressure and stress as exercise and other stress management programs.

Regions with scenic byways and scenic roads, and/or heritage and historic routes that are popular with visitors clearly understand they serve as economic generators. Because the majority of these experiences are off-the-beaten path, the spending and jobs generated are in rural areas where it is most challenging to generate new jobs and increase economic impact. At a very basic level, 100 new traveling parties to a location creates the equivalent of one new job and 1,000 traveling parties create the equivalent of 10 new jobs, although US travel places the threshold a bit higher for visitors to support creation of a job equivalent.



A Compilation of the Numbers

To get a better handle on actual visitor spending on scenic byways that is occurring, the National Travel Center identified a whole collection of economic impact studies regarding scenic byways. Multiple studies revealed economic impacts ranging from \$41,140 per mile along Florida Byways, to a whopping \$2,396,514 per mile on the Blue Ridge Parkway with \$1.1 Billion in annual visitor spending and \$3,521,300 per mile on the Journey Through Hallowed Ground, replete with historic towns and historic attractions.

Taking these heavy hitters out of the equation, the average economic impact generated was \$447,095 per mile, per byway, per year. A subset of the shorter roads taken together averaged \$305,303 per mile annually. Next, vetting those numbers against Colorado's Scenic Byways Economic Impact Study revealed an average of \$314,000 per mile, per Byway, per year in visitor spending along Colorado Byways.

The results led to the conclusion that well promoted Byways that feature heritage and cultural locations along the roadway giving visitors plenty of place to visit and spend money, can on average generate between \$250,000 and \$450,000 per mile, per year in visitor spending.

\$250K-\$450K per mile, per byway, per year in visitor spending

Selected studies also translated visitor spending into job creation. For example, the 29-county byway region of North Carolina and Virginia surrounding the Blue Ridge Parkway realized \$1.5 billion in total business sales, sustaining approximately 9,300 jobs, and an increase of \$251.7 million in labor earnings. The four-county region of Oklahoma and the Cherokee Nation, the Cherokee Hills Scenic Byway generated \$85.3 million in total business sales and created 924 jobs, plus an increase of \$30.2 million in earnings.

The 15-county region in Maryland, Pennsylvania and Virginia which the Journey Through Hallowed Ground National Scenic Byway passes through realized \$1.06 billion in total business sales sustaining more than 6,500 jobs

Key Actions to Attract Byway Travelers

Two key actions will increase the economic impact along any scenic byway, scenic roads, or for that matter, any trail or other route-based experience.

The first way is to work to attract heritage and cultural travelers. The Beartooth Highway All American Road in Wyoming and Montana, segmented visitors into four groups: Road Tourers, Active Outdoors, Passive Viewers and Knowledge Seekers. The Knowledge Seekers defined as “visiting a historical site and visiting interpretive sites” spent 35% more than Passive Viewers: scenic drivers who engage in wildlife watching and nature photography. Road Tourers and Active Outdoors were somewhere in between, yet both had lower spending than Knowledge Seekers.

A study of heritage travelers in Virginia revealed that they spent on average 38.6% more than other leisure travelers. Travel Oregon, where “touring” is the number one activity pursued by visitors to the state, reveals per person visitor spending of more than \$249 per day that resulted in an average per trip spend of \$2,497, with the average of these visitors standing at 51.1 years.

Detailed Itineraries Make it Easy for Visitors

The second key action is to develop itineraries that transform your scenic byway or heritage route into a complete travel experience. Organize the road trip into feasible days of travel. Keep in mind that you are are designing a leisure experience. Include accommodations and dining recommendations in the correct locations and illustrate the full experience into one easy to use guide. The more overnights that are included (within reason, of course), the more economic impact

that will be delivered to your area because in addition to staying, overnight visitors eat more meals and shop as well.

Make sure to create an experience that includes the key heritage and cultural locations, with no more than three or possibly four major attractions in any given day. This allows time to sleep in, enjoy breakfast, savor lunch, and relax at dinner, knowing that another pleasant day is ahead.

Travelers appreciate this approach. They are stressed out and want to travel, but don't have time to research exactly what they want to do, nor do they have the knowledge to determine the quality of what they discover. Assembling all the locations into a cohesive trip is an art and a skill, and one that most travelers do not have.

Road trips have again become the go to for travelers. Every scenic byway, scenic road, heritage trail and historic corridor has the opportunity to capture this business and the positive economic impact it delivers. Look at your road from the eyes of the traveler, feature the best story your road has to tell, and neatly wrap it all up into a complete package. Build it, promote it, and they will come.

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National Travel Center Selected Scenic Byway Experience

- Over three decades, advised, consulted, promoted, created content for and about, or otherwise worked with 443 of the 1,100 Scenic Byways in the United States.
- Previous Director of Marketing and Outreach, National Scenic Byway Foundation
- Previous Byway Expert, Federal Highway Administration (program no longer in place at FHWA)
- Keynote Speaker, Florida State Scenic Byways Conference
- Featured Speaker, Midwest Byways Conference
- Executive Editor, 110 Byway Detailed Itineraries deployed on www.ontheroad.travel
- Member, Pennsylvania Byways Workgroup

Permanent Byway Advisor, Big Sur Coast Highway All American Road

Development of a four-pronged effort to strengthen the Byway organization, develop strategies to assist with visitor control, develop sustainable funding sources and educate visitors about the need to respect the road.

Byway Advisor, Brandywine Valley Scenic Byway Commission

Development of Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Byway Application and new Website featuring the Byway, including convening the Advisory Committee to review 10 original stories produced to illustrate the Underground Railroad in Chester County, Pennsylvania during the period prior to the Civil War. Project will also include a website for the Brandywine Valley National Scenic Byway as well as one for the Brandywine Valley Scenic Byway Commission for administrative purposes.

Byway Advisor and Consultant, Washington State Byways, Washington State Tourism Office

Instructor of a Skillshop for all Washington State Byways to assist with the particulars of managing a Byway and a Skillshop for Washington State Destination Marketing Organizations regarding Scenic Byways, plus various other projects.

Volcanic Legacy Community Partnership/Volcanic Legacy Scenic Byway All American Road Long-Term Financial Sustainability Plan and Implementation

Development of a plan to establish a free-standing destination marketing and management organization (DMO) that will not be dependent on local lodging taxes, for Volcanic Legacy Scenic Byway All American Road which has more than 1260 attractions and visitor facing locations along its 500-mile route, The intent of the plan, to enable the Community Partnership to become and remain independently financially sustainable for the foreseeable future. The comprehensive plan and implementation work has included (1) a detailed profile of current and potential visitors, (2) a comprehensive capacity assessment which revealed a collection of more than 1269 local and regional visitor facing attractions and visitor service locations available to promote, (3) a listen to learn phase with 30 community officials and community members which revealed both the opportunities and barriers to attracting additional visitors and (4) development of a database of visitor attractions, complete with original copy and images, (5) a detailed 57 page marketing plan to attract visitors, (6) a detailed plan to recruit members and marketing partners and (7) implementation efforts incorporating a robust digital marketing effort deliver a very significant level of new visitor spending and new jobs to the 25 rural communities in the region. The effort also includes creation and support of the new destination marketing organization and its initial operational elements.

Mohawk Towpath Byway Coalition, Inc/Mohawk Towpath National Scenic Byway Updated Corridor Management Plan and Development of Future Strategies

Research and development of an updated multi-section Corridor Management Plan which includes (1) a comprehensive description of the Byway and all the locations along the way which illustrate the intrinsic qualities for which the Byway was designated, (2) a summary of past actions and accomplishments during the first decade of Byway operations, (3) a summary of the current situation and accomplishments for the immediate decade, (4) a listen to learn effort and (5) a plan for the future to enable the Byway to become and remain independently financially stable for the foreseeable future. The current effort, which has included development of a new website, and two detailed visitor ready itineraries, will also include replication of a comprehensive six-month digital

marketing campaign that resulted in the Byway appearing in 157,161 Google searches within the six-month period alone and doubling of the attendance at an annual event through specialized social media promotion, carried out for the period of a year.

Byway Development, George Washington Heritage Trail National Scenic Byway

Development of web presence, unique mapping, and marketing materials to provide the Byway to a national audience.

Byway Development and Marketing Advisor, Peaks to Craters Scenic Byway

Development of a circle tour incorporating three Scenic Byways, Peaks to Craters Scenic Byway, Salmon River Scenic Byway and Sawtooth Scenic Byway on a continuous 416-mile loop in south central Idaho.

Byway Development Advisor, California Route 66

Byway Marketing Consultant

Wyoming Tourism Office, Development of Detailed Itineraries for All 21 Wyoming Byways

Montana Office of Tourism, Development of Detailed Itineraries for 20 Montana Byways

North Dakota Office of Tourism, Development of Detailed Itineraries for all 10 North Dakota Byways

Delaware Department of Transportation, Development of Detailed Itineraries for all 6 Delaware Byways

Motor Cities Heritage Area including Woodward Avenue M-1 All American Road: Development of a driving trip presentation featuring the “Driving Capital of the World.”

The History Channel: Development of a special collection featuring two National Scenic Byways in each of 50 states to support network programming featuring each US state.