



Introduction: The Brave New World of Tourism



Is your community interested in attracting additional visitors from outside your immediate area? To shop, dine, stay, work, or live? Do you want the visitors to generate significant economic development to improve quality of life?

There is an opportunity for every small town, small city, and rural community to attract more visitors who deliver economic development. Smaller scale areas of all sizes are in demand as visitors seek new places to relax, explore, and engage in authentic experiences that allow them to escape their daily life for some period of time.

Visitors Are Close At Hand

Many of these visitors are close at hand, since approximately 75% of all visitors in the United States arrive from within a 4–6-hour radius surrounding any community, large or small. Just at 85% of these visitors who take over 2 billion trips each year, travel by car to places deemed “drive” destinations. In fact, over 80% of Americans who travel contemplate a trip to a small town, mountain, or remote area in the next 18 months.

Most of the travel experiences in the United States are day trips, or over a weekend, or long weekend because it is the only time working professionals and others with busy lives can get away. Even though the overall volume of leisure visitors dwarfs the number of business travelers and group travelers in America, each of these visitor markets delivers economic development in a different way.

Visitors Attracted to the Community’s Experience

Even if visitors are coming from only 50 miles away, they’re arriving to have the unique experience the community offers. They don’t travel to book a hotel room, rent a car, or buy a plane ticket. They visit to have an experience grounded in the community’s story that lets them relax and enjoy themselves for a few days. They eat, sleep, shop, tour, explore, and more, within an experience that encompasses the total of the all things they do while in the community.

Every Community Has a Story to Tell

No matter what size, every community has a story to tell. It begins with the heritage of the people who settled and the landscape they found, plus the heritage of any Native Americans who were residing in the area before European settlement. Culture is what has evolved since.

It's What Makes A Destination A Destination

Since there are no two exact combinations of heritage and landscape in the United States, it is likely this uniqueness is what makes a community a distinct location - and makes a “destination,” a destination. This phenomenon provides every community with the ability to feature itself as a unique place to visit.

Diversifying the Economy

When visitors explore, they spend money at the area’s small businesses which diversifies the local economy and tax base, requiring residents to pay less taxes for the same level of services, or benefit from additional services. In fact, tourism is the most efficient economic development a community can generate. Visitors travel to an area and spend their time and money, without the need for a community to build new schools, expand basic services, or otherwise spend tax revenues to serve new residents.



An Alternative Path to Economic Development

Generating economic development through tourism is a serious and sustainable effort that will generate reliable results within a shorter time than a corporate relocation or large construction project. The tourism effort, which is not a once and done, delivers benefits over decades.

Tourism continues to deliver results to local small businesses who need more business to support their families, send their children to local schools, and buy their supplies from other local businesses. When one of these businesses goes out of business, you have an empty storefront. When a corporate plant that has been recruited determines, without any consultation with the community, they can manufacture their product elsewhere more cheaply, the community again lacks a major means of support. The cycle of identifying another begins all over again, while small businesses keep working to keep the visitors coming. The tourism effort will not (not withstanding a natural disaster, and even that can be rectified) have the rug pulled out from under it by far off decision makers.

The economic advantages of tourism are based on the fact that visitors are constantly seeking new places to relax and explore, and new generations of travelers are always coming on behind the ones now on the ground. Americans haven't stopped traveling and no matter the state of the economy, never will.

Even Covid did not curtail Americans from getting out on the road, because travel has become a wellness product, an effective antidote to hectic lives. The 60% of Americans living in the suburbs and another 20% in large cities, are seeking smaller scale places to visit where they can feel a "sense of place."

Welcome to the Brave New World of Tourism

Effectively generating economic development through tourism requires a recognition that visitors have changed and the organizations working to attract them must change as well. No longer relegated to just marketing and promotion, when tourism becomes part of a viable effort to generate financial stability over the long term and recognized as a significant and important part of the portfolio of economic development in the community, it will deliver benefits to both visitors and residents.



Within the brave new world, tourism:

- Is focused on the needs, wants, and priorities of visitors.
- Acknowledges in the past decades, visitors have changed.
- Is based on the understanding that visitors are seeking experiences.
- Uses the experience the community delivers to attract visitors.
- Embraces the concept that those experiences are based on the community's story.
- Recognizes that every community has a unique story to tell.
- Appreciates that visitors spend money that supports small businesses while they explore and enjoy the uniqueness of the community.
- Generates tax revenues from each transaction visitors make that diversifies and expands the tax base enabling residents to pay less taxes and improve the quality of life.
- Can serve as the springboard to attract new residents, new businesses, and professionals to improve community services.
- Transforms the organization that promotes the community into an organization that also manages delivery of the visitor experience to increase visitor satisfaction.
- Is embraced as part of the economic development team working to deliver a better economy along with a higher quality of life to residents and the community.
- Is elevated into the driver's seat in the travel industry because it is the first line of serving visitors.
- Is a mainstay in the community over the long term.
- Recognized as the most efficient economic development a community can generate.



The DMMO as the Experience Delivery Organization

For purposes of this book, we have previously referred to any organization that promotes tourism in a community, town, city, or other location where residents are congregated, as a Destination Marketing Organization (DMO). As these organizations have taken on the additional responsibilities of managing the visitor experiences that are delivered in their area, they have evolved into a Destination Management and Marketing Organization (DMMO).

That approach defines a DMMO as both, an organization that promotes the experiences available in the community, and additionally works to deliver the best experiences possible to the people who visit.

In this regard, the future success of the entire community is on the shoulders of the DMMO because the qualities of a place not only attract shoppers, diners, and meeting attendees, they also attract new residents, physicians, other professionals, and retirees, all of whom contribute to the quality of life and keep the community vibrant.

Communities No Longer Promoted as All Things to All People

As a result, communities can no longer be marketed as a selective, disjointed collection of hotels, restaurants, attractions, and retail locations, who pay to play, an undistinguished place that is “all things to all people,” or an undifferentiated one that has “something for everyone.”

Instead, the location must be promoted as: (1) A collective entity delivering multi-faceted experiences, (2) An entity onto itself, with its own personality, (3) A place with a unique selling proposition, (4) A place with the ability to deliver a unique experience to visitors, (5) A location with the ability to tell a unique story, and (6) An organization capable of, and willing to, promote the total complement of available resources and assets to visitors.

Within this perspective, visitors become the “customers” of the DMMO. They do so because no other entity has a view of the entire visitor experience or the ability to blend the offerings of multiple independent suppliers which generally are only interested in promoting themselves, into cohesive whole for the visitor. That

places DMMOs in the driver's seat in tourism because they have an interest in serving the ultimate end customer in the varied requirements a trip entails.

Make it Easy for Visitors to Say Yes

It's a priority for DMMOs to make saying yes to a visit as easy as possible. They must create content that is king (pope and president), to tell stories that reveal the area's experience, while always putting the visitor at the center of it all. If they don't, others will do so and take advantage of the economic engine that visitors deliver.

In addition to great storytelling, attracting visitors also encompasses targeting visitor markets, implementing omni-channel marketing, preparing integrated communication plans, engaging in digital marketing, and using other time-tested strategies, with the intent of helping their communities thrive, rather than just survive, in a world that is moving at breakneck speed.



Visitors who get really involved in their experience are more likely to return, which cuts marketing costs. Plus, they become ambassadors who market the community to family and friends when they return home and tell them what a great time they had. Accomplishing this will require a focus on “the care and feeding” of visitors while they are in the community, having them treated well enough they will return, which incorporates the responsibility of facilitating visitor satisfaction.

Accelerating Changes

All new responsibilities DMMOs take on to achieve good results will expand and accelerate rather than slowing down in the coming years. Professionals must be willing to keep up and respond to both the opportunities and challenges that arise. The economic development benefits tourism offers are many. New ways of thinking can generate new energy and bring life to new programs that have not even been envisioned in the past. Yet, it is amazing how many organizations have given thought to tourism at this level but have no roadmap for how to proceed.





A Roadmap to Success

This book will serve as that roadmap. It is organized to address the most viable strategies and practices to successfully expand tourism, in the most effective sequence to implement the effort. Each of the 50 chapters introduces a distinct concept that is illustrated with real world examples. The text is specifically written in non-academic language to make the concepts for those not familiar with tourism, easy to understand. The information includes the hard numbers that are often hard to find or tie down and works to answer the most important questions about how to make tourism maximally successful.

Organization of the Material

To organize these concepts as a guide for action, this book is divided into seven parts:

Part One addresses the most important information any marketing program can have, a detailed view of the customer, in this case, the visitor. Details relate who today's visitors are, how they think, and what influences their tourism experience decision and illustrates the opportunities in each major visitor segment.

Part Two describes what visitors want. Great experiences filled with made to order moments, experiential tourism, trails, tours, and other Pre-Designed Itineraries to make exploring easy, heritage and cultural tourism, nature-based tourism and outdoor recreation, farm-based tourism, delightfully preserved communities with quality of place, seamless experience deliver and customer service with a smile are all needed to serve today's visitors.

Part Three speaks to the tourism opportunity assessments that illustrate what the area has available to promote to visitors, the capacity to do so, what surrounding communities, and assessments that take a detailed look at the area.

Part Four covers the innovative marketing techniques needed to attract, communicate, engage, and retain today's visitors as customers. They include omni-channel marketing, re-identification, the experience as the brand, and more forward-looking approaches.

Part Five enables development of a portfolio of plans that serve as a roadmap to success.

Part Six details the requirements of staff and the organization to plan, implement, and manage today's dynamic tourism organizations.

Part Seven illustrates the result of successful tourism programs in terms of visitor spending, economic impact, economic development, and the other vast and varied impacts tourism delivers.

Resources

Rather than making complete reference to each quote or research resource referenced in the text, an extensive list excerpted from the more than 2,200 documents reviewed for the writing, appears at the end of the publication.

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National Travel Center was founded a decade ago to do something meaningful in the tourism industry. Today, as a Delaware Benefit Corporation, we believe we are doing so across the country, assisting communities of all sizes to attract more visitors to increase economic development and improve quality of life.

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