

Rural Tourism

Economic Development for Any Size Community:
It's What Visitors Are Looking For!

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Today's Visitors

- Four major generations of visitors
 - Boomers
 - Generation X
 - Millennials
 - Gen Z
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- The youngest of The Silent Generation, older than Boomers are now 80, they're tailing off
 - Many Z's and younger travel with their parents

Leisure Travelers are the Core

- 80% of Americans travel
- Most choose to do so domestically even if they can afford overseas
- Small towns and rural communities were re-discovered during Covid when people wanted to get out of the house without lots of other people around
- That trend has continued as visitors discovered pleasant places and authentic experiences
- They are also driving the trend toward vacation rentals





Group tours are returning

- The demands for these tours has changed dramatically
- Requirements to serve groups have also changed
- Small towns and rural places that could not serve 50+ people all at once used to shut out of serving group travelers
- Today's groups range from 10-12 to 20 or 30
- They no longer all accept a disjointed experience justified by lowest price




What of Visitors of All Types Want

- Great Experiences
- Made to Order Moments
- Experiential Tourism
- Slow Tourism
- Immersive Tourism
- A way to be involved
- Trips that are interesting
- Trips to places they have not visited
- Trips that accommodate a variety of family needs

Why Are Visitors Seeking These Things?

- Having the means to travel requires a certain level of household income
- They are more educated
- They are more affluent
- Their beliefs, values, attitudes, personality, and emotions influence their travel choices
- They view travel differently than older generations did
- They are influenced by what they can find on the internet
- As in other purchases, they expect their specific needs will be met



An aerial photograph of a town during autumn. The foreground shows a street intersection with a large brick building with a red roof. The middle ground is filled with houses and trees in various shades of yellow, orange, and red. In the background, rolling hills are visible under a blue sky with light clouds.

There is an opportunity for every community in today's tourism world

- Every community has heritage, there were either Native Americans in the area, or we all came from somewhere
- Communities often promote outdoor recreation which has to be very special to attract visitors, instead of their heritage which is unique
- Every community has a unique story to tell
- Every community has and is surrounded by at least some level of tourism attractions and resources
- Since groups and meetings start with as few as 10-12 people, every community has an opportunity to serve leisure visitors, meeting visitors, and group visitors

Visitors are seeking these experiences in rural areas and small towns


- 80% of Americans live in either cities or suburbs
- Small towns and rural communities offer a change of pace
- They offer an opportunity to relax without hustle and bustle
- Many small towns and rural communities are connected by or surrounded by scenic drives
- Ford Motor Company says 54% of people prefer the scenic route





Authentic Experiences

- Visitors want to experience the real thing
- Heritage that is actually the heritage of the community
- Attractions that are real, related to the community, and not contrived or built for “tourists”
- Food that is local cuisine
- Accommodations that are local – many more people want to stay in local hotels, B&Bs and vacation rentals than perceived
- Retail shops that are unique to the community

An aerial photograph of a small town, likely in a rural area, showing a main road running through the center. The town is surrounded by green fields and trees. There are several houses, a large green-roofed building, and a parking lot. The image is used as a background for the text.

Three major experience types

- Heritage and Cultural Tourism
- Nature-Based Tourism/Outdoor Recreation
- Farm-Based Tourism (Agritourism to the industry)

What Else Visitors Want

- Effortless Selection and Booking
- Quality of Place
- Delightful Carefully Preserved Communities
- Snafu Free Experience Delivery
- Great Customer Service with a Smile
- Organizations that treat them like they really want them there
- Visitors Bureaus, Chambers and others involved in tourism who care about visitors and their experiences



Tourism Opportunity Assessment

- Define the type of community – place in the landscape of America
- Comprehensive inventory of tourism resources and assets within a 30-mile radius
- Capacity Assessment – quantity of additional visitors who can be served
- First impression of the community
- Profile of current visitors
- Listen to learn for both opportunities and barriers
- Competitive Assessment
- Tourism audit – situational analysis of the whole current picture



Marketing and Promoting to Today's Visitors

- An Apple phone can run a whole life and tourism websites are not even mobile friendly, much less with sophisticated technology
- Visitors do not live in a bubble, the experience the effortless buying of Amazon and others
- Omni-channel marketing, where everything is tied together is the coming thing
- Marketing and re-marketing is targeted to specific visitor markets
- The something for everyone approach is no longer effective





The Experiences that are offered determine the available target markets

- Personas/Profiles of target visitor market
- The entire experience from the first touch to the return home influences the visitor's impressions and satisfaction
- Your branding is the experiences that are offered, it is the only point of reference the visitor has
- Define specialized profiles and markets that align with the community's experience

Create Experiences with Made to Order Moments

- Tours, trails, detailed itineraries, pre-designed experiences are a key to attracting today's visitors
- Make these widely available
- They make say yes to a visit easy for the visitor
- Today's DMMOs must create, manage, and update these visitor experiences
- Make them multi-day to gain the economic impact of additional room nights
- Combine locations thematically, including accommodations, dining and shopping, plus attractions, all the places visitors spend money



Comprehensive Integrated Planning

- Strategic planning for purpose, mission, vision, strategy, values
- Integrated tourism plan
- Communication plan
- Website Design plan
- Digital Marketing Plan
- Social Media Plan
- Visitor Engagement Plan
- Event Plan
- Crisis Management Plan
- Agile Strategic Action Plan



Content: The Key to All Effective Marketing

- Good storytelling is imperative, no matter what you're offering
- Engaging Images
- Inspiring Words
- Pull the potential visitor into the text or website while they are still reading
- The more likely they can envision themselves in the experience, the more likely they are to visit or join the tour
- Provide content at all steps in the visitor decision journey
- Describe the available experiences in detail





Small Towns, Small Cities, Rural Communities

- Approach tourism as economic development to improve quality of life
- Capture a comprehensive inventory of assets and resources
- Engage the community
- Build a strong foundation for tourism
- Develop and provide itineraries, tours, trails and more to tour operators and visitors
- Keep track of visitor spending and the vast and varied other benefits tourism delivers

A photograph of a visitor service center. The room features a dark wood ceiling with exposed beams, stone walls, and a large white column. A grand piano is positioned in the background, and a woman in a red jacket is seated at a desk. In the foreground, a woman with glasses is looking at a document on a desk. The overall atmosphere is warm and professional.

Visitor Service Locations

- Become Visitor-Centric
- Treat visitors other than “pax”
- Think through the visitors experience with your organization
- Think through the visitor whole experience in the community
- Seek to gain repeat visitors
- Become part of the visitor’s experience and not just a “service” location they must book to take the trip
- Remember visitors are not just looking for lowest price

Tour Operators

- Create experiences that suit today's visitors, for specific target markets
- Be prepared to offer services to various types of groups
- Offer engaging trips rather than just trying to offer lowest price
- Be prepared to assign a dedicated group specialist
- Provide travel insurance
- Provide a daily full breakfast
- Facilitate rooming lists to make sure all guest requirements are met
- Price the experience per person, inclusive of all taxes and fees
- Make the tour description interesting, engaging, and inspiring



For More Information

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Available on Amazon

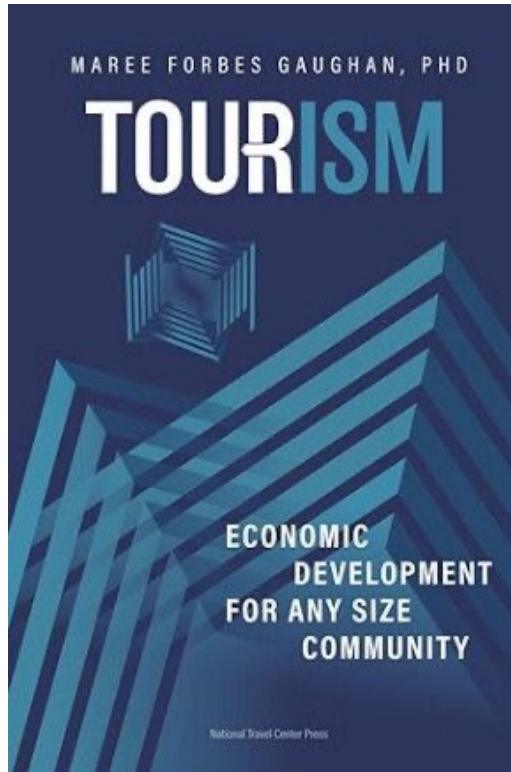
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