

**Hendricks County, Indiana
November 2008**



Assessment Findings & Suggestions Report



Ideas to increase tourism spending

In June and in September of 2008, a Community Assessment of Hendricks County, Indiana, was conducted, and the findings were presented in a three-hour workshop in late September. The assessment provides an unbiased overview of the community – how it is seen by a visitor. It includes a review of local marketing efforts, signage, attractions, critical mass, retail mix, ease of getting around, customer service, visitor amenities such as parking and public restrooms, overall appeal, and the community’s ability to attract overnight visitors.

In performing the “Community Assessment,” we looked at the area through the eyes of a first-time visitor. No prior research was facilitated, and no community representatives were contacted except to set up the project, and the town and surrounding area were “secretly shopped.”

There are two primary elements to the assessment process: First is the “Marketing Effectiveness Assessment.”

How easy is it for potential visitors to find information about the community or area? Once they find information, are your marketing materials good enough to close the sale? In the Marketing Effectiveness Assessment, we assigned two (or more) people to plan trips into the general region. They did not know, in advance, who the assessment was for. They used whatever resources they would typically use in planning a trip: travel guides, brochures, the internet, calling visitor information centers, review of marketing materials, etc. - just as you might do in planning a trip to a “new” area or destination.

The community has five opportunities to close the sale:

- 1) Personal contact (visitor information centers, trade shows, etc.)
- 2) Websites
- 3) Brochures and printed materials
- 4) Publicity (articles)
- 5) Word of mouth - the most effective means

We tested all of these methods by contacting area visitor information services and attractions, searching the internet for activities, requesting and reviewing printed materials, looking for articles and third-party information, and questioning regional contacts. We reviewed both commercial and organizational

websites promoting the area, state tourism websites, read travel articles, and looked at AAA Tour Book reviews and suggested activities.

The marketing assessment determined how visible the community was during the research, and how effective the marketing was in convincing a potential visitor that the community would be worth a special trip, a stop, or an overnight stay. The key to the marketing assessment is to see if you have a primary lure that makes you worth a special trip of a two-hour drive - or further away. The question on most visitors' mind is: what do you have that I can't get closer to home? What makes you worth a special trip?

Where most communities fail is when they merely provide a "list" of what the community has, whether it's truly "unique" or not. Nearly every community in North America promotes the usual list of diversions: local museums, unique shops and restaurants, plenty of lodging, golf, outdoor recreation (bird watching, hiking, biking, boating, etc., etc.), historic downtowns, scenic vistas, and so on. Of course, nearly every visitor can do this closer to home. So, what makes your community worth a special trip?

Always promote your primary lure first - what makes you worth that special trip, THEN your diversionary activities. Would you go to Anaheim, California if Disneyland wasn't there? Do you think that Universal Studios and Knott's Berry Farm get upset that Disneyland gets all the glory? That they are diversions? Of course not. Eighty percent of all tourism spending is with diversionary activities. Disney does the heavy lifting in terms of advertising and promotion, and the diversionary activities ride on those coattails.

In a nutshell, the Marketing Effectiveness Assessment looks for things that make you worth a special trip and an overnight stay. The secret shoppers look for details, details, details. To be successful you must provide itineraries and specifics - not just generalities. Are your marketing efforts good enough to close the sale?

The second part of the assessment process is the On-site Assessment. During this part of the assessment, we spent several days in the community, looking at enticement from freeways and highways (signs, billboards, something that would get a visitor to stop), beautification and overall curb appeal, way-finding (ease of getting around), visitor amenities (public restrooms, visitor

information, parking), activities, overall appeal, retail mix (lodging, dining, shopping), critical mass, customer service, area attractions, pedestrian friendliness, gathering spaces, evening activities, and the availability of marketing materials and their effectiveness.

The community benefits from tourism when visitors spend money, and they do that in the local gift shops, restaurants, hotels, etc. Therefore, the On-site Assessment includes a candid look at private businesses as much as public spaces and amenities.

For every shortcoming or challenge we note during the assessment process, we provide a low-cost "suggestion," where possible, on how the challenge can be corrected or overcome. The suggestions are not termed "recommendations," as they were developed without consulting the community first about possible restraints, future plans, or reasons the suggestions may not be appropriate. Hopefully this assessment process will open dialogue within the community, leading it to adopt some or all of the suggestions, taking them from suggestions to recommendations.

It's important to note that to increase the community's tourism industry, fulfilling one or two of the suggestions may have little impact, but implementing a number of them, if not all, can have a profoundly successful impact on the community's ability to tap into the tourism industry.

Implementation of these suggestions must be a community-wide effort, involving both privately owned businesses as well as local, county, and state agencies, where appropriate. Every local organization plays a role in tourism, downtown revitalization, or economic development efforts. A Destination Marketing Organization (DMO, CVB, Chamber, TPA, etc.) cannot be successful if the tourism effort is not community-wide.

In many cases, issues may come up that you are already aware of and are already working on. In that case, the assessment validates those efforts. But more often than not, the assessment will point out things that you are painfully aware of but can't mention or bring up without paying a political price. Local politics can be a killer of the tourism industry.

While marketing efforts are important, product development is the most important factor of a successful tourism industry. Visitors want activities, not just things to look at. How much time can a visitor spend enjoying activities - that cater to their interests - in your community? Does your community have truly unique attractions the visitor can't get closer to home? You must be able to deliver on your marketing promises - otherwise visitors might come once, but they won't come back. It's much more cost effective to bring people back, than to always go out and entice new visitors into town. "Been there, done that" communities eventually run out of visitors and find they don't have a sustainable tourism industry, or simply become pit stops or gateways on the way to somewhere else.

After spending several days reviewing marketing materials and assessing the community, we have looked at all of these issues, developed some suggestions and ideas the community can discuss and possibly implement to help increase tourism spending locally.

SUCCESSFUL TOURISM TRANSLATES TO CASH

Tourism is successful when the community imports more cash than it exports. When residents spend their hard-earned money outside the community, the community is exporting cash - often referred to as "leakage." Tourism helps fill that gap, importing cash into the local economy without the necessity of having to provide extended social and other services. Visitors come, spend money, then go home. When you import more cash than you export, you have a positive "balance of trade." Communities with successful tourism programs easily see that the industry subsidizes the community, whereas other communities find that they subsidize visitors - providing services visitors use without them leaving enough money behind to cover the cost of those services.

The primary goal of the tourism industry is to bring more cash into the local economy. This doesn't happen when visitors come into the community, get out of their cars, and take photographs. And it doesn't happen when visitors go swimming in the lake at your city park all day, sunning, and eating the lunch they brought from home. And it doesn't happen when visitors hike down your trails, enjoy your interpretive centers, or stroll through your lovely arboretums. These are all great things to do, and, of course, you do want your visitors to do these - but, you also want to entice them into your shops,

your cafes, espresso stands, restaurants, galleries, B&B's, hotels, ultimately opening their wallets to make purchases. That is what helps your local economy, your small merchants, your hoteliers, and your tax coffers.

To entice visitors to spend money in your community, you need to have places for them to spend it - you need to have the right mix of shops, restaurants, entertainment, and lodging facilities, all in an attractive setting, as well as the attractions that make them want to visit you in the first place.

THE THREE TYPES OF TOURISM

1. Visiting friends and family

The number one reason people travel is to visit friends and/or family. If you did nothing to promote tourism, you would still have tourism in your community. However, when friends and family come to visit, do local residents take them out to eat, shop, dine locally? Or do they head to a neighboring community? Do your locals even know what you have to offer? An effective tourism marketing effort also includes educating locals as to what you have and how to find it through effective wayfinding signage, gateways and advertising.

2. Business travel

The second most popular reason for travel is business. Included in this category is educational travel: colleges and universities, as well as conventions and meetings, corporate travel, vendor travel, etc. Like leisure travelers, this group is looking for things to do "after hours" while in the area. The most successful convention and trade show towns are the result of their secondary activities or "diversions," not simply because of their convention and exhibition facilities. Think DisneyWorld, Disneyland, San Antonio's River Walk, to name a few.

3. Leisure travel

The third, and most lucrative of all types of visitors, is the leisure traveler. They have no personal connections to the community, but are coming purely to enjoy themselves. They stay in commercial lodging establishments, eat virtually all their meals in local restaurants, and their top diversionary activity is shopping and dining in a pedestrian-friendly setting.

The average leisure visitor is active 14 hours a day, yet typically only spends four to six hours with the primary lure. They then spend eight to ten hours with diversionary activities - things they could do closer to home, but will do while in the area. A good example of this is Branson, Missouri, the “live music-theater capital of the world.” This town of 6,500 residents hosts 7.5 million visitors a year. The primary “lure” is the 49 music theaters. The average visitor attends two shows a day over about four hours. During the other hours of the day, the visitor will shop in local outlet malls, head to the water parks, theme parks, and other attractions, play a round of golf, hike, bike, fish, do some bird watching, and participate in any number of other activities they could do closer to home, but will do while visiting Branson.

THE THREE STAGES OF TOURISM

1. Status quo

If you take no action to develop the tourism industry, you will still have an element of tourism, simply because some travelers will pull off local highways or freeways for gas, food, or lodging, as well as the fact that the number one reason for travel is to visit friends or family. If you have residents, you will have some tourism.

2. Getting people to stop

The first priority of developing a successful tourism industry is getting people to stop. Imagine how successful businesses in the community would be if just 50% of the vehicles traveling through pulled off the highway and spent just 30 minutes in your community – buying gas, an ice cream cone, a sandwich, a gift or souvenir?

If there’s a strong pull, imagine the money spent if visitors stayed two hours in the community, which nearly always translates to additional spending.

The first goal is to get those travelers to stop.



3. Becoming the destination

To become a destination community you must have attractions and supporting amenities that convince visitors to spend the night. And those attractions must be different from what the visitor can get closer to home.

Overnight visitors spend three times that of day visitors, and nearly ten times that of visitors using your community as a pit stop on the way to somewhere else.

THE FOUR-TIMES RULE

Visitors will make a point of stopping or staying in a community if it has enough activities that appeal specifically to them and will keep them busy four times longer than it took them to get there.

In other words, if a person has to drive 15 minutes to visit you, do you have enough for them to do to keep them busy for an hour? (4 times 15 minutes) If a visitor has to drive an hour, do you have the activities and amenities to keep them busy for four hours?

The more you have to offer, collectively, the further visitors will come, and the longer they will stay, and of course, the more they will spend. This is why it is so important for communities to market more than just their immediate geographic areas. By marketing neighboring activities and attractions, you present much more for a visitor to do, and you make the visit worth the trip. Visitors don't care about city limits or county lines – so market the broader package and you'll be able to keep people in the area long enough to translate to another meal, some more shopping, and hopefully, an overnight stay.

SELL THE EXPERIENCE, NOT GEOGRAPHY

Nearly every destination marketing organization is charged with promoting a geographic area, yet visitors couldn't care less about those boundaries. They are looking for activities that cater to their interests, and location is second to the experience. ALWAYS promote the primary lure first, then the location. If I want to go see Andy Williams, I don't care whether he's in Muskogee, Oklahoma or in Branson, Missouri. Visitors, by the millions, head to Disneyland, DisneyWorld, Dollywood and other attractions. They are not going to Anaheim, Orlando or Pigeon Forge.

Always sell the activity - the experience - THEN the location.



LURES, DIVERSIONS AND AMBIANCE

Too often communities promote the list of diversions that nearly every community has. The primary lure is the activity that a visitor can't find closer to home.

Always promote your primary lure, then the diversions. Do not try to be all things to all people. Have you ever gone anywhere because they had "something for everyone?" Of course not - you go there because they have something specific for you. Find your niche and promote it like crazy. Historic downtowns provide ambiance - they are not attractions, diversions, nor are they a primary lure. It's what's in the buildings that makes a downtown a destination.

The same can be said for scenery. Unless your vista is a world-class scene, such as Niagara Falls or the Grand Canyon, scenic vistas create wonderful ambiance, but don't translate to spending, and they only last a few minutes. Then what?

All too often communities promote their heritage as a primary draw. How far would you travel to visit a mining museum? A timber museum? An agricultural center? A county historical museum? Heritage must be outstanding and pervasive throughout the community to be a primary lure, such as Plimoth Plantation or Salem, Massachusetts.



Thousands of communities are the "capital" of something. For instance, in California, Borrego Springs is the grapefruit capital of the world. Gilroy is the garlic capital. Modesto is the tomato capital. Gridley is the kiwi capital. Oxnard is the strawberry capital. Fallbrook is the avocado

capital. But here's the question: Have you ever gone anywhere because it was the capital of a fruit or a vegetable?

Your local heritage is important to the community and can set the ambiance, even becoming a diversionary activity. But to the vast majority of potential visitors, it's not a reason to make a special trip.

BE DIFFERENT OR THE BEST

Why should a visitor come to your community if they can enjoy the same activities closer to home? Too many communities promote "outdoor recreation" as their primary draw. Unfortunately, that is the same attraction promoted by nearly every community in North America.

If you are different, then you have a reason for travelers to choose to visit you. If you are the best, then visitors will generally flock to your doors.

If you have great hiking trails, then market their unique qualities. Be specific and paint the image of how wonderful they are in the minds of your potential visitors. If you have one fantastic restaurant in town, let people know about it – a unique dining experience is something many people will travel far to enjoy.

Ashland, Oregon, previously a depressed timber town, began its Shakespeare Festival, which now runs nine months of the year and draws hundreds of thousands of visitors who spend an average of six nights in the community. The Shakespeare Festival made Ashland different from any other community.

Leavenworth, Washington, another dying timber town, adopted a Bavarian architectural theme and produces dozens of Bavarian events every year. Some now say the town looks more genuinely Bavarian than towns in Bavaria. It is now one of the primary tourist destinations in Washington state, hosting more than 2.5 million visitors annually. They offer a different experience, an experience that is pervasive throughout town.

Okanogan County, Washington is an outdoor recreational paradise – just like 37 of the 38 other counties in Washington. So why go to the Okanogan? Because they are the best. They researched guidebooks, newspaper and magazine articles, and pulled quotes they could use in their advertising

efforts. Like, "Pinch yourself, you're in Okanogan Country with perhaps the best cross country skiing on the continent." This, and other quotes like it, make it worth the drive to visit Okanogan Country. The third-party endorsements show that they are the best.

Set yourself apart from everyone else, and you'll see that in being unique, you'll become a greater attraction.

CRITICAL MASS MEANS CASH

Although it may not be the primary reason why visitors come to your community, shopping and dining in a pedestrian setting is the number one activity of visitors. Besides lodging, it is also how visitors spend the most amount of money.

Do you have a pedestrian-friendly shopping district? If not, can you create one? Many communities have been highly successful with the development of a two or three block long pedestrian "village" including visitor-oriented retail shops, dining, visitor information, restrooms, etc., all in an attractive, landscaped setting.

The general rule of thumb in those two or three blocks (not spread out all over town) is 10+10+10: Ten destination retail shops, which includes galleries, antiques, collectibles, home accents and furnishings, artists in action, book stores, logo gear (clothing), souvenirs, outfitters, tour operators, activity shops such as kites, jewelry, wine or tobacco shops, and other specialties. The second ten is for food: ice cream, fudge and candy stores, soda fountains, sit-down dining, coffee shops, cafes, bistros, delis, etc. And the final ten are businesses open after 6:00 pm. This includes entertainment: bars, dance clubs, theaters (movies and performing), retail shops with activities (piano bar in a wine shop), etc.

The important point is to group these businesses together to create the "critical mass" in a pedestrian-friendly setting. This will attract visitors as well as locals, and make it worth their while to stop and shop. People are always drawn to the critical mass – the opportunity to have multiple choices, multiple experiences, all in a convenient and attractive setting.

TOURISM IS AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY

The goal of successful tourism is for people to come into the community, spend money, and go home. Tourism is nearly a \$650 billion dollar industry in the U.S., supporting millions of jobs. Ninety percent of tourism industry

businesses are small businesses of which 90% have less than 15 employees. Tourism provides the opportunity for entrepreneurs to get started, for small family-run businesses to thrive, for artisans and craftspeople to find a market, and creates a basis for unique niche-retail environment including wineries, artists, crafts, etc. Tourism provides a diverse market within the community, expanding its potential. Enhancing the community through beautification efforts creates an attractive setting for both locals and visitors, key in revitalizing a community's downtown. And a tourism-friendly town will attract non-tourism industries faster than others – new businesses will see the community as a visitor before they make a final determination about the community. Tourism is the front door to your economic development efforts.

The benefits of a healthy tourism industry can rejuvenate a town, foster community pride, encourage economic diversity, and lead the way to a vital, successful community.

NEXT STEPS

The findings and suggestions in this report can provide your community with many ideas, strategies, and goals to reach for. We hope that it fosters dialogue in the community and becomes a springboard for the community in enhancing its tourism industry, leading to greater prosperity, rejuvenation, and enjoyment by all the citizens.

This report offers a first step in reaching that goal. To fully realize the benefits of this assessment, the community should take these findings and suggestions, discuss them and evaluate them, and develop a plan for implementation.

A detailed "Community Branding, Development and Marketing Action Plan" builds on the results of this assessment, adding in-depth research, evaluation, and community input to develop a unique brand and implementation program. The assessment process essentially provides a look at where you are today.

The next steps in the planning process is interviewing local stakeholders, providing public outreach, and reviewing past and current planning efforts. This determines where you want to go as a community.

The third step involves research, feasibility and market analysis, and determining your brand - what you are or hope to be known for. Then comes the "development" portion of the plan or the "how to get there" program: determining what product development initiatives need to be undertaken to reinforce and grow the brand. This also includes defining the roles of the various local organizations. Brand-building takes a village - everyone pulling in the same direction, each with its own "to do list."

Finally, there's the detailed marketing plan: how and when you will tell the world who you are and what makes you special: the place to live, work and play.

This Branding, Development & Marketing Plan should be an "action plan" as opposed to a "strategic plan." You want a to do list, by organization, not just general strategies, goals and objectives.

For every recommendation the following elements should be detailed:

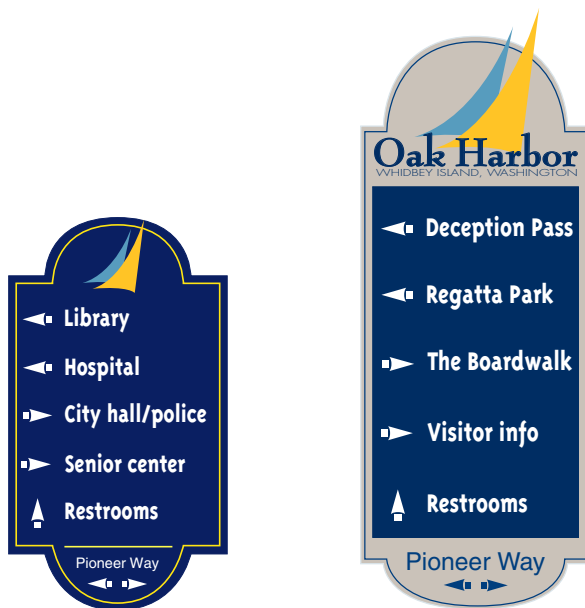
1. A brief description of the recommendation
2. Who would be charged with implementation
3. When it would be implemented
4. How much it will cost
5. Where the money will come from
6. The rationale for making the recommendation

The recommendations should provide all the necessary steps for your community to be successful in attaining its goals of a more diverse economy with an enhanced tourism industry and to become a more attractive and enjoyable community for both visitors and citizens.

If you move forward with the development of the Action Plan and hire outside services, always hire the most qualified team you can find (issue a request for Statement of Qualifications) and then negotiate the scope of work and cost with them. If you are not able to reach an agreement, then move to number two on your list. A good plan will provide a program to get local residents and the business community pulling together to enhance the community, building its unique image in the minds of visitors and residents alike. The result of your efforts will be a prosperous, enjoyable environment to live, work, and visit.

Quick Facts:

- Geography-based tourism is dead.
- Experience-based tourism is alive and is the future of tourism - starting yesterday.
- Visitors don't care about counties or districts, cities, towns and "places." They are looking for "activities," THEN the location. The internet has leveled the playing field. We don't type in cities and counties when deciding where to spend the weekend. We type in activities (horseback riding, fishing, biking, shopping, antiques, etc.) and THEN look at which location is either better or closer to home.
- The days of marketing lists are over. Providing a list of what you have to offer is rarely going to close the sale, because most of what you have, other communities also have. What sets you apart? Lists? Nope.
- The heart and soul of any community, besides its people, is its downtown. It is the litmus test for all your economic development efforts.



Real Men Don't Ask For Directions The rule of wayfinding

There are two primary signage issues that are critical to the success of any community: gateways and directional (or wayfinding) signage. Gateways introduce visitors to the community and downtown districts and provide a sense of arrival. Directional signs help visitors and residents navigate the area, telling them what attractions and amenities are available and where to find them. If visitors can't find what they are looking for, they'll simply head down the road.

The city of Oak Harbor, Washington, is developing wayfinding signage (bottom left) that is color-coded for residential services (the blue signs) and visitor attractions and amenities (the gray bordered signage.) Their signage is decorative to reflect the nautical theme of the town.

Leavenworth, Washington (bottom right) has wayfinding signage that reflects the Bavarian theme of the town.



Suggestion:

From here (top right) I have no idea which direction downtown is or where I should go. Develop a wayfinding system to direct visitors downtown. If it's too hard for visitors to even find downtown, they'll move on, saying just one word - "Next."

At Harrison and Wayne, (bottom) I'm only one block from the water park and need to know which direction, but there is no directional signage to let me know if I'm even close.

What to do:

Every community (or county) should develop and implement a signage plan and program to address:

- Wayfinding
- Gateways & entries
- Attractions
- Amenities
- Billboards and marketing displays

Less than 5% of visitors stop at visitor information centers - IF they can find that - so effective wayfinding is essential to increased spending in the community. Wayfinding signs can not only provide directions, they can also help visitors (and residents) know what attractions and amenities you have in your community.



First Impressions Are Lasting Impressions The rule of perceived value

Would you eat at this restaurant (top right)? Probably not, based on your first impression. You might be wondering how this restaurant is still open and serving food to the public. Your first impression of a restaurant, a shop, or a whole town can color your lasting perception of that place.

Gateways provide a sense of arrival and give travelers their first impression of the community. If the gateway to your town is an impressive monument sign in a beautiful landscaped location, your first impression of the community will be favorable. A beautiful gateway will increase the perceived value of your town.

Danville is a very nice city, and a city this nice deserves a more professional gateway. (bottom left) Stay tuned... perhaps there's a brand you might want to incorporate into it...!

There is too much sign clutter here. (bottom right) Suggestion: Find another place for the Bible School sign.



Suggestion:

Keep signs current and well maintained (top right). Although the flowers and landscaping is nice, the sign should be up to date and repainted to look more professional.

Danville Town Hall's sign is beautiful (bottom). The brick monument sign and landscaping are a great model for the other gateway signage coming into town. Make them consistent.

Think of residential communities with nice gateways and entries. New home developers will spend a lot of money developing outstanding gateways or entryways. Why? Because it creates community pride, creates a sense of place, makes you want to live there, and it sells real estate inside the gates faster, and at an increased price. The same rules hold true for cities and for downtowns.

Always put your gateways where you will make the first, best impression, never at the city limits. You have one chance to make a good first impression.



Suggestion:

Curb appeal can account for 70% of first-time sales at restaurants, wineries, lodging, retail shops, and golf courses. The exterior of your shops can be considered your “entry-hall.” The sidewalks should pull customers into the store, and entice visitors down the street to see what else is available.

This store front (top) has a lot of appeal with the potted flowers, flags, and furnishings, but could be improved. The A-board sign could be improved by keeping it painted and fresh-looking, and making the text neater and easier to read. Add a simple tablecloth to the table to make it warmer and more appealing. Yank the customer inside!

This is a gorgeous storefront (bottom). Add a blade sign so that people can tell what’s actually IN the store. Consider a couple of hanging baskets, and a couple of planters beneath the windows to finish off what is one of the more attractive buildings in town.



Invest In Beautification

The rule of invitations & staying power

Curb appeal is an investment with tremendous return. Curb appeal starts with the merchants. The LaRua Restaurant in Whistler, British Columbia (top) is an excellent example of how to beautify and attract customers. Whistler, with roots as a ski resort, now sees more visitors in the summer than in the winter - in great part due to the beautiful ambiance created by the merchants.

A research study had four towns plant street trees every 30 feet along one block (bottom left) and then surveyed sales in that block for a year, comparing them to sales in the rest of the town. The results found that sales in the block with the street trees increased 18% - three to four times that of the rest of town.

Merchants in Ellensburg, Washington (bottom right) have adopted corner gardens. They are responsible for planting and maintaining the downtown beauty, and they do an excellent job. They know a beautiful downtown attracts more customers and increases sales.



Suggestion:

Think of your favorite destinations. Are they beautiful?

Sisters, Oregon, population 1,100 (top right) has created stunningly beautiful streetscapes, and now can boast of having the highest retail sales per capita of any city in the state of Oregon. The local garden club has taken the lead in dressing up downtown, and the efforts have paid off handsomely.

Beautification is an investment with a tremendous return and creates customer loyalty.

Consider joining and aligning yourself with the nation's largest community improvement network: www.kab.org.

Soften the transition between building facade and sidewalk (bottom right) by using planter boxes or pots filled with shrubs and flowers. Remove the weeds from around the trees and in the sidewalks.

Look at this photo again:

1. Can you tell what businesses are here?
2. Can you tell whether or not they are even in business?
3. Is it inviting? Does it get your attention?
4. Does it make you want to walk down this block?

Suggestion: Paint aluminum window trim to make the building a little more modern and attractive. Don't get stuck in the 60s.



Suggestion:

Neenah, Wisconsin (population 5,000) did a downtown makeover. Notice the photo, bottom left, with the typical building facades meeting the sidewalks. Now look at the shops shown, bottom right, just one block down. Which set of shops would get your attention? After the beautification enhancements in the block with the beautification, retail sales increased nearly three times faster than in the rest of the town.

Pull people in - make your streetscapes stunningly beautiful.

These floral pots (top right) really bring color to downtown. They are very nice, but you need more of them and you need similar efforts where facades meet the sidewalk. This is where the merchants need to take the lead. The city can handle the curb side, but merchants need to follow suit along storefronts.



Suggestion:

Kudos for taking such good care of them, too! (top right)

Oh, so this is what 3rd Saturday is! (bottom left) Very fun! Outdoor retail (merchandise displayed on tables for sale) should not be confused, however, with outdoor displays and beautification. For a special event such as 3rd Saturday, it works well, but for everyday, outdoor retail gives a “garage sale” appearance.

During other times, we recommend extending window displays to exterior spaces, but never outdoor retail, which creates a garage sale look to the community. It works fine for “Third Saturday,” which would be the exception to the general rule.

The Chamber of Commerce looks great with the colorful flowers - and it's perfect that the Chamber is right on the square. (bottom right) Chambers should always set the standard for the community. Suggestion to all merchants: Limit the number of fliers and posters in windows to less than four and change them at least once a month. Otherwise passersby will just ignore them.



Suggestion:

Why does the Chamber have more plants outside than the florist? (top right) Good job with the hanging baskets and bench outside. Consider adding more pots on the sidewalk to soften the transition between the sidewalk and the building facade. Really make it a stunning corner. Next to the Chamber, florists should always have a stunning entry. This is a great start and a perfect location to make a real statement.

Nice awning. (bottom left) Add a blade sign (perpendicular to the street - you only see the name when you're across the street) and add some color. Set the standard for the town and for the county. Be sure to sell the service, not the organization: "Visitor Information" should be noted on the awning and on a perpendicular, or blade sign.

Here, again (bottom right), add pots of shrubs and flowers to soften the streetscape. Does this make you want to go in? What's in here? This is why blade signs are so important.



Parking Is Not Just For Lovers

The parking limits rule

Two hour parking dramatically reduces visitor spending and repeat visits. (top far right) Visitors will typically spend up to four hours to experience shopping and dining, but if a visitor has to rush back to their car to move it after two hours, they will usually just get in their cars and leave. The rationale: “we can’t get our merchants to park elsewhere, so we’ll punish the customers instead by limiting them to just two hours.”

Suggestion: If you insist on two-hour parking, then let visitors know WHERE they can find all day or four-hour parking. Add this to every sign that states it’s a two-hour parking zone.



The Place to Hang Out

The importance of downtowns

Quick Facts

- The top diversionary activity of visitors is shopping, dining and entertainment in a pedestrian-friendly, intimate setting.
- This is where 80% of all tourism spending takes place.
- Special note: 70% of ALL consumer spending (locals and visitors) takes place after 6:00 pm. Are you open?
- People want a place to gather, to “hang out” - those “Third Places.” The “First Place” is our home. The “Second Place” is where we work. The “Third Place” is the place we go to hang out. This is typically a great downtown and is critical to cities hoping to lure back young people, small businesses, and industry. People want traditional downtowns more than ever, so make it a priority.



Critical Mass is More Than a Religious Experience

The 10+10+10 rule

And in that downtown, make sure you have the critical mass of like businesses grouped together. THE MINIMUM business mix in just three lineal blocks that can make a downtown a true destination is:

1. TEN places that sell food: Soda fountain, coffee shop, bistro, cafe, sit-down restaurant, wine store, deli, confectionary.
2. TEN destination retail shops: Galleries, antiques (not second hand stores), collectibles, books, clothing, home accents, outfitters, brand-specific businesses, garden specialties, kitchen stores, cigars, etc.
3. TEN places open after 6:00: Entertainment, theater (movies, performing arts), bars & bistros, specialty shops, dining, open air markets, etc.

Downtowns need to get the “Mall Mentality:”

- Like businesses grouped together. Think auto malls, antique malls, food courts - clustering of fast food or gas stations on every corner at key intersections.
- Common operating hours.
- Open into the evening hours
- Common marketing efforts
- Beautification
- Attractive gateways

Aha, so THIS is what’s going on in the square ... (bottom left)
how did the first season end up?



Suggestion:

You are doing an incredible job trying to get people to hang out downtown!
(top right)

Lots of people hanging out ... (bottom left)

...a very busy day for visitors and locals. (bottom right) Key to any successful
downtown is the phrase "Bring downtown to life." This is a great start.



Kiosks Never Sleep

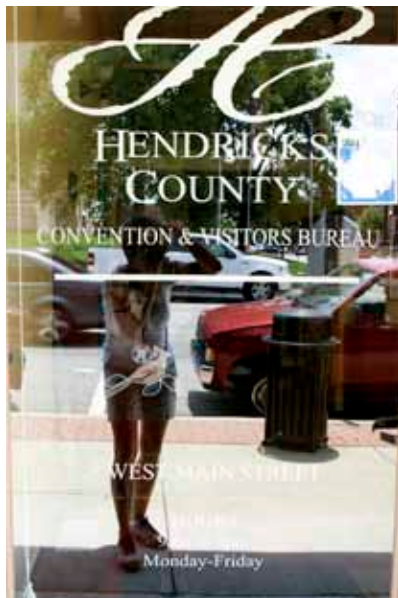
The 24/7 rule

No visitor information available after 5 PM on Friday, even though the CVB is right on the square? (bottom left)

Visitors don't just travel during business hours, so it's critical to provide visitor information after hours. Provide a kiosk or display with brochure distribution. Place visitor information kiosks around the county to cross-sell attractions, amenities, and services. The more you have to offer, the longer people will stay.

The Chamber of Commerce in Ashland, Oregon (top) has this display of visitor information right downtown, including a map, lodging and dining options, and information about the Shakespeare festival and other activities.

There are several kiosks like this one (bottom center left) in the Teton Valley of Idaho. Moses Lake, Washington (bottom right two photos) volunteers built this kiosk which includes "must-see" attractions.



Suggestion:

Develop several 24 hour visitor information kiosks. Make sure you include brochure distribution. Place kiosks where visitors can spend money. Each should cross-sell another part of the county or another area of town.

This kiosk in Beatty, Nevada (top right) was built from a kit by volunteers. A local craftsman added the displays and brochure holders inside. It is very attractive and effective. Work with Kiwanis, Rotary and other local auxiliary organizations who often can help fund and build these important kiosks.

This example (bottom right), in Kingsport, Tennessee, is constructed in brick to fit the historic downtown. They included 24-hour brochure distribution (bottom left) as well as their displays. Merchants and attractions pay \$5 monthly to have their brochures included, which helps pay for stocking and maintenance, plus provides additional funds to help finance construction of additional kiosks.



Other notes and impressions:

I noticed the strangest thing about Danville ...

... there seems to be a very large number of attorneys per capita here! For the most part, they seem to understand the power of beautification, while most of the merchants, with the most to gain, don't..



Suggestion:

This sign (top right) and the theater aroused my curiosity. It's an excellent sign. Great job. Make sure you ALWAYS put your signage perpendicular to vehicle and pedestrian traffic.

It would be wonderful to read the story of this theater - it must have an interesting history. Consider developing an interpretive display to let people know the story. This helps endear people, particularly visitors, to the community.

Love the little cart! (bottom right) This is a great little museum with very attractive landscaping that does a great job telling the stories. Great job with the signage and the landscaping. Very nice.

In the museum, make sure you tell stories and not just display artifacts. If you can captivate visitors for two hours, spending locally will increase. People remember stories, it engages them, and gives them stories they can tell others, enticing them to visit the community and museum as well.

The average museum visit lasts between 20 and 40 minutes. The goal: to make the experience last two hours and to make it so captivating that people will tell other people, increasing visitation and making it not a "been there, done that" attraction. The more experiential it is, the more successful the museum will be.



Suggestion:

The courthouse square is beautifully maintained. (top and bottom left)

With a treacherous highway crossing for pedestrians ... (bottom right). The crosswalks in town are practically non-existent.



Suggestion:

Decorative crosswalks help improve safety for pedestrians crossing the street because drivers notice them easily. They also help to beautify a town, make an excellent gateway, and can be designed to fit almost any theme.

These crosswalks were created by StreetPrint, based in Canada, with operations throughout the U.S. The process embeds decorative designs into the asphalt - this is not paint - that will last for decades.

Notice the work crew in the top left photo. They just completed the near side, and are now working on the other side. Vehicles can drive on the newly embossed side immediately. The cost of this type of decorative crosswalk runs around \$6 per square foot, far less than actual paver-blocks and a whole lot less maintenance.



Suggestion:

Here is another sample design for a decorative crosswalk (top).

Another diamond in the rough (bottom left). Add a new sign with some color in the front and an updated awning. Add a few pots with flowers and shrubs outside the door to help pull customers in.

This is a great anchor tenant with a great story! (bottom right)

Remember: Women account for nearly 80% of all consumer spending, particularly in shops like this one. So make it inviting! If this were in another town and you were passing through, would you stop? It's a great store once inside, but the trick is getting customers actually IN the door!



Suggestion:

This walk signal took so long to prompt a signal change every time I needed to cross the street that I simply gave up and either jaywalked or just skipped the effort. Convenience, these days, is critical. We are an impatient society.

Even though you're on a highway, make your downtown square as pedestrian friendly as possible. This is where people will spend money, and you want to make it convenient for them to get to the various shops and restaurants.

The Mayberry Cafe (below) is outstanding - what a great anchor tenant! Promote them specifically! You have one of the greatest brands for Danville possible, right here!

Suggestion: Use your anchor tenant to build your brand and attract visitors. Think like the folks in Mt. Airy, North Carolina, where Andy Griffith actually grew up (bottom right). Note the article shown here. Isn't that fun?

If possible make it experiential. Based on activities, not just ambiance. With regards to the Mayberry Cafe, add some pots and hanging baskets to pull customers in.



Get Arrested by Andy Griffith

Mount Airy, N.C., retains much of the '50s vibe that inspired native son Andy Griffith's fictional Mayberry. Cashing in on the town's fame, Mike Cockerham has restored a 1962 Ford Galaxie to look like a Mayberry RFD patrol car and hired former chamber of commerce president Jim Grimes to run 25-minute tours. It's proved so popular, local minister and B&B owner Roger Sickmiller was tapped to play sheriff Andy in a second squad car. 336/789-6743, tourmayberry.com. \$20 for up to five people.

Suggestion:

All that walking around town (top) made me hungry. Time for dinner.

This looks like a good place for dinner. (bottom left)

Guess not. (bottom right) Too bad it's not open. First impressions are lasting impressions. What's with all the rules? Suggestion: Cut down the signs to two - or three at most. Put up invitations, not rejections. Instead of "Closed" let people know WHEN you will be open. Make it an invitation to come back, not just a statement to go away. No soliciting (twice). No Smoking (twice). Closed (twice). No shirt, no shoes, no service. Warning! One welcome and 10 negatives. First impression: This restaurant has had some serious problems with vandalism, rampant solicitors who won't stay away, less than desirable customers who can't dress properly, and customers you have to tell them multiple times that you are closed and that there is no smoking.



20/20 Signage Equals \$\$\$

The rules of retail signage

As visitors drive into town, they look directly forward through the windshield to make sure they don't violate local traffic laws or cause an accident. They might be on the lookout for a parking place, a public restroom, or a place to stop and have lunch. It's very difficult for drivers to get detailed views of the buildings looking side to side when they need to keep their eyes forward.

And yet, many shops in a downtown district place their signs flat against the building parallel to vehicular and pedestrian traffic, on the doors, or on the windows. It's easy for drivers to miss those signs, thus missing the shops entirely.

The solution? Use perpendicular blade signs, like those shown on this page, which allow drivers to read them without turning their heads. Make sure the letters are tall enough to be seen from a distance, and are consistent in height and size. Limit the sign to less than four words. These examples are from Leavenworth, WA (top); Carmel, CA (bottom right); and Nantucket, MA (bottom left.)



Suggestion:

Also, always promote what it is you're selling - the lure to bring customers in before you promote the name of the business. Do you know what "Laffin Crab" is? (top near right) A seafood restaurant? Crab house? They are no longer in business because they sold kites and windsocks, but when shoppers have no idea what it is you're selling they say one word: "Next."

Make it obvious what it is you're selling - that's a much more powerful lure than the name of your business.

Develop a Retail Signage Plan that addresses outdoor retail, A-boards, retail signage, etc. Limit the use of plastic banners. to two weeks, maximum (bottom right).

I finally found the waterpark - what a great asset. Remove the chain link fence and use wrought iron fencing instead. Add some signage.



Toilets Attract More Than Flies

The rule of visitor amenities

But I DID find something even better than the waterpark ...the ONLY public restroom I've seen the entire day in the county!

The number one reason travelers stop is to use restroom facilities, so if you place them in a location where people can spend money, research has shown that once you get visitors to stop, there is a four-times greater chance they'll spend money as well. And if a shop does let people use their facilities, the customer will frequently feel "obligated" to buy something. Just ask the folks at McDonalds.

Restrooms can be a terrific sales tool - be sure there are public restrooms downtown that are well-marked. You don't want to force people to leave town before they're done spending money.

Merchants should never just say "No Public Restrooms." Instead, tell visitors where they CAN find them, as this merchant in Wickford, RI has done. (bottom right)



Suggestion:

As I was leaving town, I saw the readerboard (top right) for the “Night at the Museum” show at the amphitheater. These should be placed at bookend locations, to tap into people coming from other directions as well. Well done!

The gateway sign (top right) should be pressure-washed or cleaned at least two or three times a year, and painted once a year. Perhaps a good fund-raising project for a local Boy Scout troop. The beautification around both signs is terrific and makes for a great entry to town.

This looks like fun. (bottom left) Is there a classier way to advertise it? The plastic banner doesn't do a good job of promoting the Symphony Orchestra. Consider another readerboard, one a larger one that can accommodate multiple events. This one is also hard to read from a distance.

On to other communities in the county:

- New Winchester



Suggestion:

Keep your entryways and major thoroughfares clean and maintained. (top right) Keep weeds down and use the planter areas for flowers and shrubs.

WHAT TO DO

Always put your gateway signs where you will make the first, best impression - never at the city limits. An excellent example is that of Oroville, Washington (bottom left). They placed these attractive monument signs at each end of their three-block long downtown shopping district. These types of gateway signs create a sense of arrival, they slow traffic, and they increase the perceived value of the town. At the city limits signage says “Historic Downtown Oroville - ahead 1 mile.” This tells people, “don’t judge us yet! You still have a mile to go!” It also creates a teaser to keep going.

Amo’s sign is marginal. (bottom right) Suggest adding a small flower garden at the base of the sign to make more of a statement. Avoid using metal signs on metal pasture posts when creating an important gateway to the community.



Suggestion:

The Amo Fire Department & Youth League Fish Fry sign (top right) was right after Amo's "welcome" sign. Keep the area free of weeds so that drivers can read the sign without weeds blocking the view.

The downtown gathering area (bottom left) is not inviting - cleaning up the weeds and grass growing in the sidewalk areas would help customers determine that the businesses here are in fact still operating. Can you tell if the business in the foreground is still operating? Assumption: It's been out of business for a while.

Looking for the Vandalia Trail (bottom right), we saw an opportunity for the shop (below left) to market themselves as a "provisioning headquarters" for people walking the trail (think sodas, candy bars, water and other necessities). A simple sign posted on the building, along with a sign to point people in the direction on the trail, could let people know what you have to offer, pull them into the store, and give them more info about the trail.



Suggestion:

Maybe I'm confused. This can't be the trailhead. (top right)

Yes...it IS! (bottom left) This is a great trail between the towns but the trail-heads need cleaning up. Make them shine! What is your first impression? Would you want to walk the trail based on what you see here? Screen dumpsters with a cedar fence. Start a weed abatement program.

Pursue some state grant funding for trail signage. This trail, creating a transportation between two towns, should be eligible for some grant funding for some quality signs. It's obvious that volunteers or local residents have done what they can to create signage, but the trail deserves professionally produced signage.



Suggestion:

Let the teens in town use the side of this building (top) for an art project. Set up certain rules and parameters, and let the teens use spray paint to make illustrations and express themselves. This has been done, successfully, in many cities including Rapid City, South Dakota (Art Alley), and in Olympia, Washington. The efforts can engage young people in the community and can turn an eye-sore into a work of art. Another option would be to muralize the side of the building.

A sign like this (bottom left) sends a message that the town is in decline. The obvious conclusion is that the business is no longer operating. Take it down since it serves no purpose and sends a negative message about the town and Roy's Realty.

There is far too much sign clutter here (bottom right). Clean up and condense them. Avoid the use of portable signs for more than two weeks at any one location. Does this look like a place you'd want to spend time and money?



Suggestion:

Aha ... the other end of the trail at Coatesville. (bottom photos) This trail is well worth the development and maintenance effort and is a great asset for the two communities. Keep it maintained and enhance it as well, perhaps with benches along the route, effective, professional signage, and maybe a trail map posted in various locations, and in a brochure available at the trail heads.

Would a local service group or boy scout troop be able to take on the trail maintenance as a fund-raising project? Once again, it will be important to develop an attractive signage system (bottom right) for the trail. Perhaps a sign company would donate a few signs in exchange for a sponsorship: "This sign provided courtesy of XYZ Signs."



Suggestion:

Do what you can to avoid the “ghost town” look (both photos below). It gives the impression of a town in severe decline, and makes travelers want to just pass right on through.

If possible, try to keep the buildings where businesses have closed at least free of weeds. This could be a very important public service project.

Hands down my favorite stop in Hendricks County! (two right photos) This is a great cafe and bakery - people come all the way across the county to eat at this shop. Now Judy knows customer service! She understands how to be a success:

- Her shop has great curb appeal - doesn't it make you want to go in?
- Interior is clean, warm and inviting - very homelike.
- Good, wholesome food.
- Served with a smile.
- An “anchor tenant” for the town.



Promote Your Anchor Tenants

The mall mentality rule

Market your specific businesses - the BEST that you have to offer. Too often, communities market the same thing everyone else has: outdoor recreation, shopping, dining, historic downtown, hiking, biking, "something for everyone." But why should I go out of my way to visit you, if I can find the same types of things closer to home? This is why it's so important to market specifics, not generalities. Have you gone anywhere because "They have it all"?

Create an Activities Guide (bottom photos) that highlights specific shops, attractions and restaurants that are The best you have to offer. This one, produced by the Ottawa, Illinois Visitor Center, is proving very successful.

This restaurant (top) in Huntsville, TX, is one of their most unique, and most visited attractions. Although it looks like a dump, that's actually part of its appeal. The Huntsville New Zion Baptist Barbecue not only makes great barbecue, it's a one of a kind experience to eat there. GQ Magazine rated it as one of the top 10 restaurants in the world to fly to. Does Huntsville promote it specifically? Absolutely! It's an "anchor tenant."



TWO SISTERS CANDY & GIFTS
 401 East 10th Street
 Ste. 100
 815-433-4438

UPTOWN GRILL CONTEMPORARY CUISINE
 101 East 10th Street
 Ste. 100
 815-433-4438

JEREMIAH JOE SPECIALTY COFFEE
 101 East 10th Street
 Ste. 100
 815-433-4438

SKYDIVE CHICAGO CABARET THE
 101 East 10th Street
 Ste. 100
 815-433-4438

COURT STREET CABARET THE
 101 East 10th Street
 Ste. 100
 815-433-4438

RIVER ADVENTURE CANOE & BIKE RENTAL
 101 East 10th Street
 Ste. 100
 815-433-4438

DÉJÀ VU HOME & GARDEN BOUTIQUE
 101 East 10th Street
 Ste. 100
 815-433-4438

WEBER HOUSE & GARDEN COTTAGE TOURS
 101 East 10th Street
 Ste. 100
 815-433-4438

CAJUN CONNECTION TASTE OF LOUISIANA
 101 East 10th Street
 Ste. 100
 815-433-4438

Suggestion:

Ask yourself: What do we have that people in Indianapolis can't get or do closer to home? Suggested requirements to be included in a piece like this:

- Open until at least 7:00 pm, when most spending takes place.
- Good curb appeal
- Highly touted by someone other than themselves.
- Different or clearly better than what visitors can get closer to home.
- Open six or seven days a week (closed perhaps on a Monday).

What makes you worth a special trip?

The Bread Basket is one of Hendricks County's unique attractions - one that should be specifically promoted. But she can't make the town a success all by herself. Consider the Bread Basket as the anchor tenant and add some "support stores." Recruit them or set up a retail incubator to help your innovative residents begin their own retail businesses - "home-grown" businesses.

STARVED ROCK LODGE & CONFERENCE CENTER
 115 Starved Rock Blvd, Ellettsville, IN 47424
 317-844-1020
 www.starvedrock.com

LANDERS HOUSE COUNTRY LODGING & COTTAGES
 115 Starved Rock Blvd, Ellettsville, IN 47424
 317-844-1020
 www.starvedrock.com

CATTAILS GIFT SHOPPE TASTING ROOM & COTTAGE BOUTIQUE
 115 Starved Rock Blvd, Ellettsville, IN 47424
 317-844-1020
 www.starvedrock.com

THE BREAD BASKET
 115 Starved Rock Blvd, Ellettsville, IN 47424
 317-844-1020
 www.starvedrock.com

Map of Ottava Area:
 1. Starved Rock Lodge & Conference Center
 2. Landers House Country Lodging & Cottages
 3. Cattails Gift Shoppe Tasting Room & Cottage Boutique
 4. The Bread Basket
 5. The Ottava Inn
 6. The Ottava Hotel
 7. The Ottava Motel
 8. The Ottava Restaurant
 9. The Ottava Bar
 10. The Ottava Lounge
 11. The Ottava Spa
 12. The Ottava Golf Course
 13. The Ottava Marina
 14. The Ottava Park
 15. The Ottava Cemetery



Suggestion:

And right next door to the Bread Basket is this stark, barren building (top right). This isn't inviting - in fact, it's hard to tell if there are really any open businesses, or what they might be, in this entire block.

Any businesses open here (bottom left) either? If there are open businesses, be sure to make it obvious - put flags or potted flowers outside your doors. Post decorative blade signs. Add some color. Add hanging baskets and planters. Present a welcoming front door that will entice shoppers (both locals and visitors) inside.

If this was in another town and you were passing through, would you stop to visit these shops?

On to Stilesville. (bottom right)



Suggestion:

Put your best foot forward. This is not a good first impression at the entryway to town. (top right, bottom left)

Neither is this. (bottom right)

Your gateways are critical to the success of a community both in terms of tourism as well as community pride.

Work with the property owners to clean up debris, find a good home for some of these artifacts, and make these corridors and gateway areas look more attractive. Make it look as though people in the community care about the town.



Suggestion:

Maybe some of the historic artifacts could be put to good use by a business, such as this one (top right). This looks like a great market.

Have a local garden club group adopt this little vacant space (bottom left) in front of the Post Office. Leaving it to the weeds gives a very poor impression of the town - like no one cares.

Again, be sure to limit your banners (bottom right). Or perhaps consolidate all your signs. The sign clutter here nearly covers up the entire landscape! As a general rule of thumb, limit verbiage to less than 12 words on a single sign or readerboard. Passers-by have between four and eight seconds to read signage. In this case where there are seven or eight signs in just 100 feet, or so, customers will typically ignore them all or will only notice the largest one - in this case, "Fresh Watermelon." A readerboard here would be ideal.



Suggestion:

This might be a great place to eat (top right), but it sure doesn't look that great from the highway.

These photos of Fredericksburg, Texas (bottom) show what an impact potted shrubs and flowers and blade signs can have at the entrances to shops or restaurants. They add a lot of curb appeal, making the entrances very inviting.

Merchants should think of the sidewalks fronting their shops and restaurants as entry halls into their establishments. Beautiful settings attract people.

The state of Indiana works hard to attract visitors to the state, and local tourism offices do their best to bring visitors into the community. But it's up to the merchant to attract those visitors into individual restaurants or stores. And one of the most important ways to attract those customers is to make the outside of the shop - the entryway - be attractive and inviting.



Suggestion:

Curb appeal is also extremely important for golf clubs as well as retail shops and restaurants.

Overall, Deer Creek Golf Club provides a good first impression - it's a nice club and is well-maintained (bottom right). Good job with the sign (lower left). It is attractive, tells where to find the club, and lets people know that it is open to the public. Good invitation! (Do something with the window below the sign).

Consider placing these signs (top right) in a different location - these are not easy to see and aren't located in the best places to create a good impression. They should be free-standing signs.

What are these wooden crates (top right) with the metal posts protruding from them for? These are an eyesore.



Suggestion:

This was a great stand (top right), but I almost missed it. I had to turn around and come back. Be sure to place your directional signage in advance of the turn, especially coming from the west. Travelers driving by who do miss the turn will most likely not bother to turn around, but will just keep going. Make it easy for travelers by letting them know far enough in advance of any turns they need to take.

This is a terrific market! (bottom left) Lure travelers off the highway by adding more enticements, such as coffee service (promoted by a sign with a coffee pot), maybe some kids' play equipment and some fresh samples. Tempt visitors passing by! The curb appeal is outstanding!

I would assume these businesses (bottom right) are no longer operating because the sign is so dilapidated. If they are, by chance, still in business, redevelop the sign. The sign, as is, does these businesses no favors. If they are indeed closed, then remove the sign.



Suggestion:

This Antique Mall sign (top) should be repaired and repainted or removed entirely. Just because it's an antique mall doesn't mean it should have an antique sign. Retail signage is supposed to be a sales tool. In this case it tends to say "go away" more than it says "come on in!"

Dear Martha, I read about you all over the county ... great marketing! But put a sign or two up along the way in so we don't give up on the way to finding you! When you have no idea how far you have to go to reach your destination, the route always seems longer than perhaps it really is. Visitors will frequently give up unless you let them know with "reminder signs" that they are still on the right track.

Include the distance on the sign on the highway (bottom right), so travelers will have a good idea of how far they have to drive to get to you.



Suggestion:

Pittsboro's welcome sign (bottom left) is nice. Make it even better by building a small planter around it and filling it with colorful flowers or shrubs. Is Pittsboro a low cost reliable municipal electric utility? We thought it was supposed to be a town. Is this the town's greatest asset? Is this the best you can do? I guess it's better than nothing!

The Fire Department has a much nicer monument sign than the welcome sign for the city! (bottom center) Consider building a matching gateway sign.

The Pittsboro Park sign (bottom right) looks old and worn out. Could it be updated and made larger so that it's easier for visitors to see and read?

The Dr. Malcolm O. Scamahorn Community Park (top) is a beautiful park, and a great community asset. Put the sign to work! Welcome visitors on this sign, and invite us back. Use the sign to also promote one or two upcoming community events - take advantage of the opportunity here!



Suggestion:

What shops are along this block? (top right) Use perpendicular blade signs to promote what it is you're selling (if anything). Add pots of flowers outside your doors to add beauty and attract customers.

Here (bottom left) is a highway crossing, but no crosswalk. Think about pedestrian safety and security - promote pedestrian friendliness. Add crosswalks. Remember, the number one activity of visitors is shopping and dining in a pedestrian-friendly area. "Pedestrian friendly" are key words.

Here (bottom center) there is no light to get across the highway! Find ways to make the town more walkable.

Beautiful landscaping! (bottom right) This is lovely and helps create a very good impression of the town. Nice job! Now spread the wealth!



Suggestion:

This building (top) is an excellent candidate for a trompe l'oeil mural. Trompe l'oeil, French for "fool the eye," can turn any wall into a work of art or an incredible scene.

These photos (bottom right three photos) show a trompe l'oeil painting in progress on the flat side of a large brick building. The finished wall (bottom right) is stunning - and all of it is an architectural mural, including all the architectural elements.

The photo bottom left also shows a trompe l'oeil mural of a different nature. It disguises the plain concrete wall by giving it distinct architectural details. The windows, awnings, the brick, some of the plants and sky are all painted.



Suggestion:

The Winslow, Arizona building (top right) is another fine example of trompe l'oeil art. The bricks, windows, and reflections in the windows are all painted, showcasing the hit Eagle's song "Take it Easy." "Standing on a corner in Winslow, Arizona, such a fine sight to see. It's a girl, my Lord, in a flatbed Ford, slowing down to take a look at me." This mural attracts more than 1.5 million visitors a year.

The trees, the brick sidewalk, benches and planters (bottom left) combine to make this a very attractive place. Great job!

Remember, research shows that curb appeal can account for as much as 70% of sales at restaurants and retail shops. This restaurant doesn't look inviting - the signs are very dated and unattractive, the building facade is stark and harsh. Consider replacing all these signs with up-to-date signage that is more attractive, get rid of the plastic banner, add pots of flowers at the doorway and add an awning. Make the front of the restaurant more inviting.



Suggestion:

We all travel. Have you ever uttered the words “That looks like a nice place to eat.” As visitors, the litmus test is curb appeal.

This is the third city I’ve seen this banner in (top right). You don’t think there’s a race track around here, do you?

Closed. (bottom left) But when should I come back? There’s no indication of shop hours or days.

A closed sign tells potential customers to go away. It can also mean several different things: the shop is closed for lunch; closed for the day; closed for the season; or out of business. Let your potential customers know when you are open, and invite them back.

Use signs such as this (bottom right) instead of simply saying, “Closed.”



Suggestion:

After some work, I discover this is the entrance (top right) for the customers, not the employees! Suggestion: Clean it up. Put up an “entrance” sign. Add potted shrubs here - maybe along the bottom of the wrought iron railing. Make it obvious this is the entrance for customers, and that you are welcoming them. Is there a way to hide the wiring mess? It looks dangerous.

Suggestion: Replace the chain link (bottom left) fence with wrought iron. This chain link and barbed wire give a “prison yard” feel - probably not what you want to convey.

Hmmm ... Now this looks interesting! (bottom right) I’ll check this out. Suggestion: Keep the sign freshly painted. First guess: Not a very nice golf course.



Suggestion:

Well, this doesn't give a very good impression of the golf course (top right), confirming the first impressions.

At least the sign and the dumpster match! (bottom left) Remember - curb appeal is critically important for golf courses - you want to put your best foot forward with your signage and increase the perceived value of the course. Is it a nice course to play? These signs, the dumpsters, and lack of any kind of curb appeal make it look like it's not a high quality course. Is it open for public play? 9 holes or 18?

Here (bottom right), I'm stopped in my car and still can't make out what this sign says. Make sure your signage has text that is large enough for drivers to read from a distance. Only use eight words max on a sign or billboard - drivers don't have time to read more than that. General rule" 1" lettering for every 12' of viewing distance. At this distance lettering should be 12" tall, if not taller.



Suggestion:

“The Only Lizton in the World”? (top) Consider a nicer sign. This one looks as though it’s ready to rattle over. Consider a brick gateway sign. There is far too much text on here. A person would need to pull over in order to read it all. The top portion of the sign should be the only thing in this location.

It would be better served to put all of this information on a display either at the schools, on a display at a local park in town, or at another location where people are out of their cars and can take the time to read it all.

Beautiful new school! (bottom left) What a wonderful community asset.

I don’t understand the “Buy Here; Pay Here” sign. (bottom right) Most people already know that if you buy here, you have to pay here. This would be a very good corner for some beautification. Could it be adopted by a group of citizens and formed into a small park-like area, with some shrubbery, flowers, and maybe a bench? Could a garden club adopt the corner? While the single flower pot is nice, it’s totally lost and hidden behind the guardrail, the signs, stop sign, power pole, and Buy Here sign. It needs to make a statement. Consider trees, a major planter.



Suggestion:

Downtown areas should always avoid the use of chain link fencing (top right) - it has too much of an industrial feel. Consider using wrought iron fencing instead. You can also now install vinyl fencing that looks like wrought iron. It's less expensive and makes a positive first impression.

This area by the interstate (bottom photos) looks blighted and depressed. \ With scenes like this, it's difficult to entice travelers to stop and spend time and money in the town. Work at developing a volunteer clean-up crew, or work with the property owner to clean up the property and find a business or tenant.



Suggestion:

The blight must go to get people to stop. (top and bottom left) Again, work with the property owner to find solutions. Remove this temporary sign from the field (bottom left) and cut down the weeds around it. It's not working very well for whatever business it's supposed to promote.

This is a very, very busy part of town, and certainly one missing the opportunity to be the anchor tenant! (bottom right) Update the signage, take advantage of the reader-board to promote your primary lure.



Suggestion:

Advertise with signage outside of town, add some outdoor seating and tables, and give away free children's cones. (top) The Dairy Bar has tremendous potential for doing even more business and becoming a terrific draw to the town.

Take a look at the example of great outdoor seating at a casual restaurant in Door County, Wisconsin (below). It doesn't have to be expensive, but adding a few little tables and chairs and a couple of umbrellas for shade could turn the Dairy Bar into an even greater draw.

While it might be a great local place to hang out, the business does little to attract visitors (bottom right). Would you sit in either of these chairs?



Suggestion:

Welcome to our town - North Salem. (top) This entranceway looks nice - nothing outstanding, but it does look nice with the trim lawn here.

But drive a little further, and impressions of the town sink fast. (bottom left and right) Organize a community clean-up day. Make it a public event to encourage participation.

Nearly every community in the United States is looking for increased economic development: new industry, new residents, and tourism. Anyone checking out the area will find scenes like this. Does this tell them that this is a great community live, work and play in? Or does it say “next” and off they go. If you were looking for a place to relocate, how would this town stack up? What’s your first impression?



Suggestion:

A “Great Place to Raise a Family”? You need to show why that’s true!

The decorative lampposts, potted flowers, and benches along the sidewalks do look good. But that’s just a starting point. The businesses and citizens need to show pride in their town by keeping their businesses and residences looking neat and attractive.

Have a community clean up day two or three times a year. This will help develop community pride and will encourage investment, local retail sales, and can lead to attracting new industry and even tourism.



Suggestion:

Interesting name for an insurance business! (top right)

If you're the number one steakhouse in the state, (bottom left) you deserve a bit more than a piece of paper printed from the internet. How about a decorative display featuring the menu?

There is a lot of potential in this cute little town. (bottom right)



of Citysearch Indianapolis 2007 - Best Indianapolis Steak Page 2 of 8

Restaurants

- Best Breakfast
- Best Group Eats
- Best Family-Friendly Dining
- Best Fast Food
- Best Group Dining
- Best Hamburger
- Best Italian Food
- Best Mexican Food

» View All Categories

Winners in other cities

- Atlanta
- Austin
- Baltimore
- Boston
- Charlotte
- Chicago
- Cincinnati
- Columbus
- Dallas

Best Steak 2007 👍

You voted for the best Steak in Indianapolis, and we couldn't check out the results below.

[Send to a friend!](#)

Audience Winner

- 1. Red Dog Steak House & Saloon**
8 W Pearl St., North Salem, IN, 46185-9550
- 2. The Capital Grille**
40 West Washington St., Indianapolis, IN, 46204
Offering aged beef, chops, mashed potatoes and a traditional menu of fine-dine, luxurious gentleman's club-like setting.
- 3. Morton's - The Steakhouse**
41 E. Washington St., Indianapolis, IN, 46204
USDA prime beef, elegant tableside service and mammoth martinis.
- 4. Sullivan's Steakhouse**
3316 E 86TH St., Indianapolis, IN, 46240-2429
Oversize cocktails and a classy club atmosphere make this an Indy steak house.
- 5. Mo's A Place For Steaks**
47 S Pennsylvania St., Indianapolis, IN, 46204
Exclusive downtown steakhouse that attracts big spenders.
- 6. St. Elmo Steak House**
127 S Illinois St., Indianapolis, IN, 46225
The steak is properly aged and the portions are substantial at the oldest steak h.
- 7. Brix**
85 S 1st St., Zionsville, IN, 46277
Hearty, home-style American brunch, lunch or dinner in a building restored near 2.
- 8. Longhorn Steakhouse**
2365 E 118th St., Carmel, IN, 46032
National chain ruffles up its eyes, T-bones and filets in a kid-friendly, Lone Star.
- 9. Pappano's**
49 W Maryland St., Indianapolis, IN, 46204-3522
Ground zero for trendy dining, the ultra-mod Brix's have out-busy Madrasman.
- 10. Shue's Steak House**
60 S Capitol Ave., Indianapolis, IN, 46204
Shue's winning tradition on the 568 contours of this classic steakhouse chain.

40 W. Washington St.
Indianapolis
1-317-422-8799

Citysearch
Site Links



Suggestion:

...but not when no one is open to take my money. (top and bottom left)

Merchants should practice the “Mall Mentality.” In a shopping mall, all of the businesses are required to be open consistent hours and days of the week. They work together to market their businesses - because they’re all part of one community - the mall. The more customers that one store can attract means more customer traffic to benefit ALL the shops. The same is true for a downtown - the merchants need to work together to have consistent open hours and market themselves collectively. The more there is to see and do, the longer people will stay and they further they will come.

And I would have so loved a root beer float -- but CLOSED! (bottom center)

Suggestions: There are hundreds of miles of bikeable roads in the area. Develop some biking itineraries to promote the area - attract people out here to enjoy that experience, and make sure you market your shops and



restaurants in the process. You'll attract folks for the recreation, and they'll want to stop for a meal and some shopping in town.

Suggestion: You'll need more events or attractions than just one weekend a year. (bottom near left) It is a fun, attractive pole banner, though.

Suggestion:

Signage says a lot about your business, and first impressions are lasting impressions. This sign (top right) indicates a run-down establishment; whether it's true or not - that's the impression the sign gives. Replace it with an attractive, professionally produced sign and new mounting brackets.

This sign (bottom left) is also dated and worn - indicating a dated and worn out establishment. Clean up the signs and streets to welcome your weekend visitors.

Great job of beautification here (bottom right). But, what do you sell? Where is the perpendicular sign? Add another bench and put a potted plant on each side of each bench. Great start, however. Remember to always promote your primary lure - the key thing you sell - that will attract customers into the store.



Suggestion:

A great park -- this is a real gem for the community!

Super trail system! Good information on this display (bottom right). Consider printing smaller versions of the trail map to have available in outdoor brochure holders so that visitors can take a map with them.

The first impressions here are terrific.



Suggestion:

Music In the Park looks like fun too (top). It looks like a great activity, and this is a good promotion of it!

Old Farm Market is another great market (bottom left and center). Again, find ways to get travelers to stop! Consider offering 25¢ ice cream cones or coffee, promote public restrooms.

Two hours later and 35 miles of driving and I finally find O'Reilly Raceway Park. (bottom right)

Has anyone noticed that the name of the Raceway is not the same as on the maps, and neither are the names of the streets bringing you in here? Make sure all of your marketing materials are up to date. Also contact MapQuest so it can be changed online as well.



Suggestion:

After I drove all that way to find the Raceway Park, this is all I can see (top right). It's a big disappointment - I was expecting to something pretty amazing. Be sure to make it clear what visitors should expect, when they can go, and what they'll find once they are there. Invite us back!

The largest attraction in the county and THIS is across the street from it? (bottom photos)

A great location for development, and after our assessment we heard that, in fact, a major development could be underway here. Terrific.



Suggestion:

Terrific job cross-marketing in the hotel here! (top)

All in all:

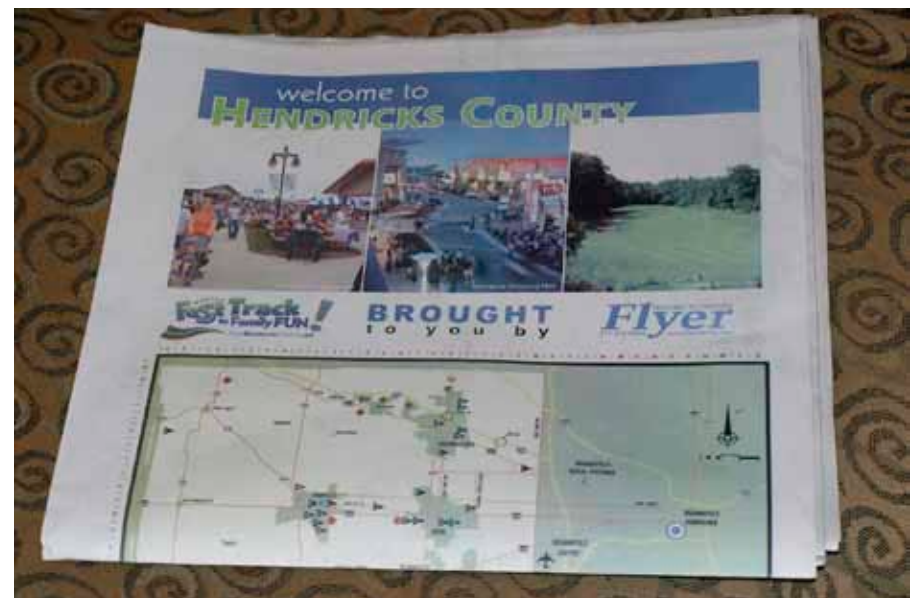
- Hendricks County could be THE place for families.
- You have a HUGE advantage being close to the state's largest metropolitan area.
- In the country, just minutes away from the bustle and hustle of the city.

Take local business leaders and officials on a Best Practices Mission:

- Head to Jasper, which has been listed the 25th best small town in America. Look around, talk to city officials, and get ideas and examples.

Eight things you can do today to make a difference tomorrow:

- 1) Put your gateways where you will make the first best impression. Make them shine.
- 2) Work on beautification. Particularly the businesses. It sells.
- 3) Promote your “anchor” businesses. Find and promote the “hidden gems.”
- 4) Create marketing partnerships.
- 5) Connect the dots with a county-wide wayfinding system.
- 6) Find your niche - by community - your brand.
- 7) Start with one block - your “demonstration project.”
- 8) Play up the farmers & roadside markets - even more. They are a terrific asset and great draw.



Success Begins With a Good Architect The rule of planning

Create a County Branding, Development & Marketing Action Plan. It should cover:

- Brands and sub-brands
- Product development
- It should dovetail with downtown, city, economic development efforts
- Roles should be defined - who does what
- Marketing: advertising, public relations, internet specifics
- The brand graphics package & Style Guide
- Detailed budgets
- Capital projects identified
- Cross-participation defined



Distance Marketing Assessment:

The following few pages contain assessments by our secret shoppers, who researched the area from a distance, reviewing marketing materials to see if they could find the area, and if the materials were convincing enough to make them want to visit.

Indiana Assessment

I did the majority of my research on Indiana on the official travel website, www.in.gov/visitindiana/. Searching for “attractions” statewide brought up 294 items, so I found their sample itineraries to be particularly helpful in narrowing things down.

The first area that I was drawn to was the area in and around Indianapolis, particularly for a family trip. This would include Conner Prairie living history museum in Fishers, just north of Indianapolis; the Children’s Museum of Indianapolis; Caribbean Cove Indoor Water Park; Indianapolis Zoo; and finally, O’Reilly Raceway Park.

Another area that looked interesting was the area in and around Tippecanoe, including Lafayette, and Battle Ground. This trip might include shopping in historic downtown Lafayette, the Farmers Market, Wolf Park in Battle Ground, Battle of Tippecanoe Battleground and Museum, Wabash Heritage Trail, Fort Quiatenon, Tropicanoe Cove Family Aquatic Center, and Columbian Park Zoo.

In Northern Indiana, I found a number of interesting things to do in the Chesterton, South Bend and Nappanee area. This would include Indiana Dunes State Park near Chesterton, University of Notre Dame in South Bend, South Bend Chocolate Company Factory and Museum, and Amish Acres in Nappanee.

Also in Northern Indiana, the communities of Fremont, Albion, and Kendalville had some unique attractions, including Wild Wind Buffalo Preserve, Satek Winery, Potawatomi Inn at Pokagon State Park, Black Pine Animal Park and the Mid-America Windmill Museum.

Finally, an area that looked good for a weekend away as a couple or with girlfriends was Brown County. This trip might include the Nashville Express Tour Train to the Village of Nashville, the Story Inn and a show at one of the Nashville theaters; plus outdoor recreation such as hiking or horseback riding at Brown County State Park and a visit to the TC Steele State Historic Site.

There were two main areas I found that might be worth a special trip in the southeast Indiana area:

The first place I was drawn to in southeastern Indiana is Madison. It looks like a nice place for a weekend getaway, either for a couple or a group of friends. I can see spending one night in Madison, especially at a quaint B&B. I think the ambiance of the town, along with shopping, historic sites, homes and museums, and wineries would make for a nice relaxing weekend getaway.

Another trip that sounded interesting is the “Explore Down Under” itinerary highlighted on the Visit Indiana website. This included Squire Boone Caverns in Mauckport, Corydon Capital State Historic Site, downtown Corydon, Marengo Cave, Leavenworth, Wyandotte Cave, Spring Mill State Park in Mitchell and Bluespring Caverns. Exploring a variety of caves over a two or three day period could be an interesting and unique trip, and spending some time in the community of Corydon could be a nice diversion as well.

Indiana Assessment

Trip Advisor shows the top 10 Attractions in Indiana to be:

- Holiday World & Splashin’ Safari
- Children’s Museum of Indianapolis
- Indianapolis Museum of Art
- Conner Prairie
- Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial
- Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art
- Indiana Medical History Museum
- The Lincoln Museum
- Jasper-Pulaski Fish and Wildlife Area
- Indianapolis Motor Speedway and Hall of Fame Museum

This list doesn't really show me anything I'd be compelled to go see. I'm not wowed.

I googled Indiana Tourism and Visit Indiana (<http://www.in.gov/visitindiana/>) website is listed first. As I know nothing, I clicked on Trip Ideas, clicked on Family Fun and was given a list. I thought "Two One of a Kind Communities" sounded interesting.

Madison is featured as a river town with 20 blocks of Historic homes and Columbus is known for its modern architecture. The website (<http://visitmadison.org/>) has tiny type, and clicking on museums, I thought there was only one, but then realized you can scroll down. Not a very dynamic website. Columbus deserves a quick look and clicking on its website (<http://columbus.in.us/>) reveals a very colorful and dynamic invitation to visit. It mentions how great its architecture is, but when you click on that category there are numerous listings without pictures—to show architecture you need photos or renderings!

Both places seem okay, but not for a special trip - back to the state's website for more ideas. "Hands-on Family Fun" sounds good, and clicking on this listing mentions Conner Prairie (<http://connerprairie.org/>), which is an interpretive village of 19th-century American culture. The website is informative, and it appears you could spend a day there. It is very near Indianapolis, so I would stay there if I were to go Conner Prairie. Perhaps we would stay at the Caribbean Cove indoor water park (<http://www.caribbeancovewaterpark.com>). Also listed are the classic things like the zoo, children's museum and the O'Reilly raceway. While all places have their own character, they seem like pretty typical tourist attractions. Conner Prairie would be fun if your kids were 12 or younger.

Exploring Outdoor Recreation might give me some better ideas: "Uniquely Koslusko sounds interesting. The Village at Winona (<http://villageatwinona.com/>) has an okay website, it does look like a peaceful place. They have an excellent map of the village showing all the dining, lodging and attractions. LOVE that when you click on Artisan Court and then Galleries or Artisans and Shops it lists them and takes you directly to their page with all necessary info. Perhaps this village is worth a visit.

The next listing is Pierceton (<http://www.theantiquetown.com/>). One look at their sad website and I kept on clicking, moving on to the Kosciusko County CVB website (<http://koscvb.org/>). Cute picture of a mom and daughter painting pottery, but they claim to be "one of the most beautiful areas in the Midwest"—let's see some scenery. Looking at the map, the county is filled with lakes, but there are no pictures and under What's Happening it is a list of Antique Dealers. The state website says the visitors center will give you a GPS unit to go geo-caching in their county, but there is no mention of this at the website! Also mentioned for this visit is a ride on a paddleboat and a visit to Oakwood Retreat and Conference Center (<http://www.oakwoodinn.org>), the state site fails to mention this is a Christian retreat. Still searching...

I spoke with a representative at the state tourism office who answered several questions; I think we were on the phone for about eight minutes. She suggested I visit N. Indiana, as my teenage sons would enjoy the Dunes State Park on the shores of Lake Michigan. We ruled out the Amish country, and she said Southern Indiana was known for its riverboats. I asked about river rafting and she said there were no rapids, but we could rent kayaks, and I would find the information in my packet she was sending (ETA 4 weeks!). Also, canoe country is just north of Indianapolis, and she thought the boys might like that area. She gave me drive times from Indianapolis to other major cities; it is very central to everything. In closing, she thought we should visit the Indy 500 car museum—a natural for most boys.

The Department of Natural Resources website regarding the Dunes (http://www.in.gov/dnr/parklake/properties/park_dunes.html) is not very pretty, and there are no pictures! Also, I need a cabin or lodge, as I won't be schlepping camping gear. The state needs a more tourist focused website than the DNR site. Chesterton is the nearest city I will try Google to see how the town is listed. NW Indiana.com is listed third and the chamber site is seventh. The NW IN site (<http://www.northwestindiana.com/cities/chesterton/chesterton.htm>) just give the facts with a link to the chamber. The Chamber site (<http://www.chestertonchamber.org/>) is very pale and the picture shows a big pond, not sandy dunes. There is no visitor link, so maybe Local Links will help? Numerous educational institutions are listed and a few chambers—I just want to see what the dunes look like and find a cabin! The state chamber website (<http://www.indianachamber.com/>) is no help. I called the Chesterton Chamber, and according to the representative, Chesterton is "long way"

from Indianapolis, about three hours. There are no accommodations on the lakeshore, and you cannot rent boats or kayaks unless you go to Michigan, where they have lakeshore rentals. We can stay in Chesterton and drive to the Dunes State Park. She will send me information, as there are “too many listings to go over on the phone.” Visiting the Chesterton website (<http://www.chestertonin.org/>) Tourism Recreation tab gives me nothing, no dining, accommodations or attractions. I clicked around a few other minor sites and still do not have a clear idea of the dunes and their magnitude or lack of.

Amish Country is worth a look (<http://www.backroads.org/>). Very pleasing website, I’m encouraged by the picture of three teens/men in kayaks and large tabs for all of the essential tourist needs. There are numerous lodging options, the Shipshewana Flea Market looks like fun, maybe a buggy ride? Some of the information has direct links and others just show pictures.

Back to the drawing board (state website) and Eastern IN. The Lincoln Museum (<http://www.backroads.org/>) is worth a try. A would visit this museum if I were in the area. I would also visit the Fort Wayne Museum of Art (<http://fwmoa.org/>). The museum had a wonderful variety of exhibits! The city’s website (<http://www.visitfortwayne.com/>) is tasteful and helpful. Auburn also looks like it has a lot to offer between the Auburn Cord Duesenberg Museum and the American Heritage Village: World War II Victory Museum and the Kruse Automotive and Carriage Museum, also the Hoosier Air Museum.

Western IN offers a visit to Lafayette and Tippecanoe (http://www.in.gov/visitindiana/trip_ideas/lafayette.aspx), the three-day plan looks like fun. Lafayette (<http://lafayettewestlafayettedowntown.com/>) has a pleasant website and it looks like a nice enough place. Fort Ouiatenon (<http://www.tcha.mus.in.us/ouiatenon.htm>) also looks interesting, and so does the Tippecanoe Battlefield (<http://www.tcha.mus.in.us/battlefield.htm>). Also mentioned is yet another water park.

Central IN (http://www.in.gov/visitindiana/trip_ideas/ideas_central.aspx) offers a few car/race related travel ideas and a wine tour (<http://www.indywinetrail.com/>). Naturally, Indianapolis (<http://indy.org/>) has to be investigated. Wow! The home page reminds me of Home Depot because of the bright orange. It looks like a fun city and the folks answering the phone said we

would have plenty to do. They could not give any suggestions regarding the rest of their state.

Moving south to South Central IN, I choose a trip idea called Romantic river, (http://www.in.gov/visitindiana/trip_ideas/river.aspx) and that suggests Madison, which I already mentioned, and the Ohio River Scenic Byway (<http://www.byways.org/explore/byways/2286/>). The river looks pretty in the picture and there are couple interesting stops. Other offerings in this area don’t really wow me—antique malls, premium outlet shopping and a gourmet popcorn store.

What does Southern IN have to offer but yet another water park in Santa Claus, IN and more President Lincoln historical sites. As it was listed on the top 10 the Lincoln Boyhood Museum (<http://www.nps.gov/libo>) must be checked out. It looks interesting, but I think if you go to Conner Prairie it would be similar, but without Lincoln history. More parks are mentioned, but the DNR site doesn’t show any many pictures, which makes it too hard!

So, I have checked out the state top to bottom and I have to say that I would not leave Washington just to visit Indiana. I am not sure I would leave Chicago to visit Indiana, unless I was a Lincoln scholar or loved car racing. The top five things I would see if I landed there due to visiting a relative or a business meeting would be:

- Fort Wayne
- Indianapolis
- Conner Prairie
- Columbus
- Madison

I would like to take advantage of the calm waterways, so I would also investigate a canoe/kayak trip. None of the smaller towns I looked at really caught my attention. I think Madison and Columbus appeal to me as I have an interest in architecture. I think the contrast between the two cities would be interesting.

Indiana Assessment

I started my Indiana research with “Off the Beaten Path - A Guide to Unique Places - Indiana.”

Probably the first place in the state I'd want to visit is Indianapolis - since it's the hub of the state, and would have a lot to see and do. Of course, there's the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, which would be a must-do activity for any visit to the state.

Another place that caught my attention is Zionsville Colonial Village, a shopper's mecca, from what the guide book describes. The Lincoln Museum in Fort Wayne would also be on the list. The Festival of the Hunter's Moon in Lafayette in October sounds intriguing, as well as the Fiddlers' Gathering in June in Battle Ground.

In Southeast Indiana, the Celtic Celebration in Rising Sun in March sounds like fun, as well as the Scottish Festival in Columbus in September. There's also the Historic National Road Yard Sale on Highway 40 in May and June - that would be a one-of-a-kind experience. The town of New Harmony in Southwest Indiana would be a fun visit.

After looking through the Guidebook to get a feel for the State and what it might offer to do, I took a look at the State's tourism website. I found the site to be very easy to use, easy to find information, and appealing. I especially like the itineraries - a visitor can search for things to do by activity in certain areas, and will receive specific two and three day itineraries of specific places to go, places to eat, and things to do that fit with their search. Very well done!

In the Eastern part of the State, I chose to look at "Wild Buffalo, Wine and Windmills." I received a two day itinerary that included a trip to the Wild Wind Buffalo Reserve in Fremont, a visit to Satek Winery (80% of their wines are awarded medals!), spend the night at the Potaawatomi Inn at Pokagon State Park near Angola. There's a nature center there, as well as bike trails and boat tours. Day two includes a visit to the Black Pine Animal Park to see exotic animals - and their gift shop. Then a visit to the Mid-America Windmill Museum with more than 20 restored windmills.

There are a variety of itineraries for each area, and they are all very well put together.

The South Central area has an itinerary called "Learn A Little - Shop A Lot" which would be a great couple's getaway. Starting with an architectural tour of Columbus, then spending time at Simmons Winery, then on to Elsbury's Greenhouses, and finishing the evening at the Boggstown Cabaret, a remnant of the old 1930s Supper Clubs dinner theatre. The next day includes a visit to the Exit 76 Antique Mall with over 550 antique vendors, and a stop at Not Just Popcorn for a treat.

Southern Indiana seems to have a lot to offer too, with the Lincoln Boyhood national Memorial, the Buffalo Run Farm, Grill and Gifts (that offers buffalo and ostrich burgers), Lincoln State Park for canoeing, swimming, and hiking. The park has cabins available too. Jasper has a German restaurant, the Schnitzelbank, famous for its Schnitzel, Sauerbraten, Kraut Balls and more.

It surprised me, but it seems that there really are quite a lot of fun things to do in Indiana. These itineraries do a great job of showing what all there is to see and do. The only major attraction I found is the Motor Speedway, but the rural areas around the state seem to have some cute and fun things to do too. However, I wouldn't make a special trip flying to Indiana for any of these getaways. If I lived within 200-300 miles, I would consider some of the itineraries as a two or three day getaway.

My suggestion for each county would be to select some of your best gems - what special shops, great activities, beautiful hiking or biking trails, fabulous wineries, best restaurants, etc. Then put together some of these great itineraries, using those outstanding assets, linked together into a two or three day getaway. The state has done a very good job on their website - you could expand those itinerary offerings with more of them. Promote them on your websites and in a brochure. When visitors see isolated attractions, they don't necessarily put them all together into a fun itinerary for themselves; that's why it's so important to make it easy for them, building the itineraries yourself. Then visitors can see that they'll have plenty of fun things to do, nice places to stay, and great food to eat.

Contact



Riverview Plaza Suite 310
16000 Christensen Road • Seattle, WA 98188
(206) 241-4770 voice
(206) 241-470 fax
www.destinationdevelopment.com
TheTeam@destinationdevelopment.com
Prepared by the Team at
Destination Development, Inc.