

Destination Master Planning

A destination is the collection of experiences, products, and services that draw visitors to a location – and that send them home enriched, refreshed, and excited.

But, it's more than that. It's also the relationship between those visitors and the people who live in the location. It's about how interactions between visitors and residents enrich the experiences and lives of both in ways that cannot be measured monetarily.

It's also about how those visitors change the shape of the area. Do their numbers overwhelm, causing locals to change daily patterns or even leave town for “the season” – or



permanently? Do visitors cause impacts to cultural or natural features of the area that hurt the sustainability of the tourism or hospitality product, or make the area less attractive to live in? Or do they bring new world views which can be discussed in meaningful conversations with locals.

How does a destination maximize the economic gains from sharing itself with outsiders? And how does it go about creating non-economic gains for the people who live there, whether or not they are involved in the hospitality industry? How do destinations plan to manage the downsides of the industry? And how can one create a balance that maximizes the positives, minimizes the negatives, and that can be maintained sustainably.

And, how can tourism be engineered to meet the specific needs and goals of the host community? (See Tourism Engineering)

You would think that all of these topics would be on the table when destinations gather to plan the future. Too often, though, the planning process is dominated by the discussion of “how do we grow numbers”.



Growing visitor patronage – more heads on beds – can, indeed, drive up the revenues for a destination. But it can also drive down those profits by driving down the value of a room night; decreasing the attractiveness of the experience; changing who comes, when, and why; damaging the relationship between visitors and hosts; and/or trading short term economics for long term sustainability (economic, social, environmental).

When we sit down, together, with a destination, we work hard to:

- Listen to needs, goals, and concerns of the industry, the host community, and the managers of publicly held resources (e.g. parks, forests, cultural sites)
- Look at the product and experience strengths the destination does or could offer
- Examine the existing patterns of visitation (who is coming, when, why, what do they do, how long do they stay, how likely are they to return, how do they relate to the hosts and local treasures, how satisfied are they with their experience, etc.)
- Research how the destination strengths match up with the marketplace (a realistic look at the products, experiences, and potential visitors with fresh eyes), and
- Review the existing tools, targets, and approaches to marketing the destination
- Understand where the decisions are made that affect the destination – and who makes them
- Look hard at where the profits and benefits of the tourism activities end up

We strive to guide a dialogue that enables the partners that make up the destination

- to listen closely to each others' needs, goals, and concerns
- to imagine, together, a destination that builds
 - on the product and experience strengths of the area
 - on the combined needs and goals of the host community and businesses
 - on matching products and experiences with the visitors who will value them highest
 - strong and healthy businesses that contribute to investor profits and community well-being
 - long term respect and healthy relationships between hosts and visitors
 - a managing partnership between the industry, the host community, and the managers of public resources
- that acknowledges and faces issues and problems
- that opens new opportunities (sometimes not previously considered)
- that is action oriented (we don't take on projects that we think will yield plans or reports that sit on shelves)
- that will lead to a strong commitment from all parties to implement a plan they feel ownership of





Destination Master Planning is, in most situations, much more than driving more heads toward more beds. Each destination has its own balance between product and experience development and refinement, impact mitigation, resource management, and marketing and sales. There needs to be a symbiotic relationship forged between the private and public sectors that functions as a partnership to ensure that both sectors can achieve their goals and that the destination can function sustainably.

From our perspective, it's really fun to watch a destination embrace and implement a new master plan when all sides have participated and feel a sense of ownership. There is an energy about the destination that translates almost immediately into improved visitor experiences, new attention from travel media, a sense of partnership between all those parties that make up a destination, new investment, and better "numbers".

You'll find that we don't approach your destination planning challenge with a "formula". Instead, we do a lot of listening, some independent evaluation of your products and services, some analysis of the marketplace, and some hard thinking about whether you are likely to engage in building, owning and executing a plan to shape your future.

At the end of the day, the plan has to be "yours". We can guide the process. We can see your destination with new eyes and share the hospitality experiences of other destinations around the world, but, in the end, you have to own your plan to make your plans and dreams into realities.