

Lake Placid Assessment

Updated November 2008

Intro Statement

Years ago, Lake Placid took its tourism future in its own hands. It took a blossoming Adirondack resort destination and went out and convinced the world to hold the Olympics there. That brought about the development of infrastructure and name recognition. When Lake Placid did the hard work of recruiting the Olympics a second time, more infrastructure was created and even more name recognition was established.

After that, Lake Placid has followed an incredible path to get to today. Initiative from Lake Placid resulted in a lodging tax that is programmed for marketing and not, like so many destinations, siphoned away for other uses. Lake Placid went out and captured events that used Lake Placid's setting, infrastructure, competitive sports image. Those events, like Ironman, World Cups and Championships, and the Lake Placid Horse Shows, drive traffic to the lodging, dining, and retail businesses and provide an economic bottom line to every visitor season. They also expose the destination to thousands of new leisure travelers every year. It is really unusual for a destination to succeed in this market to the extent that Lake Placid has.

Lake Placid, today, though, is at a crossroads. There are times when there are enough visitors in town that it feels to many that it has reached its limits. This is a crucial point for a destination.

Tourism was grown to provide jobs and business opportunities for people living in Lake Placid. In short, to make life better. But, in many destinations, unmanaged tourism takes over and starts to degrade life. Residents are not coming to retail because of parking concerns. It also, at that point, degrades the visitor experience resulting in a spiral down of destination value and visitor numbers. It's not a pretty thing – the textbooks of tourism are full of stories about when the magic is over. There is a responsibility and a need to be stewards and maintain the charm fifty years from now.

This planning project itself comes from the realization that Lake Placid is at a crossroads and the desire on the part of leadership to proactively work to find opportunities that are good for the industry and the community. Over the next year we'll all be working together to chart a course that enables Lake Placid to grow its tourism economy without taking steps that would deteriorate the quality of life for locals or the quality of the destination for visitors.

Beyond the volume issue, Lake Placid has some other things to think about. Lake Placid has continued to see investment in new lodging properties. The tourism industry has poured revenues back into lodging and dining infrastructure, but the balance of Lake Placid's infrastructure is not as upscale or current as some other destinations that potential national visitors might compare it to. Nationally and internationally, tighter markets that evolved after 2001 resulted in competitive upgrading of lodging rooms – a competition that continues.

Lake Placid started as an Adirondack getaway. It added the Olympic infrastructure and the competitive reputation. It sits in a beautiful location where it is a great hub for countless outdoor activities – both recreation and tourism. Outdoor-active visitors can base in Lake Placid and go out to climb, bike, hike, run, paddle, power boat, fish, and more. A visitor can also tour and to some extent use Olympic facilities, taking a wheeled bobsled run or an elevator to the top of the ski jump. Further, a visitor can watch hard core competitors training for or competing in events that are world class. And, where else could the person waiting your table or helping you with a purchase be a former Olympic competitor that just couldn't live anywhere else?

There is ample retail, some of which reflects the sports people come to watch or participate in, and some of which reflects genuine Adirondack souvenirs. There are places to rent equipment for paddling and biking. And there are even guide services to take visitors climbing or on a backcountry adventure.

Lake Placid and Saranac Lake share a passenger train experience built for visitors. One can tour a working maple syrup operation. There are many other visitor opportunities that are typical of a resort town – and not so much a reflection on where that resort town is.

Lake Placid's retail strip is a challenge to navigate in a vehicle when the town is hopping. In fact, congestion and parking issues are a detriment to visitor experience and residents' lifestyles.

Locals worry that the continued growth of second home sales in Lake Placid will price long term residents out of the homes and lifestyle they value. Already, it is too expensive for many people working tourism's front lines to live in Lake Placid.

And, there is some concern that the quantities of visitors are having an adverse impact on the natural environment – the very basis for Lake Placid's visitor economy – and the reason many people choose to live there.

A destination that stops competing for tourism falls to the back of the pack. That's not Lake Placid's style. So, the challenge in Lake Placid will be to find the moves to make that grow profits while managing (and perhaps even reducing) the impacts locals find troubling, those which threaten the sustainability of the destination, and those which diminish the visitor experience.

Snapshot of Current Tourism

This is an evolving document – more will be added as it comes to the table through research and community discussion. The following lists are not prioritized.

Infrastructure

- Olympic venues
- Ironman and its route
- Horse Show grounds
- Lake Placid
- Mirror Lake
- Adirondack Park
- Rivers
- Retail zone

Experiences

- Olympic venues
- Competitions
- Watching competitions
- Training
- Watching training
- Paddling
- Power Boating
- Climbing
- Biking
- Running
- Train ride
- Maple syrup
- Retail zone
- Events
- Hiking
- Fishing
- Downhill Skiing (at Whiteface in Wilmington)
- Cross Country Skiing

Products

- Olympic venues
- Competitions
- Watching competitions
- Training
- Watching training
- Paddling
- Power Boating
- Climbing
- Biking
- Running
- Train ride
- Maple syrup
- Retail zone
- Events
- Equipment Rental
- Guide Services
- Cross Country Ski Center
- Wine Tasting

Gaps

Higher end dining

Visitors aren't aware of the "off Main Street" dining options

Hotels could advertise more of the "off Main Street" dining options

True Adirondack food and use of local products

Seasons

Four strong seasons. The events marketing has even managed to find patrons for the "mud season"

Quality

The visitor experience is very good. It could be better if the retail zone were to be a totally pedestrian area or a more pedestrian-friendly area. There is room for improvement in lodging and especially dining.

Rates

There is room to "grow" the ADR for Lake Placid. Similarly, the key to the future will be to expand the "expenditures per arrival" rather than to grow peak occupancy.

Competitiveness

Lake Placid competes well. Among the Ironman venues, more participants choose to compete in Lake Placid because of the location than any other. On the other hand, visitors who have been to Lake Placid and other comparable destinations don't rank Lake Placid's lodging, dining, and nightlife as high as the competitors'.

Positive and Negative Impacts

- Sometimes when Lake Placid is near capacity, some feel there are too many outsiders in the area.
- Ironman and other events can disrupt local travel patterns
- Tourism attracts second home buyers who are driving up the costs of real estate
- Perceived impacts to natural resources from the volume of visitors
- Some crowding of places that locals like to recreate

Benefits

- Tourism is the mainstay of Lake Placid's economy
- There are great choices for dining year round because tourism also supports those businesses
- Most of the employment in Lake Placid is directly or indirectly related to tourism
- Tourism enables many residents to enjoy the "Lake Placid lifestyle"

Visitors (demographics)

Visitor Satisfaction

- Both individuals and groups return to Lake Placid in sufficient numbers to indicate a high level of satisfaction.
- Visitors who have been to Lake Placid are less likely to rate dining highly than those who have only contemplated a visit.
- Lake Placid doesn't have a strong nightlife component to its visitor experience.
- Visitors do enjoy being able to easily move (by foot) between lodging, Main Street retail zones, and attractions.
- Lake Placid's arts and culture scene is appreciated by visitors.

Potential New Products and Experiences

More opportunities to try out Olympic-type physical challenges

Community Wants

There is an expressed desire to continue to grow the tourism economy, but a strong wish that Lake Placid could manage the impacts of tourism.

Community Concerns

That tourism will change the atmosphere and lifestyle of Lake Placid

Visitor Perspectives

Products and Experiences that Contribute to a Sense of Destination

- Olympic venues
- Competitions
- Watching competitions
- Training
- Watching training
- Paddling
- Power Boating
- Climbing
- Biking
- Running
- Train ride
- Maple syrup
- Retail businesses that reflect Olympic or Adirondack themes
- Events
- Hiking
- Fishing
- Downhill Skiing (at Whiteface in Wilmington)
- Cross Country Skiing
- Main Street surrounded by mountains and close to lake

Products and Experiences that build on Essex County/Adirondack Sense of Destination

- Paddling
- Power Boating
- Climbing
- Biking
- Running
- Train ride
- Maple syrup
- Retail stores with legitimate Adirondack souvenirs
- Events
- Hiking
- Fishing
- Downhill Skiing (at Whiteface in Wilmington)
- Cross Country Skiing
- Touring to see fall colors or Adirondack scenery

Products that Conflict with Destination Appeal

Retail that doesn't reflect Adirondack (or Olympic) theme and retail that features cheap imported Adirondack or other souvenirs

What Makes This (or Would Make This) a Destination

Lake Placid **IS** a destination. The name is recognized and people seek out the destination for recreation and tourism. The name has strong ties to both Olympic and Adirondack themes among regional audiences and strong Olympic ties in broader markets.

One of the key factors for making this a destination is the presence of people who are fit and obviously engaged in challenging activities.

There is an energy about the destination that comes from having visitors recognize others with the same travel motivations and life styles in the same destination.

The active outdoor visitors couple with the active outdoor events to create an energy that is easily caught.

Visitor Satisfaction (what contributes, what detracts, what is needed)

Detractions:

- Traffic and parking
- Dining and Lodging with a view
- Nightlife

Contributions:

- Outdoor events
- Outdoor active patrons
- Olympic Venues and Training in Progress
- Great outdoor experiences
- Lodging and proximity to Main Street and attractions
- Arts and culture

Other Issues from Local Input

Summary

Lake Placid has a vibrant, energetic tourism economy. Local people have worked hard to cultivate an atmosphere of competition that extends past the Olympic theme. Lake Placid has an unusually high rate of success with events which, combined with the Olympic and Adirondack draws have created the only four season tourism economy in the Adirondacks. Tourism is the key to Lake Placid's economy.

Success sometimes creates problems. Lake Placid is on the verge of growing its tourism volume to the point where both the value of the visitor experience and the quality of life for locals could be threatened.

Lake Placid's lodging has seen a fair amount of rejuvenation and reinvestment. However, when compared with other national active outdoor destinations, that infrastructure is a little lower in quality and a bit outdated. More importantly, there is less diversity to dining and evening activities than one might expect in such a popular resort destination.

The big challenge for Lake Placid is to find a path that enables the tourism economy to grow while managing or even reducing the impacts from tourism on both local lifestyles and the visitor experience itself.