

Principle Two: Find the Fit Between the Community and Tourism

Cultural heritage tourism programs, when done right, make a community a better place to live as well as a better place to visit. Celebrating a community's heritage also instills pride in residents. It is critical to balance the needs of residents and visitors and respect the carrying capacity that a community has to accommodate tourism so that everyone benefits.



Understanding the kind and amount of tourism that your community can handle is the key to success in this principle. Among the benefits of finding the fit are:

- ❖ A successful cultural heritage tourism program encourages additional investment locally.
- ❖ Residents provide a hospitable welcome to visitors.
- ❖ Residents take pride in knowing about their community's history and the location of various attractions and sharing this information with visitors.
- ❖ Knowing that a cultural heritage tourism program is being developed can encourage a community to look at its historic resources with fresh eyes and result in efforts to preserve and protect these irreplaceable treasures.
- ❖ Residents can be among the first to benefit from a cultural heritage tourism program with the creation of new jobs.
- ❖ Residents can provide a pool of volunteers to get involved with heritage attractions as tour guides, event organizers, board members or donors.
- ❖ The program can dispel fears that a tourism program will be run by big corporations or "outsiders" by continually soliciting the involvement of the community.

Begin by talking to residents about their expectations and concerns about heritage tourism. Holding public meetings and explain that heritage tourism focuses on improving the quality of life for residents as well as serving visitors. Open a discussion about how this can be accomplished. Resident input will provide enlightenment in many areas. For example, what level of tourism growth is the community comfortable with? Do they want motorcoaches and recreational vehicles downtown or do they prefer promotion to families in automobiles? Conducting community opinion surveys, perhaps through the local newspaper, offers another outlet for citizens to participate in the process.

Cultural heritage tourism organizers also need to explain their goals and how they expect to measure the return on investment that will benefit the community. Try to be specific, not simply stating that it will help the local economy. Explain the projects goals – restoring a historic home,

opening a museum, or developing a downtown walking tour that will bring visitors to local stores, creating jobs, providing educational experiences for local schoolchildren, etc. Also be prepared to address issues such as the potential for congestion, littering, parking problems, investment costs or whatever residents express concerns about.

Communication is a key component of finding the fit between the community and tourism. Finding the fit is a three-fold approach:

- ❖ **First**, organizers must solicit feedback from local residents about their concerns and interests in developing a cultural heritage tourism program.
- ❖ **Second**, organizers should enlist local residents to not only provide information, but to become involved in the process – serving on committees, volunteering as tour guides, participating in hospitality training, sponsoring special events and other ways to contribute to the program.
- ❖ **Third**, organizers must follow up on concerns expressed by local residents. It is critical to not only collect information, but to gather participants again to provide a plan for responding to any concerns.



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