

## *Principle Four* *Focus on Quality and Authenticity*

There is an old saying that “truth is stranger than fiction.” In reference to cultural and heritage sites, perhaps it would better be expressed as “truth is more interesting than fiction.”

Telling the real, authentic story ensures that visitors will have a fuller understanding of your community, region, heritage or cultural site. Visitors have a right to expect that they are being told the truth when they travel for a heritage experience. Insisting on quality in every area – from restoration to interpretation to collateral materials – ensures that you are offering visitors the best possible experience.

Getting to the authentic story of a community or a heritage site requires commitment and an investment of time. So how do you make sure your heritage tourism program reflects authenticity and quality? Consider the following:

- ❖ **Research** – Reviewing all available documents and photographs, conducting oral history interviews, and examining a historic building’s structure are just a few kinds of research to gather accurate information. Although volunteers can be helpful, it is important to seek trained professionals whenever possible.
- ❖ **Training** – Ongoing training of guides who interact with the public is essential. Guides must learn to present the most accurate information available – and must not editorialize.
- ❖ **Materials** – Self-guided walking or driving tour publications, promotional brochures, exhibit labels and other information presented to the public must be checked and rechecked to ensure accuracy.
- ❖ **Interpretation** – When planning a tour of a historic site or heritage area, many decisions must be made. Will the interpreters be in costume? Will the tour be presented in a living history format? Will there be demonstrations of daily activities from an earlier time period? If the answer is yes, the research process begins again to make sure that costumes are authentic and that interpreters are able to stay “in character” and know how to utilize equipment or tools from previous eras.
- ❖ **Preservation** – An authentic restoration is essential if you plan to interpret the buildings as part of a heritage tourism program. As with research, it is critical to seek professional assistance to ensure a quality restoration.
- ❖ **Presentation** – Whether searching for furnishings of the appropriate period for a historic site, or recruiting local artisans for a crafts show, keep in mind the need for authenticity and quality in your decisions.

