

# Developing Relevance and Connections Through Tourism

## NPS National Tourism Strategic Plan



### TOURISM VISION

The mission of the National Park Service has, from its origin, been inextricably linked to the tourism community. The "visitor enjoyment" envisioned and fostered by our founders correctly anticipated a Service which delivers relevant, high-quality visitor experiences which support our broad conservation mission through the creation of enduring physical, emotional and intellectual connections to park resources and the American legacy they represent.

People who perform tourism functions in the National Park Service at park, regional and national levels have complementary roles in working with a wide range of tourism interests and adjacent communities, and in enabling NPS leaders to be proactive partners with the tourism community locally, nationally and internationally. They foster an informed dialogue with the tourism community which provides value through establishing common ground, shared interests and principles, successful collaborations, and strong working relationships to effectively manage and promote the National Park System.

Our staffs effectively exchange information among community and business partners and colleagues within the National Park Service to ensure a greater mutual understanding and the development of better management, education, business and sustainable practices. This collaborative work includes topics such as park visitation, visitor orientation, education and interpretation, and the use of new technology. Over time, this results in a diversity of visitation which better mirrors American society and which corresponds to the carrying capacity of park units. Additionally, a better informed public enhances our ability to properly manage and protect park resources, improves visitor satisfaction, and encourages safer visits.

Through these and other collaborative avenues, an appreciation for the breadth of the American heritage represented in the National Park System is created and strengthened with the tourism community, park visitors, and the American public.

## **TOURISM STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS**

The National Tourism Council (NTC) recommends six strategies dealing with tourism community outreach, information exchanges at various levels with partners and the public at large, strategic visitation, quality visitor experience, and field orientation/cultural adaptation. These strategies are expected to significantly assist with the implementation of the **Centennial Initiative** and the **Interpretation and Education Action Plan**.

**Strategy 1. Engage Community Partners** – Connect gateway communities, parks, and tourism partners to proactively identify and address areas of common interest.

### Strategic Community Engagement Actions

- a. Actively engage partners in strategic forums involving the tourism community at all levels.
- b. Build sustainable partnerships with professional organizations, gateway communities and academia on the basis of shared interests and the ability to leverage resources.
- c. Enable NPS managers to engage proactively with tourism partners and gateway community stakeholders in joint tourism projects using best visitor management tools.

**Strategy 2. Improve Communications and Marketing Capacity** – Establish and maintain an exchange with tourism community partners, NPS, the American public and international guests capitalizing on the promise of a high quality experience.

### Strategic Marketing Communications Actions

- a. Invest in research to better understand our current and prospective visitors with emphasis on youth and other underserved populations.
- b. Position the NPS brand by creating memorable connections between parks and visitors which will highlight the richness, breadth and promise of national parks and experiences associated with visiting parks.
- c. Provide tourism partners with information about conservation and heritage values and responsible visitor use, so that together we communicate consistent messages and reliable information to current and prospective visitors.
- d. Track and share trends, issues, and perspectives with park professionals and tourism community partners.
- e. Use most appropriate technology and communications channels to reach respective audiences with NPS tourism messages.

**Strategy 3. Create Innovative Visitor Enhancement Strategies** – Define and apply proactive strategies to address visitor distribution, capacity, and marketing communications.

Strategic Visitor Management Actions

- a. Expand visitation by extending traditional seasonal expectations and targeting potential visitors who prefer to travel during off season and shoulder periods.
- b. Create park and gateway marketing strategies to match consumer interests and needs.
- c. Ensure accurate and relevant park stories of experiences for all—with special emphasis on connecting with lapsed users and underserved demographic populations.
- d. Build marketing cooperatives, based on commonality, between parks, and other attractions related by geographic proximity, experiential activities, or by common story theme.

**Strategy 4. Ensure Quality Visitor Experiences** – Increase visitor satisfaction. Proactively elevate visitor expectations and fulfill them through high quality customer service.

Strategic Quality Visitor Experience Actions

- a. Build an expectation that visiting parks opens doors to a wide spectrum of life-enriching experiences which lead to repeat visits, referrals, volunteerism and philanthropy.
- b. Promote an integrated ethic among tourism partners and park staff to inform visitors about a full range of opportunities within the park as well as at partner attractions in the destination region.
- c. Provide practical comprehensive trip planning and useful pre-site orientation visitors.
- d. Coordinate destination planning into park plans so that facilities and visitor communications on both sides of park boundaries reflect the brand promise and values to create a holistic ‘sense of arrival.’

**Strategy 5. Ensure Professional Excellence**— Cultivate, nourish, support, recognize, and celebrate an ethic that supports a quality visitor experience ethic throughout the Service. Anticipate, relate and adjust to changes in visitor needs and preferences.

Strategic Professional Excellence Actions

- a. Provide technical assistance in tourism and marketing to park managers and other park professionals.

- b. Develop and distribute case studies which offer examples of best practices, creativity, innovation, and partnership successes.
- c. Provide incentives and peer/park recognition programs which salute achievement in proactive tourism partnerships.
- d. Develop tourism training modules to be incorporated into NPS training courses, particularly NPS Fundamentals, superintendent training, and across all park functions.

**Strategy 6. Finance Implementation and Execution of the Plan**—Carry out the plan elements by tapping the marginal increase in visitor-provided revenue over and beyond an appropriated base.

Strategic Funding Actions

- a. Ensure an enduring, base-funded NPS tourism program to carry out the plan.
- b. Create a dedicated funding source which matches marketing investment with revenue gains for parks and park stewards.
- c. Enhance both fixed appropriated funds and variable dedicated funds by leveraging with tourism partners and stakeholders in cooperative projects.
- d. Leverage variable dedicated funds with partners in joint branding communications where both brands are compatible and mutual interests are supported.