

How Is YOUR Farm, Aquaculture, or Fisheries Business Related to Tourism Efforts In Washington County?

Many organizations in our region are working together to promote economic development. An important economic opportunity for our beautiful and peaceful region exists in promoting tourism that supports and celebrates our “Downeast way of life”.

This type of tourism, called **Cultural and Heritage Tourism**, can help create new opportunities for your family, whether you run a vegetable farm, dig clams, grow blueberries, raise goats, haul lobsters, harvest seaweed, can tomatoes, make wine, or smoke mussels.

A first step toward inviting Cultural Heritage travelers is promoting awareness about the unique culture, and heritage that exist here in Washington County, and creating diverse, unique opportunities for our potential visitors to interact with our “Downeast way of life”.

Many organizations are involved in promoting our region on both the local, regional, and state level. The **Bold Coast Scenic Byway** is a state-supported, locally led tourism effort that utilizes our main transportation corridors to connect communities, promote travel through the region, and reveal the many unique opportunities along the way.

An Advisory Group made up of your friends, neighbors, community leaders, and fellow food producers leads the Bold Coast Scenic Byway corridor management planning process. Important parts of this process include determining:

- Our best assets;
- Our most likely visitor types;
- The message we want to promote about our region; and
- How to market our assets and messages in a way that supports and celebrates our land and our people.

This document attempts to share with you this process, so that you may consider if and how you might want to diversify your business opportunities by becoming involved in Cultural/Heritage tourism.

The Bold Coast Scenic Byway

The Bold Coast Scenic Byway gives travelers personal access to a way of life historically bound to the wild and scenic coastal environment. Active fishing villages, working-forests, family farms, and prolific blueberry barrens reflect this relationship as people continue to harvest the seasonal bounty of land and sea, much as their ancestors have done for centuries.

The Bold Coast Scenic Byway is a 125-mile driving route that invites visitors to explore the culture, history, wildlife, and rugged, unspoiled beauty of coastal “Downeast” Maine. The byway route is strung with active fishing harbors and lively downtowns composed of historic structures that exemplify the wealth of 19th Century ship captains and lumber barons; as well as the industrial history of the shipping, lumbering, fishing, boatbuilding, and canning trades. The byway route winds its way along the coast, passing through wild blueberry barrens; abundant farmland; coastal forests; tidal marshes and bays; and clear-flowing rivers, streams, and lakes.

In this far-flung corner of eastern Maine, salt air and solitude rejuvenate the soul. People live in rhythm with the shifting of the tides, the migration of the fish, the rising of the sun, the turning of the leaf, and the warming of the soil. Visitors are invited to experience the gentle pull of this magical landscape, to create memories with their local hosts and newfound friends, to connect with the simple joys and strengthening challenges of living in the Bold Coast region.

Along the Byway, from end to end and at every waypoint in between, visitors are provided with an honest, “authentic” experience of the land and its people. Opportunities exist to meet the people who make their living by harvesting the bounty of the land, to hear their stories, and to explore first hand the places and events that shape them. These experiences are provided in a personal, unhurried manner, allowing the visitor to unwind and to immerse themselves into the quiet and simple way of life, allowing them to bring a piece of it home with them—and stimulating a desire to return again for more.

The Experiential/Cultural Heritage Traveler

Experiential/Cultural Heritage travel is the biggest travel trend today. People want to be transformed through their experiences, to escape busy, urban lives and reconnect with themselves and with nature. Consumers want unique, unusual, compelling, hard to find, exclusive, and unforgettable experiences and products. People choose where they want to travel based on an expectation that they will connect with a place personally through experiencing the landscapes, stories, and activities that authentically represent the true history and culture of the people.

State of the American Traveler, 2012, by Destination Analysts, and *Cultural and Heritage Traveler*, 2013, by Mandala Research, provide some national trends in Cultural Heritage tourism:

- 80% of leisure travelers visit cultural or heritage sites
- Cultural Heritage travelers travel more than travelers in general.
- Cultural Heritage travelers are more likely to participate in a broad range of activities and are interested in local food/wine.
- Spending by Cultural heritage travelers has increased since 2004

And key motivators for these travelers are:

- Creating lasting memories
- Relaxing and relieving stress
- Trying new experiences

According to Mandala Research, Cultural Heritage travelers stay longer and spend more money, therefore providing fewer “heads” for a higher value. And, because they tend to become more personally connected to a place, they often become stewards or spokespeople for a region.

Cultural/Heritage Opportunities

The natural and cultural resources of the Bold Coast region and the distinct differences between each of the Byway communities create excellent opportunities for these types of unique experiences and products. The quiet, simple beauty of the landscapes and friendliness of people in the communities are the perfect backdrops for the relaxing, rejuvenating, and reconnecting experiences these travelers desire. Bold Coast communities are small, rural, historic villages rich in restaurants, museums, galleries, and historic sites. The authentic, intact culture of iconic, resource-based economies (lobster fishing, blueberry harvesting) provides memorable learning experiences. The Bold Coast Scenic Byway is closely connected to a network of other scenic byways in both Maine and New Brunswick, providing longer scenic touring opportunities for travelers and creating marketing and promotion partnership opportunities within a much larger region.

Visitors tend to remember 10% of what they hear, 30% of what they read, 50% of what they see, and 90% of what they DO (Culturalheritagetourism.org). Marketing to the Experiential/Cultural Heritage traveler should engage the five senses...touch, taste, smell, sight, and sound... in marketing strategies as well as in visitor opportunities and amenities.

Opportunities should be created for the traveler to physically and emotionally interact with people, places, history, and activities, and to personally experience new things. Interactive (rather than simply “interpretive”) sites, story-telling events, lumberjack competitions/demonstrations, hands-on farm/boat tours, guided tours led by locals, volun-tourism/enviro-tourism are some examples of experiences to market to the

Cultural Heritage traveler. Packaged experiences (E.g. lodging-dining-boat tour-museum tour-farm tour) provide easily achievable, experiences for travelers booking close to their travel date, as well as comprehensive learning opportunities for travelers desiring a broad range of quintessentially local experiences.

Opportunities for Experiential/Cultural Heritage visitor interaction with the people and places of the Bold Coast region include:

- *Interactive tours of specific heritage sites, cultural activities, and resource industries including fishing and agriculture;*
- *Arts, theatre, and music events;*
- *Volun-tourism/Education/Cultural immersion opportunities through intrinsic quality related community development projects;*
- *Local food opportunities, especially including “tour to table”;*
- *Wildlife viewing, bird watching, nature tours, fall color tours; and*
- *Sailing, paddling, riding ATV’s and snowmobiles, hunting and fishing (including ice fishing), snowshoeing and cross-country skiing.*

Telling the Byway Story

Many communities along the Byway already contain museums, arts and crafts galleries, gift shops, guided tours, restaurants, lodging, historic districts, self-guided walks, interpretive sites, recreational opportunities, and scenic vistas that offer opportunities to enjoy the local ways of life, and many communities host events and festivals that celebrate them. A key role of the Byway is to create a unified, accessible experience from these existing assets, and to identify missing opportunities and assist with their creation. The Byway achieves this by providing interpretive information that weaves together the regional story; by providing a cohesive, accessible network of places and activities; and by providing the basic infrastructure for a safe, efficient, and enjoyable journey.

Packaging hands-on experiences that exemplify the historic relationship between the people and places of the Bold Coast is the key to creating authentic and rejuvenating vacation opportunities. All-weather activities; centrally located amenities and services; comprehensive and easily accessible visitor information; and upgraded dining, lodging, shopping, and cultural/historical opportunities will reduce existing barriers to visitation and encourage longer stays.

Visitors should be provided with an honest, “authentic” experience of the land and its people. These experiences come through opportunities to meet the people who make their living by harvesting the bounty of the land, by hearing their stories and exploring first hand the places and events that shaped them. These experiences should be provided in a personal, unhurried manner, allowing the visitor to unwind and to immerse themselves in the quiet and simple way of life, creating the opportunity and desire to bring a piece of it home with them—and thus, a desire to return again for more.

Promoting the Byway Region

Businesses and organizations should work closely together toward the goal of attracting visitors through developing a healthfully competitive yet collaboratively networked local tourism environment. A compelling Bold Coast regional brand and tagline are needed to position the region as unique from all others, with distinct benefits to convince travelers to “come further” and to “stay awhile.” A simple method must be provided for connecting the visitor with the myriad of intrinsic qualities scattered across the entire region. All stakeholders should align to support this effort. By taking a collaborative approach, existing organizations, businesses and services can bring the Bold Coast region story to the forefront, and provide an exemplary experience for all.

The Experiential or Cultural Heritage traveler desires an honest, “authentic” experience of the land and its people—they want to experience the places and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and of the present. These travelers want to personally know the people, they want to hear their stories and explore the places and events that shape them. Travelers to Maine generally want to reconnect with themselves or with their family and friends, to relax into the unhurried pace, to immerse themselves into the quiet and simple way of life, and to bring a piece of their rejuvenating experience home with them.

In order to provide these types of visitor experiences while also supporting the values and culture of the local people and protecting the special resources of the Bold Coast region, marketing and development strategies should focus at first on utilizing and enhancing existing experiences and the most visitor-ready facilities. Secondly, strategies should support the thoughtful creation of new experiences and facilities that most compellingly tell the stories of a people who live and play by the rhythms of the land and the sea, whose way of life is historically connected with the abundant natural bounty of this wild and scenic coastal landscape.

Overarching Marketing Objectives

All marketing efforts for the Scenic Byway will serve its primary audiences—visitors and residents—by:

- Increasing awareness of and attracting visitors to the Bold Coast region.
- Creating a cohesive, accessible, and unforgettable Byway experience.
- Highlighting sites and activities that celebrate and support local culture.
- Communicating and preserving local values through the stories and efforts of local experts.
- Establishing the Byway as a destination, a community, and a home.
- Strengthening regional identity, sense of pride, community participation, and individual stewardship.
- Encouraging networking and partnering amongst regional enterprises.
- Encouraging return visits and further exploration “beyond the Byway”.

Cultural Heritage and Recreation Opportunities for All

- Encourage and support the establishment of easily accessible short scenic and interpretive hikes directly off the Byway route.
- Utilize the skills of Maine Guides and Wardens for guided tours.
- Design and seek funding for the signage necessary to create connections between places.
- Support and actively participate in the development of audio tours for listening to while people drive, walk, ride through places.
- Utilize snowmobile and ATV clubs to provide recreational learning experiences of a lifetime to cultural heritage travelers, boomers, friends-and-family, and younger first-timers.
- More “working museums” and experiential tours are needed where people can see the process and touch the tools and products involved, and maybe even try a hand.
- Books, website, posters, and videos: how things are made—wreaths, blueberry jam, cranberries, goat cheese, sardines, smoked mussels—“a day in the life” of the local product.
- Involve schools, museums, artists, local experts, historical societies, etc, in creating and connecting with regional identity, discovering favorite places, creating art and literature about home, learning the origin stories of their communities.
- Every community gets a weekend! Encourage collaboration on timing/location of events and celebrations—this will create more thematic movement through the region rather than force people to choose between events.
- Engage Elders in teaching traditional methods/skills/styles, and telling the history. Connects to helping instill local identity and pride in Youngers.

How could YOU diversify YOUR business to engage visitors in celebration of our resource based culture and economy?

Please contact Crystal Hitchings, Washington County Council of Governments, for more information about the Bold Coast Scenic Byway.

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