

# COLORADO Heritage Tourism

Enhancement ■ 2006

Heritage tourism is traveling to experience the places and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present, (*National Trust for Historic Preservation*).

## Defining a Heritage Tourism Vision for Colorado

In Colorado, our heritage is valued as a major contributor to our distinctive identity, character and sense of place, affording significant economic and social benefits to our communities and our residents. We work together to secure these advantages and share our heritage so that:

- Memorable, enriching experiences are offered in authentic settings.
- Heritage tourism organizations are innovative and sustainable.
- People are motivated to visit the state's heritage resources throughout their lives.
- Heritage tourism benefits residents, travelers, sites, and the state's economy.

We strive to make known heritage tourism's ability to contribute to the greater public good, to connect us with people of the past and present and to further our continued prosperity.

## Executive Summary

Colorado's splendor—gorgeous mountains, aspen forests and grassy plains—makes for great photos and great memories, but for many travelers Colorado's most remarkable endowments are its heritage resources. Museums, cultural institutions, scenic byways, uninterrupted vistas, physical remnants of past communities—historic towns, ranches and farms, worksites where miners, railroaders and others toiled, and the silent remains of ancient societies—all offer ways for visitors to steep themselves in Colorado's rich heritage. Tending these heritage resources reinforces Colorado's distinctive character. Sharing them with visitors offers Centennial State residents and their communities real economic benefits.

Tourism is big business in Colorado, generating \$7.3 billion in visitor spending<sup>1</sup> and directly employing 138,400 residents<sup>2</sup> throughout the state. Heritage travelers make up a healthy share of Colorado's visitors and represent some of the most desirable tourists available; by spending money in localities off the beaten track, heritage travelers help spread economic benefits to rural areas.

Since they're attracted to such a wide range of things to see and do—including many places that do not really gear their offerings to tourists—heritage travelers' experiences are affected by a broad array of individuals and organizations. The information that influences the decision to visit, how the attractions interpret cultural and heritage matters, whether hotel staff welcome guests, if host communities spiff up their Main Streets and historic districts: all are part of the system that delivers the heritage experience and all reflect the work of many, including some who have not traditionally been advocates for tourism. Taken together, heritage tourism is a system that affects visitors' experience and perspective through six major channels:

- **Products and Experiences:** things to see and do, provided free or for fee by public, private or not-for-profit organizations.
- **Marketing and Communications:** information that helps visitors choose and plan a trip and, collectively, creates an image and identity for Colorado and the experience it offers.
- **Infrastructure:** 1) places people eat, sleep and shop that serve as the principal vehicle for delivering tourism's economic benefits to Colorado in the form of jobs,

<sup>1</sup> Longwoods International, *Colorado's Heritage Tourism Travel Year 2003*, March 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Dean Runyan Associates, *Economic Impact of Travel on Colorado 1996-2003*, June 2004.

wages and tax benefits; 2) information needed by the tourism industry regarding visitor behavior.

- **Government Relations:** lawmaking bodies and local, state and federal agencies, departments and divisions whose actions affect the tourism industry and/or the visitor experience directly and indirectly.
- **Funding:** funding streams and financial resources, public and private.
- **Organizations:** entities charged with managing the system, from the Colorado Tourism Office in the Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT) at the state level to local convention & visitors bureaus, chambers of commerce, resorts, and others who market destinations to travelers, along with the organizations managing the resources themselves, including federal agencies, numerous not-for-profit groups, and private sector entrepreneurs.

This Strategic Plan aims to create an environment that enables this system to function well, with all of the ingredients necessary to attract heritage tourists and provide them with an enjoyable experience. The Strategic Plan addresses how these facets of the system interact and uses that framework to present strategic actions that will strengthen the industry and benefit its many players.

The Strategic Plan capitalizes on key Colorado advantages: abundant heritage assets thanks to past investments in preservation and conservation, ready markets for heritage tourism, energetic and excited regional organizations, and communities poised for growth in this sector. Moreover, the Strategic Plan recognizes that Colorado’s tourism industry faces challenges, including shifting economic, political and tourism trends.

The Plan results from an extensive effort by hundreds of Coloradoans with a stake in tourism. The Strategic Plan offers both a rationale for heritage-friendly endeavors and tools to put in them into practice. For example:

- As a policy document, the plan offers guidelines for sustainable heritage tourism development in Colorado.
- As a state agency product, the plan helps communities ensure that their policies are consistent with larger efforts.
- As a model, the plan can help communities interested in creating a heritage tourism development strategy of their own, enabling them to easily adapt and enhance its strategies to fit local circumstances and accommodate other ideas.

The strategies, which represent flexible, pragmatic approaches to enhance heritage tourism in Colorado, are listed in the table that follows, along with brief descriptions of the rationales underpinning them. For a complete description of each strategy and its component tactics, readers are encouraged to consult the full Strategic Plan, available on-line at [www.colorado.com](http://www.colorado.com) or through the Colorado Tourism Office.

## Plan Objectives and Priorities

Each facet of heritage tourism is associated with key objectives in the Plan:

- **Heritage Products and Experiences:** Emphasize quality, authentic, visitor-ready offerings.
- **Marketing and Communications:** Expand marketing and communication vehicles and tactics to: 1) Incorporate heritage as a key Colorado asset; 2) Showcase all regions; 3) Recognize in-state residents as a target market; and 4) Use technology to achieve value.
- **Information and Visitor Services Infrastructure:** Create a statewide information clearinghouse and improve visitor services and wayfinding.
- **Government Relations:** Help lawmakers appreciate tourism’s importance and support it.
- **Funding:** Strengthen current funding streams and work to secure a dedicated funding stream that supports statewide, regional and local tourism development activities.
- **Organizations:** Address capacity and sustainability issues.

The Strategic Plan offers both low- and high-intensity recommendations:

- **Core Strategies** represent 1) new approaches to existing activities and 2) ideas to increase efficiency via low-cost measures.
- **Enriched Strategies** represent longer-term objectives that require 1) further planning, 2) support from other organizations, and/or 3) new funding sources.

This approach gives heritage tourism advocates flexibility to set priorities and respond to opportunities.

## Strategies for Enhancing Heritage Tourism in Colorado

Cluster	Significance	Challenges			Strategies
			Core	Enriched	
Heritage Products and Experiences	Heritage assets appeal to visitors and residents, increasing support for preservation and conservation.	Balancing tourism with resource management, community capacity and stewardship needs.	✓		Treat Place as Product
			✓		Advance Resource Protection Awareness
			✓		Define Travel Regions to Reflect Traveler Behavior/Existing Alliances
				✓	Add Interpretation and Itineraries to Colorado.com
				✓	Strengthen Emerging Products and Experiences
				✓	Establish State-wide Quality Standards and Support Aspirants
Marketing and Communications	Marketing and communications provide visitors with information to attract them and create brand identity.	Heritage tourists, sophisticated about information sources, eschew usual marketing channels.	✓		Treat Existing Colorado Visitors as a Target Market
			✓		Market Heritage Tourism to Colorado Residents
			✓		Focus on Electronic and On-line Media
				✓	Seek Public Relations and Editorial Coverage
				✓	Create Consistent Graphic Identity
				✓	Partner with Private Sector Hospitality Providers
Information and Visitor Services Infrastructure	Quality visitor services mean repeat trips and referrals. Reliable visitor data helps target programmatic efforts.	Establishing and maintaining data collection systems and addressing visitor service gaps often take a back seat to coping with urgent issues.	✓		Improve Local Data Collection
			✓		Develop Measurement Tools
			✓		Create Information Distribution Channels
				✓	Help Heritage Sites Collect Better Data
			✓		Use Data to Assess Marketing Tactics
			✓		Revise State Highway Map as Visitor Information Tool
				✓	Provide Training for Front-line Hospitality Workers
				✓	Upgrade Highway Signage for Visitor Wayfinding
Government Relations	Government bodies at all levels—local, state and federal—are existing or potential partners.	State and local officials do not always view heritage tourism as economic development.	✓		Advance Heritage Tourism with Elected Officials
			✓		Convey Heritage Tourism's Value in User-Friendly Terms
				✓	Integrate Heritage into Local Government Functions
				✓	Strengthen Partnerships w Federal/State Agencies
Funding	Creative sources exist to fund heritage tourism development.	Securing dedicated funding has challenged the tourism industry.	✓		Leverage Existing/Underutilized Funding Sources
				✓	Identify and Develop New Funding Sources
Organizations	Implementation requires a commitment to staff and fund the Heritage Tourism Program.	Heritage groups often face more capacity, funding, marketing, and access issues than their tourism peers.	✓		Convene Industry and Provide Info Clearinghouse
			✓		Promote Regional Product and Marketing Initiatives
			✓		Create Heritage Tourism Industry Roundtable
				✓	Adopt an MOU to Formalize Partnerships
				✓	Strengthen Heritage Tourism Organizations

Organizations engaged in heritage tourism planning throughout Colorado will likely respond to these strategies with different notions of what priorities make sense. In a few regions, tourism promotion organizations or attractions are already undertaking some of these strategies, while others have only begun to consider how heritage markets and activities might help their communities achieve their goals.

Colorado’s Heritage Tourism Program, however, will function as a convener of the industry as a whole and as a clearinghouse for information of general interest to all with a stake in using heritage tourism to advance preservation and economic development. To implement these strategies, the heritage community needs to capitalize on existing assets, including each other’s skills and resources. However, for the good of the heritage tourism system as a whole, an organization’s participation in the state program is not necessarily a prerequisite for its access to shared benefits.

The Heritage Tourism Program seeks potential partners, including numerous state agencies and other organizations with allied missions identified in the Implementation chapter of this Strategic Plan, to:

- Develop consistent policies and practices that respond to heritage tourism’s challenges and support its potential.
- Pool resources and share responsibility for implementing mutually beneficial program activities.
- Share insights into what works, what doesn’t and what results to expect with each other and with allied associations and nonprofits.

Colorado’s Heritage Tourism Program can enhance the ability of local and regional organizations to engage in partnerships to leverage existing financial resources. The program can also broker the creation of new funding sources and program eligibility guidelines for heritage development initiatives. And it can foster networks of communities that can learn from one another and that can be marketed to investors and travelers. Given Colorado’s wide-open spaces, partnerships will likely cross jurisdictional boundaries and build on mutual interests in economic and heritage development.

The Heritage Tourism Program can also support efforts by local leaders and their governments to make thoughtful decisions that improve the quality of regions as places to live, work and visit. When heritage development initiatives create a climate of creativity and cooperation, they can evolve into major economic development assets, especially in smaller towns. Key to Colorado’s success will be identifying, deploying and maintaining tools to measure its effectiveness in expanding heritage tourism’s contribution to the state economy.

These interlocking strategies provide Coloradoans with a new way of looking at the potential of heritage tourism in the state’s overall economy and way of life. What makes heritage tourism so effective? It gives local people the chance to show off the authentic and the special to those who appreciate it...and by doing so, to help build a more robust economy for all Coloradoans to enjoy.

### What Now?

Governments, organizations and businesses working to advance heritage tourism initiatives or undertake heritage development projects should contact the Colorado Tourism Office to explore how this statewide initiative could enhance their efforts. People interested in playing a part in shaping and implementing aspects of the overall statewide effort should also contact the Colorado Tourism Office:

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