



## Why should visitors love your town? Count the ways...

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"What do you do for fun around here?" When visitors come to your town, replies to this question can make or break their impression of your community. If you want visitors to come back again — and say nice things about your town to others who might come, too — you need to have some good answers at the ready.

### Redefine 'community'

When thinking about tourism, it's important to look beyond your town's population sign. Travelers don't consider political boundaries when they explore, and nearby attractions and services can be leveraged to improve visitors' experiences.

The Upper Minnesota Valley Regional Development Commission (RDC) in western Minnesota has taken this advice to heart. *"Not any one of our towns has enough assets or financial resources to really go it alone, so [we always ask] 'How can we work on something that benefits everybody?'"* says Dawn Hegland, executive director of the commission.

With a broad perspective of community, start counting the things in your area that will appeal to visitors, including:

- ◆ **Beautiful or intriguing scenes in nature, including geology and wildlife**
- ◆ **Fun things to do outdoors**
- ◆ **Places to get to know local history and culture**
- ◆ **Chances to see and interact with local art and artists**
- ◆ **Festivals and events that celebrate local history, culture, harvest time, foods, music, or celebrities**
- ◆ **Built attractions, such as monuments, amusement parks, zoos, or theme parks**
- ◆ **Local businesses and retail stores where visitors can shop or be pampered**

You really need to put yourself in your visitors' shoes." Why would they want to come to your community? What would be appealing or interesting enough to get them to travel your way? And what would make them stay awhile longer?

### Involve residents

As you count assets, don't forget that the people who live in your town can help. Involving them can increase the level of support that tourism development gets from the community.

Everyone in town can help with brainstorming. Reach out to local residents from a variety of incomes, ethnicities and ages to volunteer to help identify attractions. And don't forget to include youth and young adults in tourism planning. They are the future, and they often have the same sense of adventure that tourists do.

Residents have inside information about things to see and do that might appeal to visitors — even "everyday" things, such as church dinners and the Main Street café where everybody goes for lunch. Residents also know all about the local economy, which can be a source of experience attractions — such as tours of farms and farmers' markets, manufacturing plants, mines, cheese factories, wineries and more..

And remember — as you develop and promote your attractions, always consider things from the visitor's viewpoint. That way, you will have some good answers when visitors ask, "What do you do around here for fun?"