



Assessment Findings and Suggestions Report

Digby/Annapolis Shore, Nova Scotia

Fall 2009

ddi Destination
Development
International



Community Assessment

INTRODUCTION

In July and August of 2009, a Regional Assessment of the Digby/Annapolis Shore area of Nova Scotia was conducted. The findings were presented in a two-and-a-half-hour workshop in late September. The assessment provides an unbiased overview of the communities - how they are seen by a visitor. This follow-up report includes our review of local marketing efforts, signage, attractions, critical mass, retail mix, ease of getting around, customer service, visitor amenities such as parking and public washrooms, overall appeal, and the communities ability to attract overnight visitors.

In performing the Assessment, we looked at the area through the eyes of a first-time visitor. No prior research was facilitated, and no community representatives were contacted except to set up the timing of the workshop. The towns and surrounding areas were “secretly shopped.” Any person looking to relocate their business, industry, or residence will come to your community as a visitor first. Tourism is the front door to all your economic development efforts.

How easy is it for potential visitors to find information about the region? Once they find information, are the marketing materials good enough to close the sale? In the Marketing Effectiveness Assessment, we had several DDI Assessment Team members plan trips into the general area. They didn’t know, in advance, what communities the assessment was specifically for. They used whatever resources they would typically

use in planning a trip: travel books, brochures, the Internet, calling visitor information centers, review of marketing materials, etc. - just as you might in planning a trip to an unfamiliar destination.

The region has five opportunities to close the sale:

- 1) Personal contact (visitor information centers, trade shows, etc.)
- 2) Websites
- 3) Brochures and printed materials
- 4) Publicity (articles)
- 5) Word of mouth - the most effective means

We tested all of these methods by contacting area visitor information services and attractions, searching the internet for activities, requesting and reviewing printed materials, looking for articles and third-party information, reading online reviews, and questioning regional contacts. We reviewed both commercial and organizational websites promoting the area, provincial and local tourism websites, and read travel articles and guidebooks.

The marketing assessment determined how visible the community was during the research, and how effective the marketing effort is in convincing a potential visitor that the area would be worth a special trip, a stop, an overnight stay, or a multi-day stay. The key to the marketing assessment is to see if you have a primary lure that makes you worth a special trip of a two-hour drive - or further. The question on most visitors’ minds is: What do you have that I can’t get closer to home? What makes you worth a special trip?

Where most communities falter is when they

merely provide “lists” of what the community has, whether it’s truly “unique” or not. Nearly every community in North America promotes the usual list of “diversions,” or complimentary activities: local museums, shops and restaurants, plenty of lodging, golf, outdoor recreation, historic downtowns, scenic vistas, etc. Of course, nearly every visitor can do these things closer to home. So, what makes your particular community worth the trip?

Always promote your primary lure first - what makes you worth that special trip. THEN, promote your diversionary, or “complimentary” activities. Would you go to Orlando if Disney World wasn’t there? Do you think that Universal Studios and more than 100 other attractions mind that Disney World gets all the glory? Of course not. Eighty percent of all tourism spending is with these “secondary” or complimentary activities. Disney does the heavy lifting in terms of advertising and promotion, and the diversionary activities benefit.

In a nutshell, the Marketing Effectiveness Assessment looks for what makes your area worth a special trip, or a great place to live, or to do business. The secret shoppers look for details, details, details. Do you give a reason for visiting, and do you provide enough information to make it easy to plan a trip? Are the marketing materials good enough to close the sale?

The second part of the assessment process is the On-site product development assessment. During this part of the program, we spent a week in the region, looking at enticements from freeways and highways (signs, billboards, something that would get a visitor to stop), beautification and overall

appeal, wayfinding (ease of getting around), visitor amenities (public washrooms, visitor information, parking), activities, curb appeal of local businesses, retail mix (lodging, dining, shopping), critical mass, customer service, area attractions, pedestrian friendliness, gathering spaces, evening activities, and the availability of marketing materials and their effectiveness.

The region benefits from tourism when visitors spend money, and they do that in the local gift shops, restaurants, hotels, etc. Therefore, the On-site Assessment includes a candid look at private businesses as much as public spaces and amenities.

For every shortcoming or challenge we note during the assessment process, we provide a low-cost “suggestion,” where possible, on how the challenge can be corrected or overcome. The suggestions are not termed “recommendations,” as they were developed without consulting the community first about possible restraints, future plans, or reasons why the suggestions may not be appropriate. Hopefully this assessment process will open dialogue within the community, leading it to adopt some or all of the suggestions, taking them from suggestions to recommendations.

It’s important to note that to increase the region’s tourism industry, fulfilling one or two of the suggestions may have little impact, but implementing a number of them, if not all, can have a profoundly successful impact on the area’s ability to tap into the tourism industry.

Implementation of these suggestions must be an area-wide effort, involving both privately owned businesses as well as local, district or county, and



provincial agencies, where appropriate. Every local organization plays a role in tourism, downtown revitalization, or economic development efforts. A Destination Marketing Organization (DMO, CVB, Chamber, TPA, etc.) cannot be successful if the tourism effort is not a community-wide effort.

In many cases, issues may come up that you are already aware of and are already working on. In that case, the assessment validates those efforts. But more often than not, the assessment will point out things that you are aware of but don't often mention or bring up without paying a political price. Local politics can be a killer of your tourism efforts.

While marketing is important, product development is what drives a successful tourism industry. Visitors want activities, not just things to look at. How much time can a visitor spend enjoying activities - that cater to their interests - in your communities? Does your particular community have truly unique attractions the visitor can't get closer to home? You must be able to deliver on your marketing promises - otherwise visitors might come once, but they won't be back. It's much more cost effective to bring people back, than to always go out and entice new visitors into the area. "Been there, done that" communities eventually run out of visitors and find they don't have a sustainable tourism industry, or simply become pit stops or gateways on the way to somewhere else.

After spending more than a week reviewing marketing materials and assessing the communities, we have looked at all of these issues, developed some suggestions and ideas the community can discuss and possibly implement to

help increase tourism spending locally.

SUCCESSFUL TOURISM TRANSLATES TO CASH

Success is the result when the community imports more cash than it exports. When residents spend their hard-earned money outside the community, the community is exporting cash - often referred to as "leakage." Tourism helps fill that gap, importing cash into the local economy without the necessity of having to provide extended social and other services. Visitors come, spend money, then go home. When you import more cash than you export, you have a positive "balance of trade." Communities with successful tourism programs easily see that the industry subsidizes the community, whereas other communities find that they subsidize visitors - providing services visitors use without them leaving enough money behind to cover the cost of those services.

The primary goal of the tourism industry is to bring more cash into the local economy. This doesn't happen when visitors come into the community, get out of their cars, and take photographs. And it doesn't happen when visitors go swimming in the lake at your city park all day, sunning, and eating the lunch they brought from home. And it doesn't happen when visitors hike down your trails, enjoy your interpretive centers, or stroll through your lovely arboretums. These are all great things to do, and, of course, you do want your visitors to do these - but, you also want to entice them into your shops, your cafes, espresso stands, restaurants, galleries, B&B's, and hotels, ultimately opening their wallets to make purchases. That is what helps your local economy, your small merchants, your hoteliers, and your tax coffers.



To entice visitors to spend money in your communities, you need to have places for them to spend it – you need to have the right mix of shops, restaurants, entertainment, and lodging facilities, all in an attractive setting, as well as attractions that make them want to visit you in the first place.

THE THREE TYPES OF TOURISM

1. Visiting friends and family

The number one reason people travel is to visit friends and/or family. If you did nothing to promote tourism, you would still have tourism in your community. However, when friends and family come to visit, do your residents take them out to eat, shop, dine locally? Or do they head to a neighboring community? Do your locals even know what you have to offer? An effective tourism marketing effort also includes educating locals as to what you have and how to find it through effective wayfinding signage, gateways and advertising.

2. Business travel

The second most popular reason for travel is business. Included in this category is educational travel: colleges and universities, as well as conventions and meetings, corporate travel, vendor travel, etc. Like leisure travelers, this group is looking for things to do “after hours” while in the area. The most successful convention and trade show towns are the result of their secondary activities or “diversions,” not simply because of their convention and exhibition facilities. Think Disneyworld, Disneyland, San Antonio’s River Walk, Halifax, Banff, to name a few.

3. Leisure travel

The third, and most lucrative of all types of visitors, is the leisure traveler. They have no personal connections to the community, but are coming purely to enjoy themselves. They stay in commercial lodging establishments, eat virtually all their meals in local restaurants, and their top diversionary activity is shopping and dining in a pedestrian-friendly setting.

The average leisure visitor is active 14 hours a day, yet typically only spends four to six hours with the primary lure. They then spend eight to ten hours with diversionary activities - things they could do closer to home, but will do while in the area. A good example of this is Branson, Missouri, the “live music-theater capital of the world.” This town





of 6,500 residents hosts 7.5 million visitors a year. The primary “lure” is the 49 music theaters. The average visitor attends two shows a day over about four hours. During the other hours of the day, the visitor will shop in local outlet malls, head to the water parks, theme parks, and other attractions, play a round of golf, hike, bike, fish, do some bird watching, and participate in any number of other activities they could do closer to home, but will do while visiting Branson.

THE THREE STAGES OF TOURISM

1. Status quo

If you take no action to develop the tourism industry, you will still have an element of tourism, simply because some travelers will pull off local highways or freeways for gas, food, or lodging, as well as the fact that the number one reason for travel is to visit friends or family. If you have residents, you will have some tourism.

2. Getting people to stop

The first priority of developing a successful tourism industry is getting people to stop as they are passing through the area. Imagine how successful businesses in the community would be if just 50% of the vehicles traveling through pulled off the highway and spent just 30 minutes in your community – buying gas, an ice cream cone, a sandwich, a gift or souvenir?

If there's a strong pull, imagine the money spent if visitors stayed two hours in the community, which nearly always translates to additional spending.

The first goal is to get those travelers to stop.

3. Becoming the destination

To become a destination community you must have attractions and supporting amenities that convince visitors to spend the night. And those attractions must be different from what the visitor can get closer to home.

Overnight visitors spend three times that of day visitors, and nearly ten times that of visitors using your community as a pit stop on the way to somewhere else.

THE FOUR-TIMES RULE

Visitors will make a point of stopping or staying in a community if it has enough activities that appeal specifically to them and will keep them busy four times longer than it took them to get there.

In other words, if a person has to drive 15 minutes to visit you, do you have enough for them to do to keep them busy for an hour? (4 times 15 minutes) If a visitor has to drive an hour, do you have the activities and amenities to keep them busy for four hours?

The more you have to offer, collectively, the further visitors will come, and the longer they will stay, and of course, the more they will spend. This is why it is so important for communities to market more than just their immediate geographic areas. By marketing neighboring activities and attractions, you present much more for a visitor to do, and you make the visit worth the trip. This is why the province has regional tourism programs.

Visitors don't care about city limits or county lines – so market the broader package and you'll be able to

keep people in the area long enough to translate to another meal, some more shopping, and hopefully, an overnight stay.

SELL THE EXPERIENCE, NOT GEOGRAPHY

Nearly every destination marketing organization is charged with promoting a geographic area, yet visitors couldn't care less about those boundaries. They are looking for activities that cater to their interests, and location is always second to the experience. Promote the primary lure first, **then** the location. If I want to go see Andy Williams, I don't care whether he's in Muskogee, Oklahoma or in Branson, Missouri. People by the millions head to Disneyland, Disneyworld, Dollywood and other attractions. They are not going to Anaheim, Orlando or Pigeon Forge.

Always sell the activity - the experience - THEN the location.

LURES, DIVERSIONS AND AMBIANCE

Too often communities promote the list of diversions that nearly every community has. The primary lure is the activity that a visitor can't find closer to home.

Always promote your primary lure, then the diversions. Do not try to be all things to all people. Have you ever gone anywhere because they had "something for everyone?" Of course not - you go there because they have something specific for you. Find your niche and promote it like crazy.

Historic downtowns provide ambiance - they are not attractions, diversions, nor are they a primary lure. It's what's in the buildings that makes a

downtown a destination.

The same can be said for scenery. Unless your vista is a world-class scene, such as Niagara Falls or the Grand Canyon, scenic vistas create wonderful ambiance, but don't translate to spending, and they only last a few minutes. Then what?

All too often communities promote their heritage as a primary draw. How far would you travel to visit a mining museum? A timber museum? An agricultural center? A county historical museum? And how often would you do it? Heritage must be outstanding and pervasive throughout the community to be a primary lure, such as Plimoth Plantation or Salem, Massachusetts.

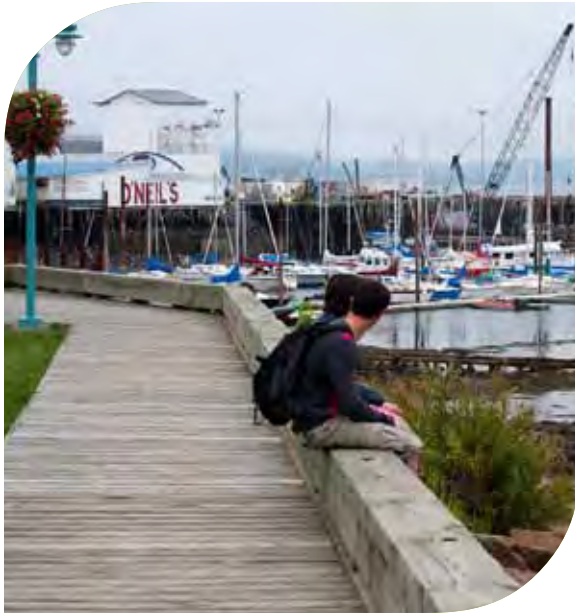
Thousands of communities are the "capital" of something. For instance, in California, Borrego Springs is the grapefruit capital of the world. Gilroy is the garlic capital. Modesto is the tomato capital. Gridley is the kiwi capital. Oxnard is the strawberry capital. Fallbrook is the avocado capital. But here's the question: Have you ever gone anywhere because it was the capital of a fruit or vegetable?

Your local heritage is important to the community and can set the ambiance, even becoming a diversionary activity. But to the vast majority of potential visitors, it's not a reason to make a special trip.

BE DIFFERENT OR THE BEST

Why should a visitor come to your community if they can enjoy the same activities closer to home? Too many communities promote "outdoor recreation" as their primary draw. Unfortunately,





that is the same attraction promoted by nearly every community in North America.

If you are different, then you have a reason for travelers to choose to visit you. If you are the best, then visitors will generally flock to your doors.

If you have great hiking trails, then market their unique qualities. Be specific and paint the image of how wonderful they are in the minds of your potential visitors. If you have one fantastic restaurant in town, let people know about it – a unique dining experience is something many people will travel far to enjoy.

Ashland, Oregon, previously a depressed timber town, began its Shakespeare Festival, which now runs nine months of the year and draws hundreds of thousands of visitors who spend an average of four nights in the community. The Shakespeare Festival made Ashland different from any other community.

Leavenworth, Washington, another dying timber town, adopted a Bavarian architectural theme and produces dozens of Bavarian events every year. Some now say the town looks more genuinely Bavarian than towns in Bavaria. It is now one of the primary tourist destinations in Washington state, hosting more than 2.5 million visitors annually. They offer a different experience, an experience that is pervasive throughout town.

The Okanogan area of British Columbia is an outdoor recreational paradise – just like the rest of British Columbia and nearby Alberta. So why go to the Okanogan area? Because they are the best. They researched guidebooks, newspaper and

magazine articles, and pulled quotes they could use in their advertising efforts. Like, “Pinch yourself, you’re in Okanogan Country with perhaps the best cross country skiing on the continent.” This, and other quotes like it, make it worth the drive to visit Okanogan Country. The third-party endorsements show that they are the best.

Set yourself apart from everyone else, and you’ll see that in being unique, you’ll become a greater attraction.

CRITICAL MASS MEANS CASH

Although it may not be the primary reason why visitors come to your community, shopping and dining in a pedestrian setting is the number one activity of visitors. Besides lodging, it is also how visitors spend the most amount of money.

Do you have a pedestrian-friendly shopping district? If not, can you create one? Many communities have been highly successful with the development of a two or three block long pedestrian “village” including visitor-oriented retail shops, dining, visitor information, restrooms, etc., all in an attractive, landscaped setting.

The general rule of thumb in those two or three blocks (not spread out all over town) is 10+10+10: Ten destination retail shops, which includes galleries, antiques, collectibles, home accents and furnishings, artists in action, book stores, logo gear (clothing), souvenirs, outfitters, tour operators, activity shops such as kites, jewelry, wine or tobacco shops, and other specialties. The second ten is for food: ice cream, fudge and candy stores, soda fountains, sit-down dining, coffee



shops, cafes, bistros, delis, etc. And the final ten are businesses open after 6:00 pm. This includes entertainment: bars, dance clubs, theaters (movies and performing), retail shops with activities (piano bar in a wine shop), etc. Seventy percent of all consumer spending (both locals and visitors) takes place after 6:00 pm. Are you open?

The important point is to group these businesses together to create the “critical mass” in a pedestrian-friendly setting. This will attract visitors as well as locals, and make it worth their while to stop and shop. People are always drawn to the critical mass – the opportunity to have multiple choices, multiple experiences, all in a convenient and attractive setting.

TOURISM IS AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY

The goal of successful tourism is for people to come into the community, spend money, and go home. Tourism is nearly a \$650 billion dollar industry in the U.S., nearly \$75 billion in Canada, and supports millions of jobs. Ninety percent of tourism industry businesses are small businesses of which 90% have less than 15 employees. Tourism provides the opportunity for entrepreneurs to get started, for small family-run businesses to thrive, for artisans and craftspeople to find a market, and creates a basis for unique niche-retail environment including wineries, artists, crafts, etc. Tourism provides a diverse market within the community, expanding its potential. Enhancing the community through beautification efforts creates an attractive setting for both locals and visitors, key in revitalizing a community’s downtown. And a tourism-friendly



town will attract non-tourism industries faster than others – new businesses will see the community as a visitor before they make a final determination about the community. Tourism is the front door to your economic development efforts.

The benefits of a healthy tourism industry can rejuvenate a town, foster community pride, encourage economic diversity, and lead the way to a vital, successful community.

NEXT STEPS

The findings and suggestions in this report will provide your community with many ideas, strategies, and goals to reach for. We hope that it fosters dialogue in the community and becomes a springboard for the community in enhancing its tourism industry, leading to greater prosperity, rejuvenation, and enjoyment by all the citizens.

This report offers a first step in reaching that goal. To fully realize the benefits of this assessment, the community should take these findings and suggestions, discuss them and evaluate them, and develop a plan for implementation.

A detailed “Community Branding, Development and Marketing Action Plan” builds on the results of this assessment, adding in-depth research, evaluation, and community input to develop a unique brand and implementation program. The assessment process essentially provides a look at where you are today.

The next steps in the planning process is interviewing local stakeholders, providing public outreach, and reviewing past and current planning efforts. This determines where you want to go as a community.

The third step involves research, feasibility and market analysis, and determining your brand - what you are or hope to be known for.

Then comes the “development” portion of the plan or the “how to get there” program: determining what product development initiatives need to be undertaken to reinforce and grow the brand. This also includes defining the roles of the various local organizations. Brand-building takes a village - everyone pulling in the same direction, each with it’s own “to do list.”

Finally, there’s the detailed marketing plan: how and when you will tell the world who you are and what makes you special: the place to live, work and play.

This Branding, Development & Marketing Plan should be an “action plan” as opposed to a “strategic plan.” You want a to do list, by organization, not just general strategies, goals and objectives.

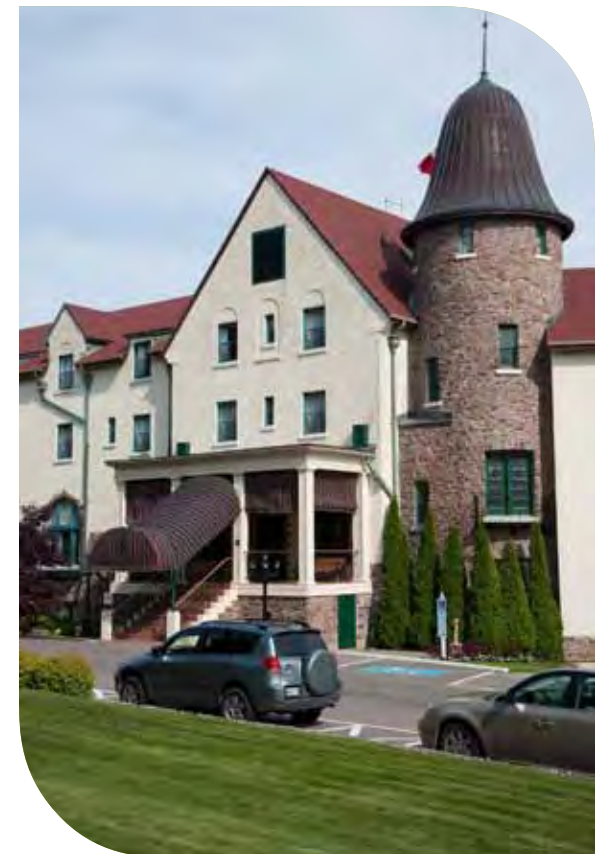
For every recommendation the following elements should be detailed:

1. A brief description of the recommendation
2. Who would be charged with implementation
3. When it would be implemented
4. How much it will cost
5. Where the money will come from
6. The rationale for making the recommendation

The recommendations should provide all the necessary steps for your community to be successful in attaining its goals of a more diverse economy with an enhanced tourism industry and to become a more attractive and enjoyable community for both visitors and citizens.

If you move forward with the development of the

Action Plan and hire outside services, always hire the most qualified team you can find (issue a request for Statement of Qualifications), then negotiate the scope of work and cost with them. If you are not able to reach an agreement, then move to number two on your list. A good plan will provide a program to get local residents and the business community pulling together to enhance the community, building its unique image in the minds of visitors and residents alike. The result of your efforts will be a prosperous, enjoyable environment in which to live, work, and visit.





Findings & Suggestions

The primary goal of tourism development is to increase the amount of cash that is “imported” into the community. Fortunately, many of the same ingredients that make a destination attractive to visitors, also make the community attractive to residents and new business development - and investment - making it a better place to live, work, and play.

Quick Facts

- Geography-based tourism is dead.
- Visitors don’t care about counties or districts, cities, towns and “places.” They are looking for activities.
- Experience-based tourism is alive and is the future of tourism - starting yesterday.
- The days of marketing “lists” are over.
- The heart and soul of any community, besides its people, is its downtown.

Digby

We started our journey, of course, in Halifax, and drove out to the region on Highway 101. We stayed in Digby, since it was centrally located.



Beautification. Suggestion: Add a bench, numerous pots and planters. Add a menu board outside the restaurant. Pull people in!



Before



Invest In Beautification
The rule of invitations & staying power



After. Retail sales increased by almost a third.



Digby, home of the world's famous scallop fleet, has a type of seaside charm all its own. One thing that was lacking in general, though, was beautification of the retail core. Adding pots and planters (evergreen shrubs and seasonal flowers), outdoor seating, and menu boards outside helps pull those customers into the shops and restaurants.

Good curb appeal is an investment with incredible return.

LaRua, a restaurant in Whistler, BC, (top right) sets up these beautiful carts and pots of flowers in their outdoor dining area during the growing season.

Neenah, Wisconsin did a downtown makeover. Note the streetscape in the bottom left photo. Although it's clean and neat, compare it to the street just one block down, after the makeover (bottom right). Note how the planters soften the facades and create a fresher, more inviting sidewalk. Retail sales in the block with the beautification increased by more than 25% compared to that of the unbeautified block.

The communities that are most successful at attracting visitors work hard at beautification. For example, Banff, Alberta (top right) is filled with merchants that make their storefronts very attractive. Their hanging baskets of flowers are out of reach of the deer.

Note the use of evergreen shrubs, benches, ivy and flowers in hanging baskets, menu displays, and well-maintained building facades in this streetscene in Nevada City, CA (top left).



Blaine, Washington (bottom left) has revitalized downtown with gorgeous streetscapes. The merchants do their share too - this shop has brought some of their merchandise outdoors to make a very attractive display. The owner says the 20 minutes she spends every day doing so is easily worth the effort - it actually saved her business.



This restaurant in Door County, WI (bottom right) sets a cheerful scene with its bright flower boxes and hanging baskets.



Ivy's are a low-cost, evergreen supplement for beautification.



Fort Macleod, AB



This streetscape in Ellicottville, NY (top left) is very inviting - the hanging baskets of flowers, tables and chairs, awnings and decorative signs create a stunning scene.

Harsh weather should never be an excuse for not making a storefront attractive. Merchants in all climates and conditions have found various solutions.

All of these examples are small towns in rural areas.

Note this storefront (bottom left) in Jonesborough, TN - all decked out in October's finest, including hardy mums and pumpkins. Doesn't it make you want to linger?

No off-season excuses!



The flowers and plants here: silk.



These pots of winter pansies and the bench (freshly painted) create a very appealing, but simple, scene in front of Village Greener & Gifts in Fort Macleod, Alberta (top right).

The storefront entry in Grass Valley, CA (bottom right) is very welcoming. And the flowers are all silk!

Another excellent way to beautify a storefront is to create an outdoor display of select merchandise (top left) like this store in Monroe, WA. This is different than just setting up merchandise for sale outside - that only creates a "garage sale" look in your town. Consider the sidewalks and entry area into the store as an extension of your window displays - you want them to be gorgeous and welcoming.



Extend window displays to exterior spaces.

These shop owners in Pendleton, OR (top right) keep their barrels of flowers beautifully maintained.



Consider a retail buying cooperative for planters, plants, and soil.

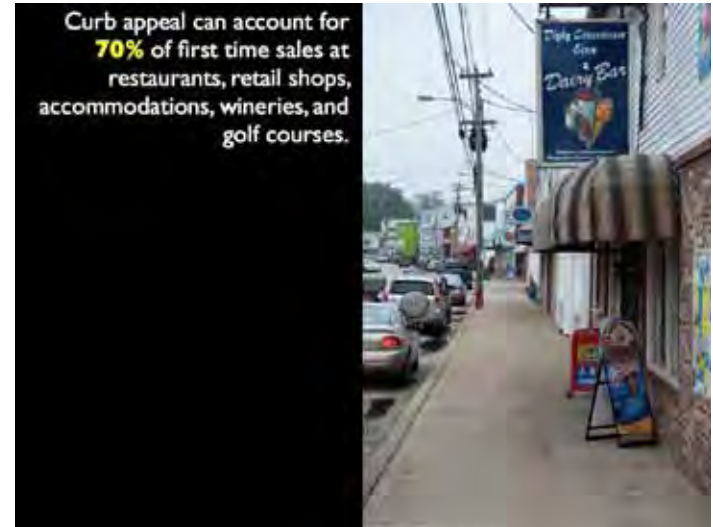
Work with a local garden club, if you have one.

This shop in Turlock, CA (bottom left) keeps the trees outside the door in winter, but instead of leaves, miniature lights make a cheerful and welcoming entry.



In this case, the deciduous trees are strung with lights during the winter months.

This street in Digby (bottom right) has a lot of potential to look very appealing - merchants should work together to buy planters, shrubs, flowers, and soil in bulk - as a buying co-op.



Curb appeal can account for **70%** of first time sales at restaurants, retail shops, accommodations, wineries, and golf courses.



Good job! Now take it up a notch.



Nice touches. Next up: promote what it is you sell before the name of the business.



This entrance (top left) looks nice, and the hanging baskets are good, but it could easily become outstanding. Add more planters against the building, and a bench as well.

This storefront (top right) looks very nice, and the perpendicular "blade" sign is good. But merchants should always promote what it is they're selling.

What attracts customers into your shop? Making it obvious that you offer something the customer wants or needs. Promoting what you sell is far more important than promoting the name of your business.



Always promote what it is you're selling - the lure to bring customers in... before you promote the name of the business.



Can you guess what kind of shop Kelly's Famous Laffin Crab is? (bottom left) Restaurant? Comedy club? They sold kites and windsocks. But who would know from the sign? Is it any wonder they're no longer in business?

Grizzly Ricks' Market (bottom right) in Jackson, WY added the "Snacks, Sundries, Drinks" to his sign. He sold the "lure" instead of just the name of the store. Sales increased by 35%!

Signs placed perpendicular to the building allow drivers and pedestrians to read them easily, even from a distance. Note the use of blade signs in Leavenworth, WA (top left); Nantucket, MA (top right); and Carmel, CA (bottom left).

Perpendicular signs are seen ten times more frequently than facade-mounted signs.

Blade signs should be decorative and placed between seven feet (bottom edge of the sign) and nine feet (top edge), and typically no more than 42 inches wide. They should be double-sided, and fit the ambiance of the town and architecture. Metric system measurements are noted on the next page.

Can you tell what's in any of these shops? (bottom right) When there are no retail signs that you can see, there's no incentive to go down the street. Give potential customers a reason to continue down the street - tempt them with blade signs, sandwich boards, or exterior displays to promote what it is you sell.





Your signs can say so much about your shop! Here are two creative and attractive sandwich board ideas. Note the A-board sign (top left). It is decorative to fit the style of the shop, and adds to the ambiance of the area. The seafood restaurant sign (top right) does a great job of enticing customers inside. This was taken in Port Townsend, Washington. Be sure to promote what it is you sell first, then the name of the business. Make sure your signs provide a good first impression!



Rules for retail signage:
 No lower than 7' (2.1 m)
 No higher than 9' (2.7 m)
 No wider than 42" (1 m)



Good job with beautification. Suggestion: Add a blade sign. What do you sell?

This shop does a very good job - besides the beautiful pots and baskets of flowers, the building facade is very attractive and well-maintained. All it needs is a blade sign promoting what it sells.

Many merchants use signs that are placed above awnings and high above pedestrian eyesight to promote their business (top left). The problem is that no one can see them unless they are across the street. Blade signs are an easy solution. Another addition - add some planters on the sidewalk.



These planter boxes in Fredericksburg, TX (top right) are an excellent example of a simple way to soften the transition between the building and the sidewalk. They add color and beauty to the whole street. These were built by a high school shop class.



Consider creating a merchant-driven retail signage design-review program. Develop specific guidelines for signs, such as limits on the use of plastic banners and temporary signs, as well as a review process.



Imagine planter boxes under all the windows in this block! (bottom left)



Suggestion: Avoid the look of "outdoor retail" as opposed to extending window displays to exterior spaces.



This makes you look like a second-rate garage sale town.



A merchant-driven signage review committee could also be responsible for review of outdoor retail displays. Provide guidance for retailers - for example, simply setting merchandise on tables outside is NOT an attractive display. On the contrary, it looks like a rummage sale, and that devalues the appearance of the town - and the business.

To pull customers in, don't just set merchandise outside - create an attractive display. Use that outdoor space to create a welcoming, attractive ambiance.

Create Merchant Driven Signage & Outdoor Display Programs
The rule of pulling customers in



There are many ways merchants can attract customers into their shops. This shop owner in Omak, WA (bottom right) places the table and chairs outside, added the barrels with plants. She also sells ice cream, and regularly gives away ice cream cones to local kids, as long as they'll sit at the table outside. The sight of the kids eating ice cream cones pulls in dozens more customers, and they usually buy more than just ice cream.

Beautification doesn't have to only include planters. Look at Maggie Mae Mercantile's display (top left). Select store merchandise is artfully arranged, and the large "open" flag invites customers inside.

Signs and displays tell people a lot about a business - be sure your "curb appeal" creates the desired impression and pulls customers inside.

These displays (top right) are nice. Take it to the next level by adding more plantings and perhaps a bench, or two.



Good job here. With some plants this would really shine.



Crooked Timber Books wins the signage award for Digby.

We weren't sure what this is, was or is supposed to be. Museum? If so, when is it open? Assumption: Out of business.



The walkway and waterfront park is very nice.



And the interpretive displays are well done and informative.



We really enjoyed the waterfront park in Digby - it's a very attractive, pleasant place to relax.

The visitor information center in Digby was very helpful and friendly. And it was busy!

Good job on the interpretive displays! This one, though, needs to be corrected (bottom photos). The English text in the bottom paragraph is the same as in the top one, although they have different headings and should be about different topics.

This particular one needs to be reprinted...



The museum (top left) was closed - it would be helpful and create a good impression if there was a sign explaining the situation to visitors. Is it closed for the day? The season? Permanently closed? And what's the focus of the museum?

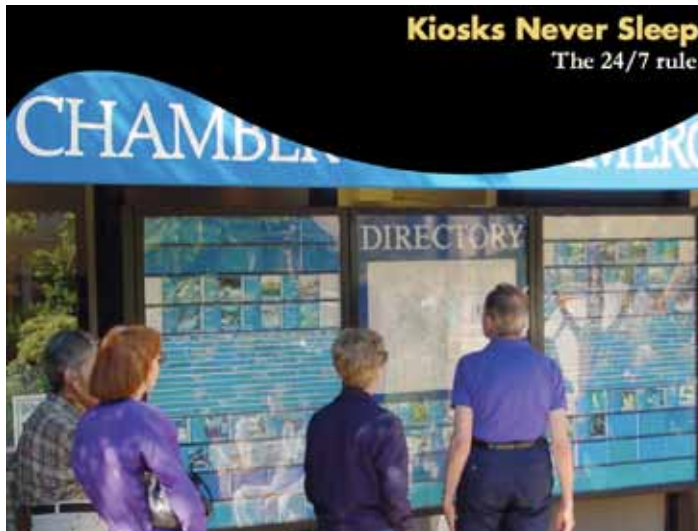
Visitors don't just travel during business hours, so it's critical to provide visitor information after hours. Provide a kiosk or display with brochure distribution. Place visitor information kiosks in different locations throughout the area to cross-sell attractions, amenities, and services. The more you have to offer, the longer people will stay.

These examples of outdoor visitor information are from Ashland, Oregon (bottom left); and Teton Valley, Idaho (bottom right). There are several of these throughout the valley. Each sells what's available in the immediate area, and cross-sells other areas in the valley.

Suggestion: Remove the sign until the museum is reopened. If anything, add an interpretive sign explaining the situation.



The folks in the visitor information center were exceptional and did a great job. Suggestion: Add 24-hour information.





Kiosks can come in just about any shape or size you can imagine. This display in Whistler Resort (top left) includes detailed maps of the area along with information for hotels, lodges, dining, shops, and other amenities.

This “Information Station” (top right) was built in Moses Lake, WA by volunteers. Although the displays could be improved graphically, it does feature “must see” attractions - a sure way to entice visitors to spend more time in the community.



This visitor information display in the transit center in Oak Harbor, WA (bottom left) reflects the town’s nautical theme. They are building additional visitor information kiosks modeled after this one.

This visitor information gazebo (bottom right) was built in Betty, Nevada from a kit by volunteers. A local craftsman built the display and brochure racks inside. It makes a near-perfect visitor information display.

This visitor information kiosk in Kingsport, TN (top left) has a weather resistant brochure holder (top right). There is a \$5 per month charge to include your brochure, and that fee pays for maintenance, keeping it stocked, and to help fund construction of the next kiosk. They are designed to complement the local brick architecture.



Mahone Bay's visitor center (bottom left) provides two outdoor brochure holders for 24-hour information.



This piano bench-sized brochure holder in Gig Harbor, WA (bottom right) has a glass lid that lifts up so visitors can easily access the information, and can take it with them.





If the opportunity ever arises, consider putting the power underground.

The boardwalk is very nice - but we almost missed it.

The missing ingredient in Digby: Nothing about scallops, the fishing fleet, etc. This should be a priority!

Another small visitor information kiosk (top left) located in Colebrook, New Hampshire, provides displays and brochures. Always include brochure distribution with your visitor information displays. Not many travelers carry a clipboard around with them!

One project that would greatly improve the overall ambiance of Digby would be to put the power lines underground. Consider it as a future project.

Digby is the scallop capital, but there was no information about the scallop industry downtown - nothing to see or do that had anything to do with scallops. Visitors enjoy learning about the places they visit - educate them! Add interpretive displays to explain about the scallop fleet and how they gather the scallops. Promote the scallops in every way you can imagine.

Are there any stories about the fishermen gathering scallops? Anything dramatic - like a scallop boat caught in a storm? Tell the stories on display panels.

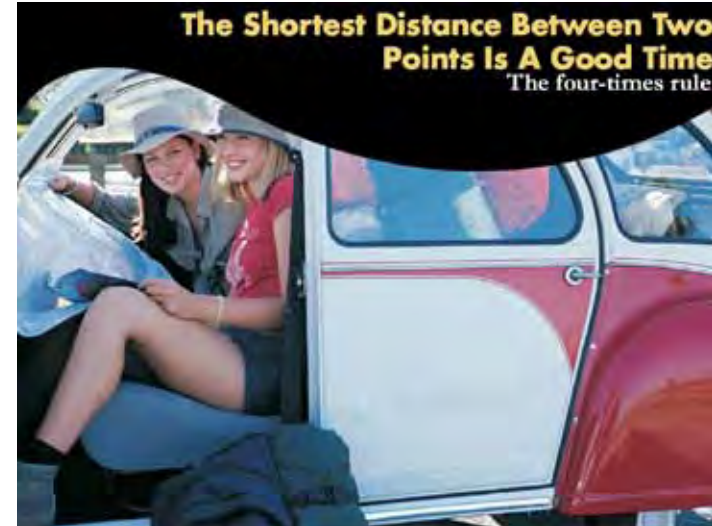
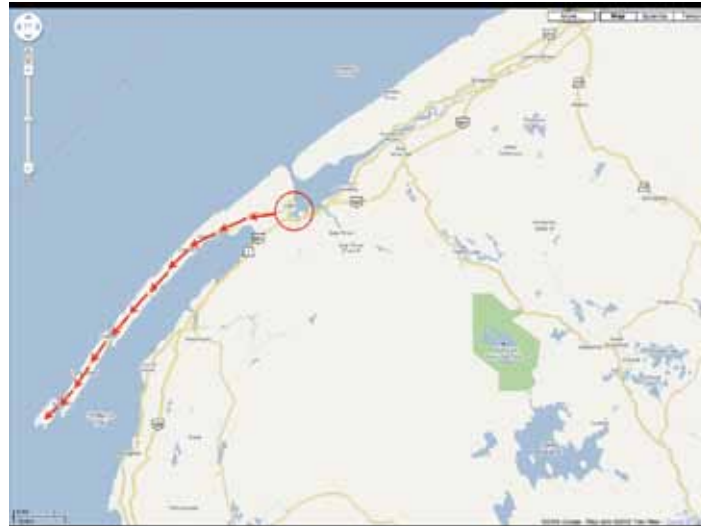
For Digby, in a nutshell:

- Work on beautification and exterior retail displays.
- Develop 24/7 visitor information.
- Tell us about Digby's world famous scallops.
- The fishing fleet is promoted, but where is it? Can visitors see it?
- Promote the "Best of Digby:" Promote your anchor businesses.



On to the Digby Neck & Islands.

Looking at the map, the Digby Neck and Islands inspire a feeling of adventure - what will we find out that long, narrow expanse of land? It would take a few hours, but we set aside a full day to check out this area! We didn't have any information to work with, but it looked as though it might be - at least - very scenic.



A good opportunity to add information - if they are still in business.



We did find the visitor information center on Long Island.



The trip was a long one, and we tried to see everything promoted in brochures we managed to pick up in the area. We found the little museum and visitor center (bottom left) on Long Island, several whale watching enterprises, and a few other small businesses. Consider adding an outdoor display with maps for 24-hour information.

Suggestion: Add 24 hour information.



Having a map of the island would be good.



Remember the four-times rule discussed in the introduction? Visitors will travel to a destination if it has enough activities that appeal specifically to them and will keep them busy four times longer than it took them to get there.

So if it takes visitors three hours to reach Brier Island, are there enough activities to keep them busy for 12 hours?

Of course, the journey is part of the experience, but in order for the journey to be enticing and part of the attraction, it needs to provide appealing activities as well that make it "worth the long drive."

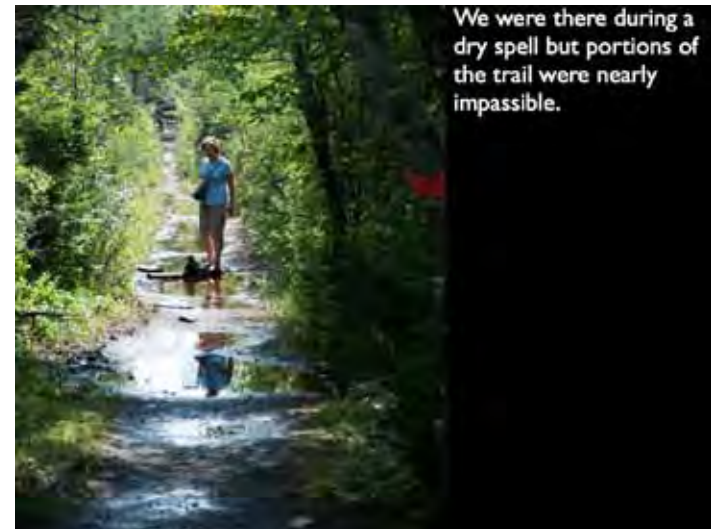
One of our highlights of the journey was the trek out to Balancing Rock. That was a one-of-a-kind experience!

Provide more information about that hike - it is long and very wet. Add more information to prepare visitors for the trail conditions in the brochure. Details, details, details. How long is the walk? How far is it? Is it passable for strollers? The elderly? Kids? What kind of shoes should we wear? What will we see when we get out there, besides the rock? Is it easy? Dangerous?

The trail started off very well, but quickly became a boggy mess. Consider developing a boardwalk to cover more portions of the trail - that would make it a more appealing experience for more visitors - you don't want visitors to become disgruntled and turn around before reaching the end. Water can flow under the boardwalk keeping the bog areas natural and would allow convenient access for a lot of visitors with children or who are elderly.



Suggestion: Considering the fact that this is one of the region's best attractions, some funds should go into developing a boardwalk through the bogs.

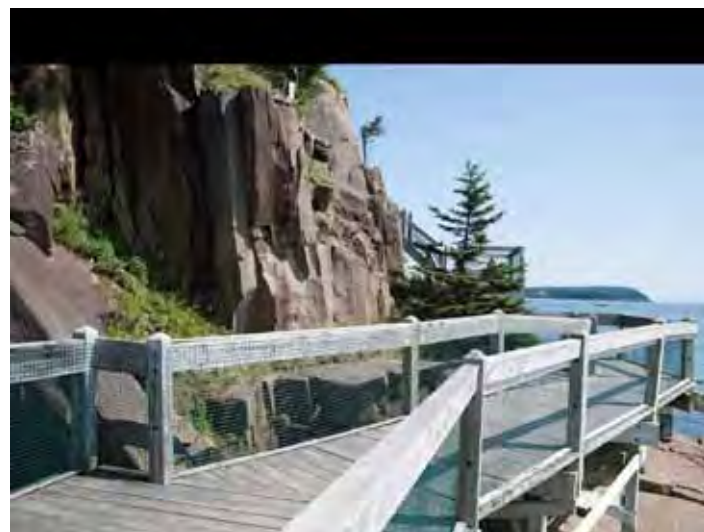


We were there during a dry spell but portions of the trail were nearly impassible.



The hike out to the Balancing Rock was definitely worth the trip! It was a stunning spot. This is well worth promoting - even more than it already is. If visitors could see more photos of the scenery at the end of the hike, more people would be drawn to the Digby Neck.

Show the steps down to the rock, the viewing decks, the flora and fauna on the way out to the rock. The hike should be promoted as a key part of the experience.



Add a donation box in the parking area. We would have been glad to donate a few dollars for maintenance, upkeep, or even to go towards building a boardwalk out to the shoreline.

Add photos to Google Earth along with text. Promote it!

We enjoyed the ferry rides, and found that their operating schedules made the crossings very convenient. Make sure you note this in your marketing materials. We had a hard time finding out how often the ferries run, including costs.

We explored every road on Brier Island, and enjoyed seeing the lighthouses. The whale watching tours are definitely the big activity, so if a visitor isn't participating in a whale watching excursion, there's not much else to do. The island was full of charm, though. Just remember the "Four Times Rule." Is it worth the drive?

And remember that the goal of any tourism effort is to provide places for people to spend money. It's up to each business to pull people in the door.

The ferries to Long Island and Brier Island are great. There was little information, however, of when or how often they run.



Brier Island was a real treat.



The other big draw (the experiential activity) is the whale watching. The vendors do a great job of marketing the program, which should be heavily marketed.

The "park" here was a great place for lunch and a terrific view.



The Lighthouse Cafe does a good job with its beautification. It was very busy.



A great idea. Other communities take note. Suggestion: Add a map on the back so we know how to find these places.



The Lighthouse Cafe does a very good job - with its food as well as beautification. The Gift Shop was very nice as well.

Consider the feasibility of other small business opportunities on Long and Brier Islands that might keep visitors busy longer - possibly bicycle rentals, boat rentals, the sale of prepackaged picnic fare.

Very nice and a great touch.



We saw what looked like a hotel or resort, and decided to check it out. Someone said they served a great lunch.



When we first arrived on Brier Island, the Lighthouse Cafe was very busy, so we wanted to find someplace else for lunch. We'd been told the resort had great food, so we went to check it out. But - they don't serve lunch.

Suggestion: Develop some itineraries for spending a day, or two, or three, on Digby Neck and the Islands. Be very specific about what to do, where to eat, when to go whale watching, where to hike, etc. Post these itineraries on the website, and include some of them in brochures. Keep them up to date - if a business closes or a new one opens, be sure to update the website right away.

If you'd like full-sized copies of the itineraries shown here, let the DDI team know and we'll provide you with samples.



There goes a whale watching cruise. Suggestion: Beef up your websites, add far more photos, itineraries - Close the sale!

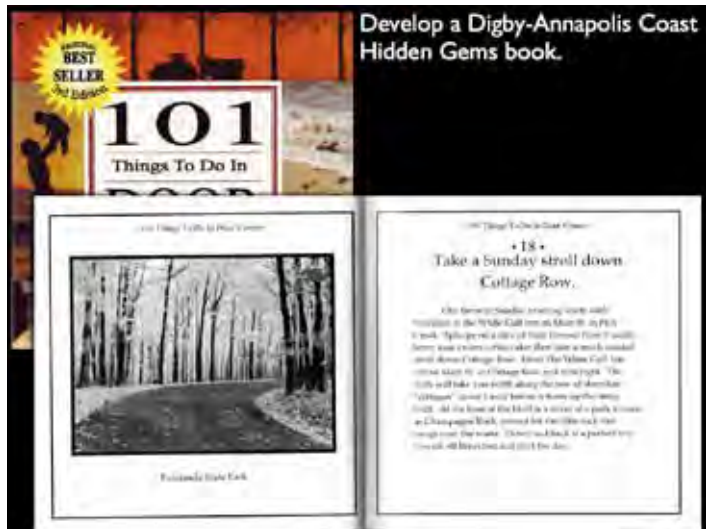


A beautiful island. Lots of "Hidden Gems."



Consider developing a "Hidden Gems" book for the Digby/Annapolis Shore area. There are so many "hidden gems" on the Digby Neck and Islands that could be promoted and could become a primary reason for visiting this beautiful area.

Model the book after the "101 Things to Do in Door County" (bottom left). This book was written and published by a private individual, and doesn't give standard visitor information - instead, it describes things to do once a visitor arrives. Things the locals would know about, such as where to rent a bicycle and where to ride it; where to hike and what you'll see; what bakery makes the best scones; where to find the best romantic sunset, etc. Once again, details, details, details.



Develop a Digby-Annapolis Coast Hidden Gems book.

Like other places, there is no information. Hiking trails? What will we see? Anything we should know? The seagulls were deafening.



We could hear thousands of seagulls (bottom right) but had no idea how to see them, or if there are hiking trails here, or if this is off-limits.

We wish we'd had time to go on a whale-watching tour!

Develop a photo library of the area - with professional quality photos. Post them on the website as well as on Google Earth and on review sites such as TripAdvisor, Gorp.com and others. The web should be your number one marketing resource and priority.

The village on Brier Island was so full of charm! There are some lovely homes.

These photos should be added to Google Earth. They can help "close the sale." There were a few, but most were pretty amateurish.



Wish we would have had more time! Looks like a lot of fun.



It looks as though the tour operators do a good job. How does the whale watching here stack up to similar experiences in the province?



How much? We were ready to move in!



Suggestion: Make the sign a little more artistic and appealing - but we did see it! Knock down the weeds around the sign.



Hmmm. Visitors will be hesitant to visit when it looks like a home and it's not obvious if it's open or even still in business.



The brochures seem to include every business on Digby Neck and the Islands, plus some that were no longer operating. Some of them didn't seem to be worth the effort to visit, because there were no activities, just convenience items meant primarily for local residents.

The emu farm is promoted, but it didn't appear to be open to visitors. If it does have provisions for visitors to come in, spend time, see the emus up close and learn about them, a sign should be displayed welcoming visitors and telling them where to enter.

This one wasn't as inviting as the others. Add some curb appeal, exterior displays, a brochure holder.



Add beautification wherever you can! This store (bottom left) would be so much more appealing with planters on each side of the door and bench. Make it inviting! Make it obvious you're in business.

We did find the emu farm. Didn't meet the FourTimes Rule.



Visitors are always reluctant to approach a shop that appears to be a residence. To encourage them, as well as to increase the apparent value of the shop, use decorative, professional signage. Add a banner or two that say "open" and "welcome." One shop we've seen in Newfoundland and Labrador uses a whole series of signs encouraging visitors to come in. It works!

We found several parks along the Digby Neck, which were very nice. Note: Parks are not primary draws, but they are important amenities.

Gulliver's Cove didn't really have any visitor activities that we could see, and there weren't any washrooms, so visitors wouldn't be able to spend much time there.

Washrooms can be an important sales strategy! Never just tell customers to go away. Tell people *where* they can find the washrooms! Relieved visitors spend more!

Washrooms attract more than flies! The number one reason travelers stop is to use the facilities - and once they stop, they are much more likely to spend money on a snack, a souvenir or gift, lunch, or an ice cream cone. Place public washrooms where visitors can spend money. Provide visitor information there as well to sell your attractions and amenities.

The Little America Travel Center (bottom left) advertises their washroom facilities on the highway as well as their ice



cream cones. Located 150 miles east of Salt Lake City and 300 miles west of Cheyenne, Wyoming along I-80, this little oasis has built up a huge business over the last 60 years, and their biggest strategy is to try to get those travelers to stop along



their journey. In fact, the spotless restrooms translate to more than \$12 million in annual retail sales and services.



Digby Neck Long & Brier Islands

Pros:

- Great cover photo
- Very good map
- Good teasers

Suggestions:

- Develop more specifics or provide links to where we can get more info.
- Be selective as to what you list - not just everything.

A Guide to BRIER ISLAND NOVA SCOTIA

Pros:

- Excellent map
- Lots of information about island features

Suggestions:

- Promote the major lures - the best draws
- Include places to eat or shop (the best of)
- Avoid lists of businesses

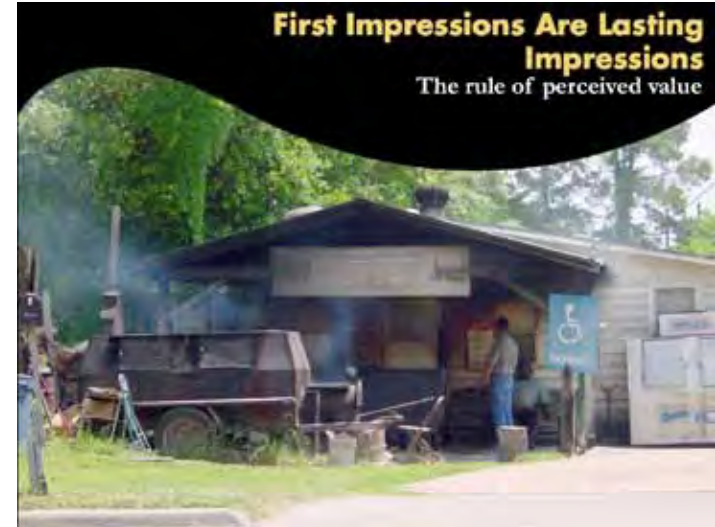


Summary:

- Digby Neck and the Islands are easily worth a day trip for anyone in the Digby/Annapolis region. As a stand-alone destination, the islands don't meet the Four-Times rule for Halifax residents or visitors. They have to be part of a larger package of activities.
- Develop detailed half-day and full-day itineraries - with photographs and specifics: what to expect, seasonal considerations, what to bring and wear.
- There were few places to spend money, and most of the places (local markets) did little to pull visitors in their doors.
- Visitor information should be provided once off the ferry, with brochure distribution and maps.
- Create the Hidden Gems of Nova Scotia's Digby Neck and Islands.

First impressions are critical. Your gateway, or welcome signs, are a visitor's introduction to your community. What they look like, and where they're placed, gives visitors their first impression, which is a lasting impression. Be sure to place your gateway signs where they will make the first, best impression, and keep your welcome signs well-maintained. They present a direct reflection on the quality of the community.

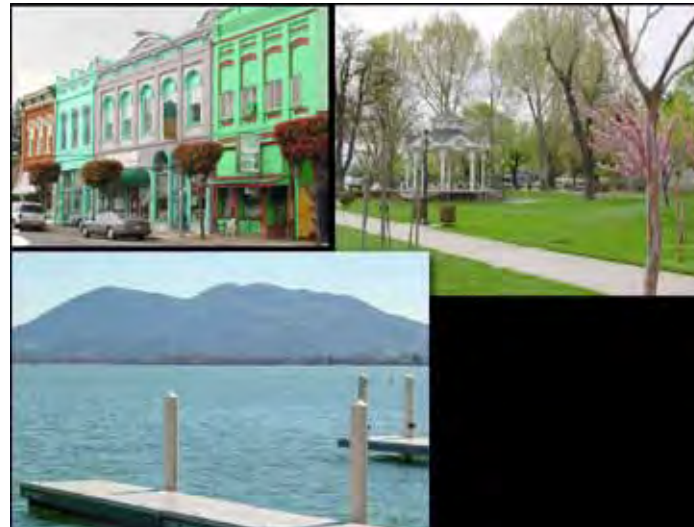
Borrego Springs (bottom photos) is a beautiful town in southeastern California, with first-class resorts, a gorgeous golf course, a country club, and lovely residential neighborhoods. And the park and public washrooms in the middle of town also look very nice (bottom right).





But what impression does Borrego Springs' welcome sign (top left) give? It certainly doesn't give an accurate impression of the community. When we did a community assessment of Borrego Springs, we suggested they redo their welcome sign. So they had it remade (top right) - but still didn't quite get it right.

It's best to put community service organizations' signs in their own space, at a location where people can stop to read them. When placed on a welcome sign, they give a cluttered appearance.



What impression does Lakeport, CA's welcome sign give? (bottom left) It really sells the town short. Downtown Lakeport is a very charming and attractive place (bottom right photos).

First impressions are lasting impressions - and this always starts at your gateways. Look at yours. What do they say about you?

What impression does Othello's welcome sign (top left) give you of the community? Does it look like a town you'd want to visit?

Oroville, WA, a town of 1,650 residents, has placed these attractive monument signs (top right) at each end of its three-block long downtown.

Ever wonder why developers create elaborate gateways at the entries to their high-end residential developments? They increase the perceived value of the community and create a spirit of community pride. They give a feeling of "arrival" - that you've reached a special destination. Beautiful gateways into communities achieve the same results.

The visitor information center in Weymouth looks very nice, but consider adding pots or planters, and maybe a bench or two. Weymouth didn't seem to have much to offer visitors.

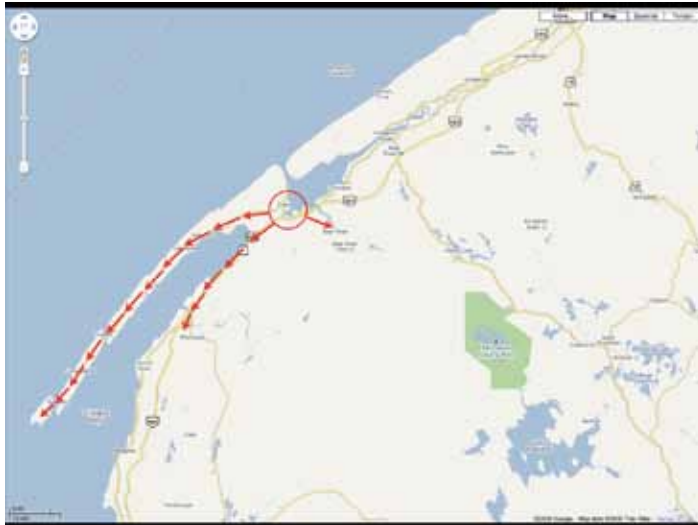


We did eventually find it. Nice visitor information center. Can use some curb appeal though.



Overall we didn't see much in the town. Suggestion: The word "gateway" is something you pass through to go somewhere else.





We continued exploring the region - we spent time exploring Digby, traveled all the way down Digby Neck, across the channels to both islands, and headed south along the mainland coast to Weymouth. Next we drove inland to Bear River.

Since Bear River seemed to be "out of the way" and not very convenient, we struggled on whether or not it was going to be worth the effort. We had very little information to go on, but locals in both Digby and Annapolis Royal seemed to think highly of the community, so we decided to take the chance and headed to Bear River.

We found Bear River to be enchanting. The galleries, wineries, cafe, and the whole ambiance were very enjoyable. As it turns out, Bear River was one of the highlights of our entire two-plus weeks in Nova Scotia. What a charming little town.

What a charming little community - and one probably overlooked by a lot of visitors. A must-visit town while in the area.



In any retail mall, the anchor tenant is the major store that attracts the most customers, i.e. Macy's or Bloomingdale's. While most people come to the mall for that anchor tenant, all the other shops benefit from the increased foot traffic. Like a mall, towns also need to have at least one anchor tenant.

We felt that Bear River's Flight of Fancy Gallery is the town's anchor - people would drive to Bear River specifically to go to that gallery - even from Halifax. In fact, having traveled throughout the province extensively over the past five or six years, this is one of the very best galleries we've had the pleasure to visit.

Another good case of an anchor tenant is the Southern Baptist Texas Barbecue in Huntsville, Texas (top right and bottom photos). Would you eat there? The Barbecue was started as a fund raiser for the little church next door. You might not want to eat there unless you heard about it - and many people have.





Bus loads of visitors come from Houston and Dallas for lunch, and GQ Magazine listed it as one of their "top ten meals to fly for" in the world!

Ottawa, Illinois, located one and a half hours southwest of Chicago, produced a brochure to specifically promote their anchor tenants - each page includes one or two photos and descriptive text about a shop, an activity, or a restaurant, that visitors couldn't find closer to home. (bottom photos) They sent copies to each household in town to use when visitors came, plus they had a copy distributed to each car entering the nearby state park, which was very popular with Chicagoans.



Within six months, Ottawa's hotel occupancy rates increased by more than 30%, and their downtown shops were actually getting more business, not just from visitors, but from locals as well. Be sure to promote your anchor businesses. Like every mall, every town relies on the anchor businesses to pull customers in. All the other businesses benefit by that.

Don't let local politics get in the way of promoting your anchor tenants. Promote your anchor tenants and everyone will benefit. Think Disney World and Orlando. If we drive to Bear River to visit the gallery, you can count on us finding other artisans, visiting the two wineries, and perhaps having lunch or dinner in town, while we wait for the tides to change.

Bear River has a whole lot of charm! A few suggestions for improvement would be:

- Add more beautification. Half-barrels with shrubs, trees, and flowers. More hanging baskets.

- Take another look at your signage - merchant signage as well as wayfinding. Always promote what it is you're selling - not just the name of the shop or gallery. You entice people in by letting them know what you have that they might want. And be sure your wayfinding signs lead all the way to the destination.

- Add benches throughout town. Make it a great place to "hang out." Particularly places with river views.

- Add interpretive signs about the tides, provide a seasonal tide chart. Tell us about the buildings built on stilts (one of the most charming aspects of Bear River) - and easily what sets the town apart from all others.





Women account for 80% of all spending. Women tend to notice and appreciate beautification efforts - and who doesn't enjoy being in a beautiful place?

Take a close look at the bottom right photo. What do you see? This was not staged, but illustrates the importance of benches and seating areas.



There is a lot to enjoy in Bear River - it is a real gem. Very unique setting; several galleries and shops featuring all kinds of art and one-of-a-kind objects; boutique wineries offering tours and tastings; overall, a very pleasant place to spend a day. In fact, we found ourselves drawn back to the little community several times while in the area.

The challenge: Marketing. We wonder how many people visiting the area never make the short trek to Bear River. They are missing a real treat.

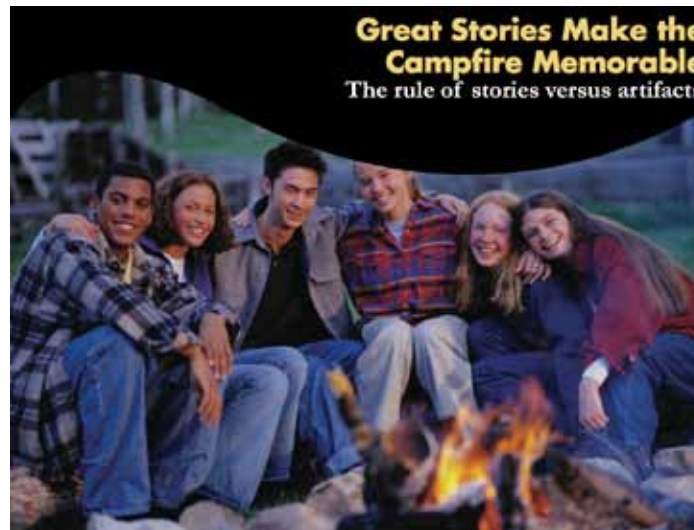


Good Information Center.

Add 24/7 information.

We had to come back a second time when it was open.





The average museum visit lasts between 20 and 40 minutes, but if you can captivate the visitor for two hours, spending will increase. When visitors stay for two hours or more, they will usually want to get a snack or a meal, and are more likely to visit local shops and galleries.

To captivate visitors longer, museums need to tell stories, not just display artifacts with facts and figures.

Museums that engage visitors by demonstrations and learning experiences can become primary attractions to a region, and can keep visitors entertained all day.

Ross Farm, in Nova Scotia, is a great example of one such museum experience. They have a blacksmith shop (bottom right) as well as a cooperage (bottom left). Visitors can watch as different kinds of barrels are made, and as iron tools are forged. The products made are sold there, and they help fund the museum's operation.



Visitors are fascinated by these crafts and industries. Ross Farm also has covered wagon rides, and other experiential activities as well.

The Wallace & Area Museum did a terrific job of telling fascinating stories that kept us there for more than an hour, translating to additional spending locally.

As we traveled in the area, we saw the visitor information sign (bottom right) and thought it would be a good spot to get some additional information about the area.



By the way, the things they make are a funding source for the museum's operation.



The Wallace & Area Museum also did a great job telling stories.



Good! Visitor information ahead.

Now what? Where is it? Make sure you finish the job with your wayfinding efforts.



Real Men Don't Ask For Directions
The rule of wayfinding



We must have missed the visitor information somehow (top left). No more signs.

If visitors end up frustrated trying to find key attractions and/or amenities, many will simply say one word; "Next" - and they're gone. The top priority for ANY community is the development of a "Wayfinding System." Connecting the dots to attractions, amenities, and local services through a professionally produced directional and gateway signage system.



Oak Harbor, WA, (bottom left) is developing a signage system with blue signs for community services and gray signs for visitor amenities and attractions. They have a nautical theme reflecting the harbor community.

Bend, OR (bottom right) uses these brightly colored signs for wayfinding throughout town.

The easier you make it for visitors, the more likely they are to spend additional time in your community and spending will increase.

Additionally, wayfinding not only educates visitors about what you have and where it's located, but will also educate your front-line employees about what you have and where attractions and amenities are.

We found the hand made signs for the Heritage and Culture Centre, and were able to find it with no problem.

The Centre building looks stark, and could look more inviting with landscaping that would include native plantings in front. It looked as though the centre is no longer operating. If it's not obvious you are in business, people will generally assume you're not - especially in rural areas.



When are you open? We tried three times and finally gave up.



What a shame. And a missed opportunity.



Had we not been doing an assessment, we would have never found these other attractions - including the two wineries.



With your wayfinding system, you must put up "reminder signs." Ten k/m feels like 20 to first-time visitors. We nearly gave up. Twice.



Always be sure to post your operating hours and invite visitors back.

The Cultural Centre looks like it has a fascinating array of activities, events, and demonstrations. Post that information - a schedule of events and activities - so that visitors can know and plan when to return.

We eventually found the signs pointing towards the two wineries. Be sure to promote them in your marketing materials! They are first-rate attractions.

With every wayfinding system, be sure to "connect the dots" all the way to the destination. And include "reminder" signs. It's easy for visitors to get the impression they've gone too far, when the destination might be only a short distance further.

We easily found the first winery, but we almost gave up finding the second one.

We knew there was another winery in the Bear River area! (top left) Annapolis Highlands was a long way down the road, though, and we thought we might have gone the wrong way when we, by chance, found it. Be sure to put up reminder signs so visitors will know they're not lost.

The Bear River Working Studios Guide listed several different studios for travelers to visit. We tried to find them all, but we could actually only find about half of them. The map in the guide is not detailed enough, and some of the studios are no longer open.

For the ones that are open, though, sometimes it wasn't clear if visitors were actually welcome. If the artists do want visitors to stop by, then there are two things to do:

- Post signage that states that you are open and that visitors are welcome to come in.
- Give clear instructions on your signs telling visitors exactly where to go, and if they need to knock first or simply enter.



When we found them we had a hard time knowing whether or not they were open to the public.



We also found the other winery and got a very nice tour of the winery, the process, and grounds. Nicely done. Gracious hosts.



Artisans should have consistent public open hours - even if its just every Friday and Saturday. Consistency is important.

Navigating around Bear River was challenging - the maps in the brochures were too vague.

We found the Bear River Winery, and were able to enjoy a wonderful tour of the facility. The wineries are a great draw to the area.

Although the brochures for the Bear River area and the Cultural Centre could use some improvements, they piqued our interest and portrayed Bear River as a unique and enjoyable spot.

Remember to promote specifics - don't fall into the trap of using vague generalities. If you're using a phrase that could be applied anywhere, then you're not being specific enough - and you're selling your area short.

Bear River
Nova Scotia
A Place Like No Other!

Just a five minute drive off Hwy 101, Box 24 brings you to Bear River, the ideal village on 1600. It remains one of those rare places that still has an "off the beaten path" feeling, while offering a variety of exciting accommodations. Nestled between two steep hills on a 1000 foot Bear River is geographically unusual. Both its area and its many different ways to those who visit quickly discover. It is a glimpse into the way of life that is simple and where community still matters. Come in for a visit, the reward is well worth it.

A little slice of real Nova Scotia just over all the most beautiful places anywhere!

www.bearriver.ca

Pros:

- Nice photos

Suggestions:

- Jettison the generic (A place like no other!)
- Cut the text by two-thirds
- Beef up the size of the photos
- Use bullet points
- Concentrate on the artisan brand
- Provide a better map

Bear River First Nation
Heritage and Cultural Centre

"Let The Beat
Of Our Drums
Awaken Your Soul"

Pros:

- Wonderful descriptions
- Sounds fascinating - and worth the trip

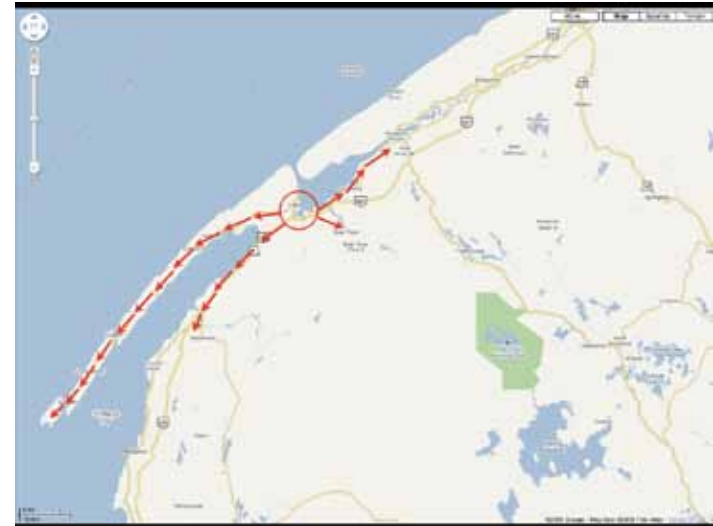
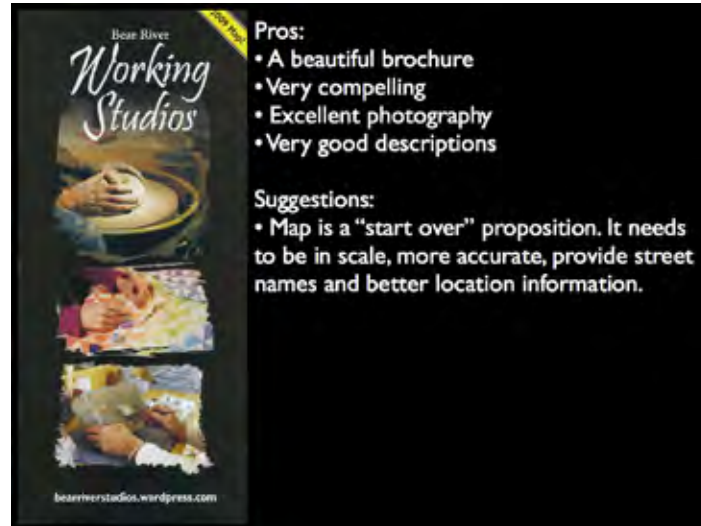
Suggestions:

- No professional, high quality look
- Print it in color
- Add photography
- This is worth taking up a notch - a big notch

Bear River could use a good, detailed map. The roads are confusing, and without a good map, it's easy to lose your way.

Next up, we headed northeast towards Annapolis Royal.

Annapolis Royal's welcome sign is very attractive and creates a good impression upon entering the town.



Suggestion: Keep the plantings/weeds below the wording on the sign.



A very charming first impression. Nice shops, good curb appeal - for the most part.



Be sure to keep up the maintenance on your gateway signs (top left). Keep the planters weeded, and keep the shrubs and flowers trimmed so they don't hide the sign.

Coming into Annapolis Royal, the rich history of the town is plain to see. One building after another brings the heritage of this area to life. The town has a tremendous amount of charm and grace.

Complimented by some terrific architecture.



One of the iconic Nova Scotia elements is the colorful buildings.



Curb appeal is so important for the success of destination towns. Most of the merchants are doing a good job.

There are some areas that could be improved. Soften the harshness of downtown structures, especially where the facade meets the sidewalks, by adding pots and planters with trees, shrubs and seasonal flowers. Switch to silk during the winter months.

One of the key ingredients for a successful downtown is providing "gathering places." People love to be in active, vibrant, beautiful surroundings - with other people. These can be plaza areas, wide sidewalks, or "bulb-outs" - sidewalks that bulb out into the street in place of a parking space or two.

Posting menus in an attractive display is a very good way to entice customers into your restaurant.

Encourage outdoor dining - it helps bring downtown to life.



Most of the merchants understand the importance of beautification and curb appeal.



The bench should be flanked with pots/planters. Always work to soften the transition between facades and sidewalks.



Adding gathering places, like Leo's has done, is always key to creating an outstanding destination.



The exterior menu board is very smart. Leo's was VERY busy.

Good job.



Keep your signs fresh and well maintained. Good curb appeal here as well.



Outdoor seating - with benches or tables and chairs - is friendly, welcoming, and encourages visitors to linger in town (top left).

This incredible historic building (bottom left) attracts like a magnet. Add some potted flowers around the entry and beside the stairs. Consider a window box filled with brightly colored blooms. The coffee shop and soda shop were great - what a treat!

A great building. Now just add some curb appeal.



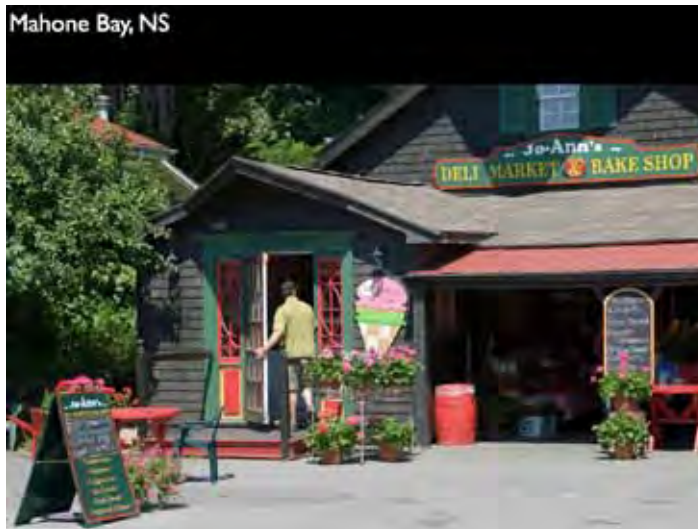
Good teasers to pull customers into the theater's gallery.



There was a lot of good beautification already, but not all the merchants were making the effort. The storefront (top left), while well-maintained and attractive, is a bit harsh and cold. Potted plants under the windows, or window boxes, and an attractive blade sign are all it needs to become a stunning “must visit” retail shop.

Several of the communities on the Bluenose Coast are models of excellent beautification efforts. This shop (top right) in Hubbards uses baskets and flowers to crate an inviting display.

Consider a “best practices” mission to Mahone Bay. Nearly every shop is appealing. Note the use of brightly painted trim on the buildings, the A-board signs with brightly colored chalk letting customers know the specials for the day, the flowers and shrubs everywhere you look.





The photos on this page show more examples of attractive shop fronts in Mahone Bay. Note the decorative signs and wonderful use of color. These shops are very inviting.

Annapolis Royal has every bit the potential of Mahone Bay and/or even Lunenburg.



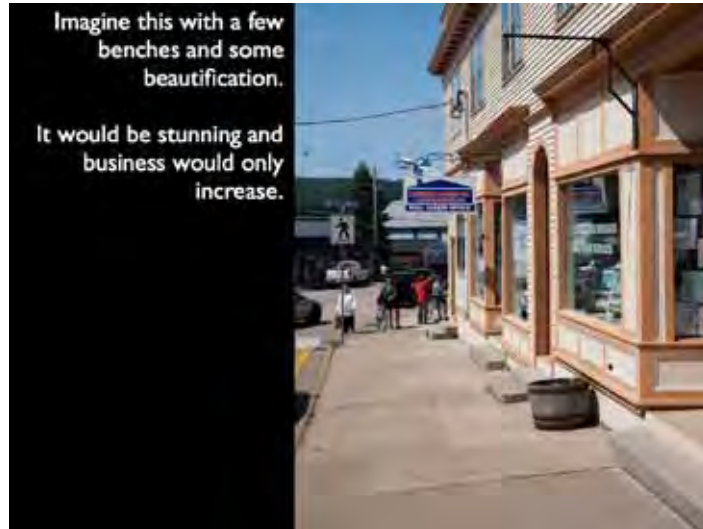
This shop (top left - also in Mahone Bay) is so appealing you wouldn't even need to be a dog lover to want to go inside and take a look. The bright blue and yellow facade, the plants and hanging baskets, and the attractive sign, combine to create a wonderful shop front. The one next door to it is just as appealing.



This beautiful B&B (top right), also in Mahone Bay, makes the most of its incredible architecture. The yellow and white building, surrounded by colorful gardens, and the hanging baskets centered in the circular openings, make this a stunning place to stay.



Annapolis Royal has all the potential of any destination community in Atlantic Canada. Add more pots, planters and benches along the storefronts to bring color and life to the setting.



Well done. Good signage. Great color. Excellent curb appeal.



And another "anchor tenant."



This crafts store (top left) has tremendous appeal and is easily one of the town's "anchor tenants."

Be careful to avoid "sign-clutter." When several signs are grouped together, it becomes overload, and people tend to just ignore them all. Could these signs be consolidated - possibly into a directory?

Open-air markets have been steadily growing in popularity for residents as well as visitors. People are drawn to the activity and vibrancy of that type of market place, as well as the opportunity to interact with the farmers and craftspeople who sell their wares. Open-air markets usually have the feeling of a festival, and people are attracted to them.

Not too sure what all the signs are about. Can these be consolidated?



A great market.



Note: Public markets are now a huge tourism draw. Add music or entertainment, artisans in action if possible.

Look into adding entertainment to the market, such as acoustical music (guitar, bagpipes, accordion), puppet shows, magicians, jugglers, and more. Consider expanding operating hours or days.

People are attracted to vibrant places, and one way to help make a town more active is to recruit street performers.

Annapolis Royal, with its history and fun shops, its great architecture and views, its activities and attractions, is a wonderful primary draw to the whole region. It has tremendous potential to become one of the premier destinations in Nova Scotia.

Many visitors are reluctant to try staying in a B&B because of some common misconceptions:

- Lack of privacy
- No private washrooms

Visitors are also afraid to try the "unknown." Alleviate visitors' fears by addressing them in a brochure, on your website, and by offering to show your facilities.



This is very creative. Add an interpretive display telling about this "work of art."



Ever open? If so, invite us back! Tell us WHEN you will be open.



Visitors are curious. Whenever feasible, provide an interpretive sign about interesting locations in town, such as this structure (top left).

Treat customers like guests. Welcome them! Create invitations, not rejections.

A sign that just says "Closed" is like telling a visitor to go away. Instead of posting a "closed" sign, use signs like these (bottom photos). Tell the customer you want them to come back, and let them know when you'll be open.



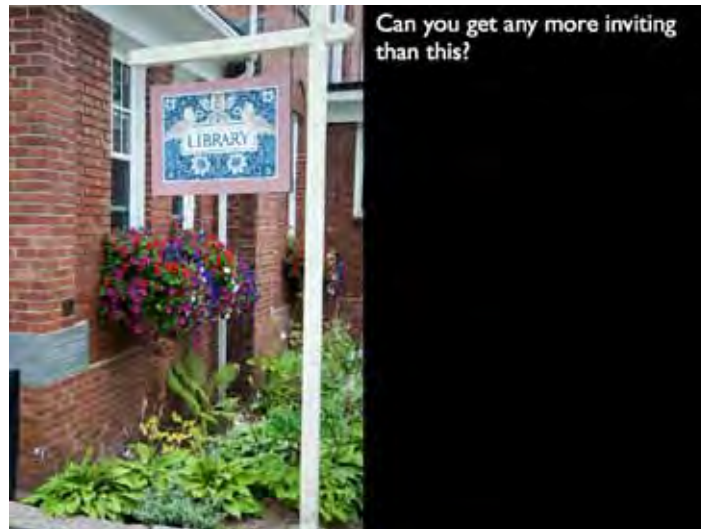
Curb appeal can account for 70% of first-time sales at restaurants, golf courses, wineries, lodging and retail shops. It is very important to keep weeds out, plant flowers and shrubs, keep buildings and facades clean and painted, use attractive signage, and keep sidewalks swept.

Would you eat at this restaurant located in eastern Washington State? (top right) It looks stark and cold - not very appealing. It does nothing to draw customers.



In contrast, the library's beautification efforts (bottom left) make it very appealing. Businesses should follow suit.

Visitors are attracted to pedestrian-friendly towns. That includes sidewalks and crosswalks to make people feel comfortable and safe (bottom right).



A great little shop - and another anchor tenant.



The museum has done a good job in making it experiential.



There were many great little shops in Annapolis Royal. The museum was a big hit too - they do a very good job of making the exhibits interactive. The ghosts in the basement were terrific!

It took us a while to find how to access the boardwalk. Suggestion: Develop a pedestrian wayfinding system to guide visitors to attractions and amenities. Not only will it help visitors find what they're looking for, a good wayfinding system will also tell visitors what other attractions you have. The more you have to offer, the longer visitors will stay, and the more they will spend.

We saw the promenade but were unsure how to get to it.



A wayfinding system should be decorative, and it should be in keeping with the town's brand or ambiance - in your case, historic. This example (bottom right), from French Lick, Indiana, is a good example.

The boardwalk and interpretive signs throughout town were excellent and very enjoyable. Visitors love to learn about the places they visit, and the stories told on the interpretive signs helped to bring the history of Annapolis Royal to life, creating an emotional connection to the area. Good job.



What's the story here? What happened? When? Remember that history isn't a point in time. It's happening today.



Had we not seen the tour group, we wouldn't have known about tours locally.



This scene (top left) made us want to know what happened. Consider adding an interpretive sign to let visitors know.

The downtown tours looked like they would be a lot of fun. But it's easy to miss the signs and promotions for the tours. Create a large sign so that visitors can't miss it, and include all the information a visitor would need to know: how often, how much, what time of day, what's included, how long the tour lasts, etc.

Suggestion: Make it a sign rather than an ad. "Tours 3 times daily. Starting right here. 10:00 - 1:00 - 3:00"

Then include one small paragraph of what participants can expect.

Include the cost.



We wanted to borrow these folks' front porch. Looks so inviting!



Fort Anne National Historic site is a wonderful attraction. It's beautiful and rich with history. There was a lot of good information on the interpretive signage, but more could have brought the location and its previous inhabitants to life better.

What was life like in the Fort over the years? How did they build this huge earthen structure, and how much dirt was moved? How was it moved? How long did it take? How many men worked at it? Imagine how hard it would have been to actually build the site to the original plans. How muddy did it get? Did the ground freeze during excavation?

Put visitors into the shoes of the people who built the fort - without the advantage of modern-day machinery. While the history is important, knowing how life was here is just as important, and that was totally missing.



This was all hand dug - and has settled nearly two meters (or more) over time.



The construction of the fort is worth promoting and talking about.

Tell the stories of how it was built, who lived, worked and died here, and what was day-to-day life like.

We understand the earthworks used to be a couple of meters taller, but they've shrunk over the centuries. Just knowing that, however, gave an incredible sense of how difficult this must have been to construct.

Where did the stones come from? How long did it take to build this archway? Tell us the stories.



Where did the concrete come from?

The Historic Gardens were very enjoyable. Gardening is the fastest growing hobby in North America, and so the gardens should be placed front and center in your marketing efforts. Offer one, two, three hour gardening classes: Designing an English Garden, pruning, transplanting, shade and rock gardens, water gardens, etc., etc. People will travel from two to three hours to take classes.

And the B&Bs and Inns looked very nice.





Another stunning property. Thanks for the tour!



When can we move in?

Visitor information kiosks are essential - but make sure they don't just become cluttered bulletin boards for local interests. Keep them maintained and the information fresh and current. Allocate each panel for its own purpose:

- Events
- Brochure distribution
- Primary attractions
- Local interests



Suggestions:
 Have one panel for locals
 One panel for events
 One with brochure distribution
 One panel with primary attractions
 Avoid the bulletin board look



This is just not that appealing for visitors - or even local residents.

The Tidal Power Visitor Centre piqued our interest, and we followed the very good wayfinding signs to the facility.

Consider replacing the sign at the Visitor Centre with one that matches the wayfinding signs. The existing sign is very unappealing (bottom left).

The facility is looking uncared for and run down (bottom right) - a big disappointment.



Suggestions: Make the displays interactive.



Visit the Museum of Industry in Stellarton.



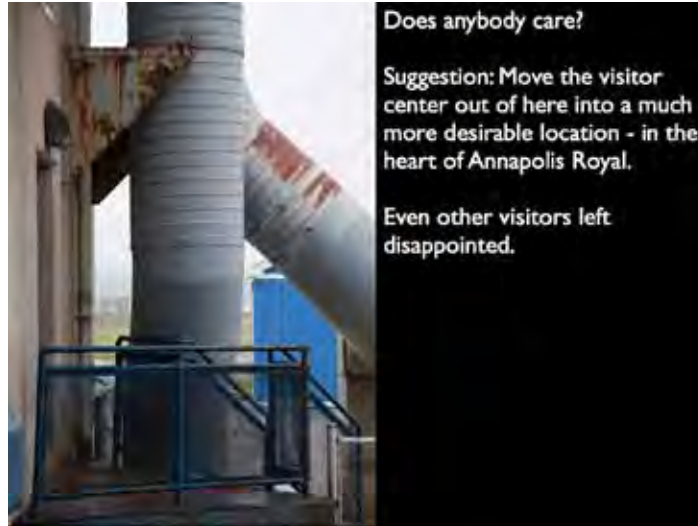
The displays were uninteresting and not attractive. They should engage the visitor by being interactive.

Consider visiting some other museums and facilities to see how they make their exhibits more appealing - the Museum of Industry in Stellarton is a good example (see photos top right and bottom).



Consider moving the visitor center to the heart of town, where visitors can easily walk to it. This facility looks run down and uncared for. The presentations and displays needs to be upgraded.

All in all, this is an embarrassment for the entire province, when it should be a showcase facility for people from all over the world - especially in this day of green energy. What a shame. What a missed opportunity.



The North Hills Museum is very well maintained, and is in a lovely spot, and the displays of 18th and 19th century furnishings, glass, and porcelain make it well worth the visit.





The Port Royal National Historic Site was fascinating and a lot of fun. It's a great attraction for the area. Visitors love costumed interpreters - it helps bring the exhibit to life.

There is a lot of information on the website, and it would be very beneficial to include that information on-site - in the appropriate rooms. As we walked through the buildings, we had a lot of questions, but weren't able to find all the answers.



Interpretive displays inside and outside the buildings would be very helpful.

We also visited Clements Park, and were very impressed with the whole experience. It is very, very well done, and we feel it is a good model for how to do an amusement park right.

The grounds were well kept and attractively landscaped.





Great information, nice readerboard.



Suggestion: Add "Upcoming Events" to the large door. Make this work for you as a teaser to get people to come back.

It was a warm, sunny day when we visited, and the park was full of people having a great time.

The signage and wayfinding in the park were also very good.



Overall Clements Park was a real treat. Beautiful grounds, nice people, in a great setting.



Wayfinding!

Clements Parks looks like a very successful operation. There are many different dining options, with pleasant places to sit, and lots of different activities.

We spoke with the gentleman operating the train, and he told us about how much he enjoys his job. He takes great pride in keeping the train well-maintained, and it shows.

The only confusion we had was how long often the train ran, and how long we needed to wait for the next one. If possible, post the times at each train station. Every 10 minutes? 20? 30?



We also visited the Wildlife Park.



The Wildlife Park was also fun. Consider consolidating the many signs at the entrance to reduce sign clutter (bottom left), and add an obvious sign at or above the door stating “Welcome” or “Entrance.”

Also, add interpretive information about the animals. If a cage is empty, let us know why or where the animal is.

Once walking through the park there was very little, if any, information about the animals, their habitat, or habits.

Suggestion: When possible consolidate all the signs and make the entrance a bit more inviting.

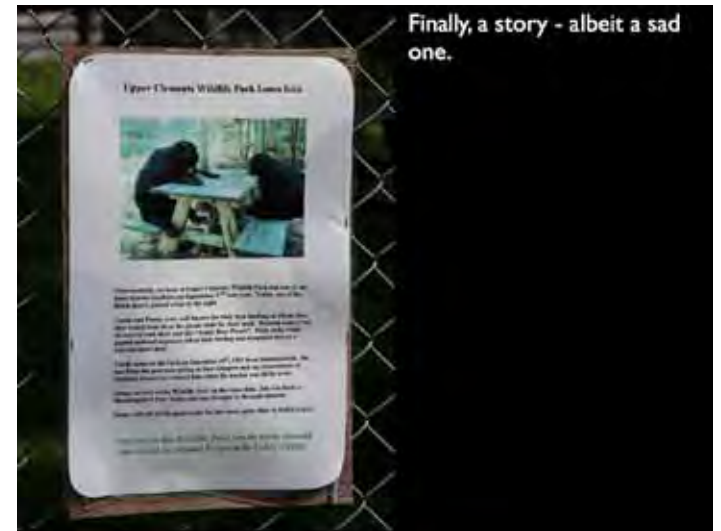


Suggestion: Tell us about the animals! There was very little, if any, information. Just a lot of cages, about half with animals in them.



Give visitors some information - tell stories about the animals. This will create more interest in each exhibit and in the park as a whole.

The Wildlife Park was pleasant, and is nicely cared for and maintained, but would benefit from additional interpretive signage. Seeing a groundhog or a beaver is one thing, but tell us about how they live. Predators. Habits. Family life. Habitat. Longevity. Where these animals came from.



Where does this go? Suggestion: Add signage. Connect the dots.



Nice sign to Cornwallis Park.



We went to the Wildlife Park before going to the Amusement Park, and when we saw the tractor and cart (top left), we weren't sure where it went between the parks or if there was a charge. Be sure to put up signage to let visitors know.

At first we thought the tractor did tours through the wildlife park, which might be a good idea and something to consider. This way the driver, or interpreter, can talk about the animals.

Nice gateway into the Conference Centre, but once you turn the wayfinding disappears. Suggestion: Finish the job!



We also found the golf course. Good sign.



Heading into Cornwallis, the welcome sign is very attractive (top right). Be sure to "connect the dots" with wayfinding signage to the Conference Centre. Wayfinding needs to continue at every turn until the destination is reached.

The golf course and clubhouse look very nice.

The Annapolis Royal area was full of interesting and enjoyable attractions. The historic sites, town, and area activities were well worth a visit of several days. We weren't expecting it to be as much fun as it was!



Pros:

- Good photography
- Explains the history of the site

Suggestions:

- No real information about the rooms, who lived there, what life was like, etc.
- Add specifics
- Tell stories or interesting facts

Pros:

- Great descriptions
- Pleasing layout
- Good photographs
- Plenty of information

Suggestions:

- Organize by location, not alphabetically
- Make sure it sets the event apart from similar events in the province

Pros:

- Nicely produced
- Excellent map
- Descriptions are very interesting
- Story teasers are good

Suggestions:

- Consider color
- Put contact, organizational info on back




Historic Gardens
Annapolis, Maryland

Stop and smell the roses...

Pros:
 • Beautiful brochure
 • Excellent photos
 • Nice map

Suggestions:
 • Put contact info on back
 • Include educational opportunities (if avail.)



The SINCLAIR INN Museum

Come Meet the Queen

220 Annapolis Street
Annapolis, Maryland
March 21-22, 2009

Pros:
 • Great job promoting 3 museums, genealogy
 • Nicely written
 • Great job of selling the experience

Suggestions:
 • Sell the experience first, then the location

We continued on to the northeastern end of the Digby - Annapolis area, and entered Bridgetown. The welcome sign is nice, but we always wonder - when a town states how friendly they are, do they really think they are friendlier than other towns in the region? And why? Does that give visitors a reason to spend time there?

Have you ever gone anywhere because the people there were friendly? And did they really "deliver on the promise"?



Bridgetown is a very appealing town, with nice pole banners, street lighting, buildings, and pretty scenes. There wasn't much for visitors to do there, though.

To attract visitors, a town needs enough to do to keep visitors occupied for a period of time. A "critical mass" of shopping, dining and entertainment will attract visitors and give them places to spend money.



Great sign.



Charming place.



Our secret shoppers all picked The Digby Pines. They had no idea about the ownership. A terrific, exceptional staff here.



While in the area we stayed at the Digby Pines Resort. In our particular case, we have specific business needs when traveling and doing assessments, such as internet access and a large desk on which to spread out our work. Digby Pines was able to meet those needs. For many visitors, the Digby Pines is an attraction in and of itself - a primary reason to visit the area.

This pulls in visitors who also spend money in the local restaurants, shops, and attractions. It will be essential to maintain the excellent quality of the resort with maintenance, upkeep, and the necessary supplies that keep the resort running as the first-class accommodation that it is, in order to keep those visitors coming. We hope the province invests in the resort - it will be critical to the success of the entire area in terms of tourism development.

There are many other excellent accommodations in the area as well, especially the Inns and B&Bs in Annapolis Royal.

When looking at a display of rack brochures (top right), which ones stand out the most? Usually people notice the yellow Sea Kayak brochure first - yellow tends to jump out, and the bold title also makes it visible.

WHAT TO DO:

Product Development

- Work on retail beautification efforts.
- Develop 24/7 visitor information kiosks throughout the area.
- Work on retail signage and beautification.
- Look at your gateways and make sure they are in the best location to make the first, best impression.
- Museums - tell stories, don't just display artifacts.
- Create a wayfinding system to your primary attractions and amenities.

Pros:

- Good map
- Descriptions are enticing

Suggestions:

- Use more experiential photos
- Better quality photos
- One outstanding photo on the cover
- Avoid script text on brochures



Pros:

- Towns are highlighted in a special section
- Good, brief descriptions
- Activities by season - excellent
- Excellent photography

Suggestions:

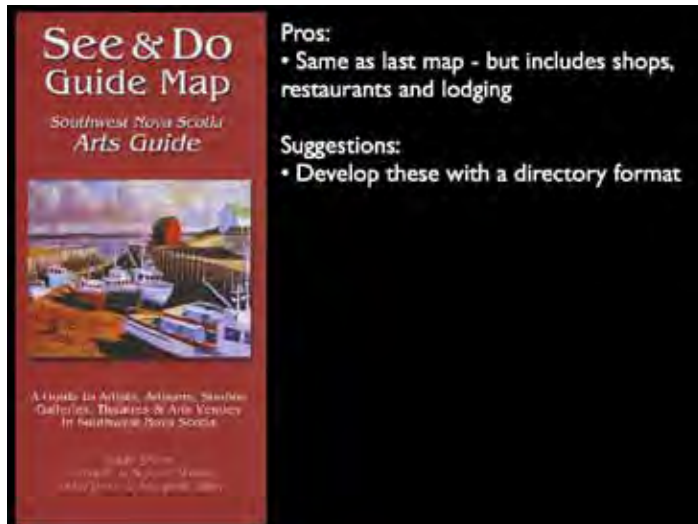
- Far too large of an area - can it be divided up somehow?
- Add maps of each region
- Include key on map of towns, attractions
- Hotel listings lack information
- Don't just promote members
- Include everyone that meets a minimum standard of quality

Pros:

- A good idea and a good map

Suggestions:

- Format is awkward
- Same map on both sides. Why?
- Put ads in numerical order

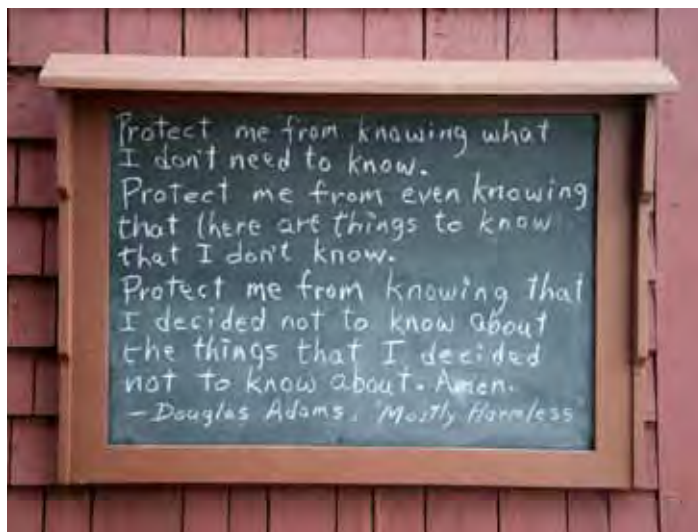


- Pros:**
- Same as last map - but includes shops, restaurants and lodging
- Suggestions:**
- Develop these with a directory format



WHAT TO DO:
Marketing

- Create the “Hidden Gems of Nova Scotia’s Digby-Annapolis Shore.
- Develop detailed itineraries. This should be a top priority. People want specifics, not generalities. Don’t let politics kill your efforts.
- Start with “Pick your season” - then “Pick your passion.”
- Promote your anchor tenants: The Best of the Annapolis Shore.
- Develop better maps and make them available.
- Jettison the generic in your marketing efforts.
- Develop a photo- and experience-driven website.
- Stay open later on weekends during the peak season.



Create detailed itineraries for half day, full day, and multi-day visits:

By type of activity:

- History and culture
- Arts and entertainment
- The environment
- Sports and recreation
- Shopping and dining
- Events

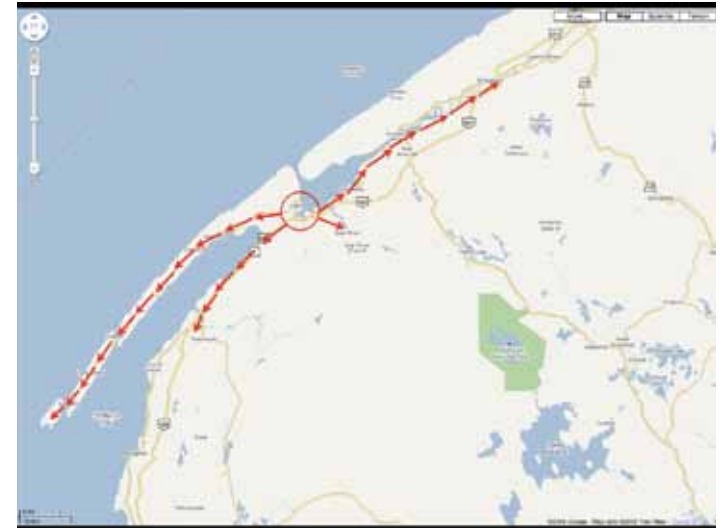
By type of travel:

- Motorcycle
- Bicycle
- Private auto, RV
- Tour bus



If I lived in Halifax or was visiting the province, why would I visit the Digby/Annapolis Shore?

- The lodging makes you an overnight stay
- The primary activities would include:
 - Clements Park for families
 - Annapolis Royal for history
 - Balancing Rock for the hiker
 - Birding, whale watching (Digby Neck & Islands) for the environmentalist and outdoors
 - Golf
- The complementary activities:
 - Shopping, dining (Annapolis Royal, Digby)
 - Art (Bear River)
 - Day trip (Digby Neck & Islands)



Annapolis/Digby Marketing Assessments

Marketing Materials Review:

Fundy Shore & Annapolis Valley, Yarmouth & Acadian Shores, South Shore 2009 Guide

This book covers an extremely large area – about one-third of Nova Scotia. I like how nine towns, communities and one island are highlighted in a special section. The descriptions are very brief, which is good.

The section about seasons lists several activities visitors could enjoy during that time, which makes for a good teaser. Likewise for the 26 Activities.

Excellent photography throughout. Good sections on lighthouses and wineries too.

Suggest adding maps of each of the regions within their sections, so that more detail can be shown than what you see on the one map of the entire area. You could include a key on the map to show all the towns, and the locations of attractions.

The member hotel listing doesn't provide much information to help a visitor decide where to stay. Could it be expanded a little to include icons of the amenities provided, and their ratings? A listing of the members is really not useful for visitors, and shortchanges the location, since it can appear that there is little variety or quantity of restaurants, shops, and accommodations (unless every business is a member!) It's far more beneficial to include everyone that meets a minimum standard of quality – not just members.

Fundy Shore & Glooscap Trail 2009 Guide

This booklet also includes a larger area than what we were exploring. The map is too small to do more than give a general idea of where places are. Consider including maps of smaller areas also, so that more detail can be provided.

One of the Fundy Shore's greatest attractions is the low tides and tidal bores. Add more specific information about how and where to view and experience this phenomenon – it's very, very hard to learn these specifics from any of the marketing materials!

Work to add more specifics. Under the section Four Reasons to Explore the Fundy Shore, the Summer section is simply general things someone could do anywhere – enjoy the great outdoors; enjoy a full complement of activities and events. Camping, river rafting, hiking, fabulous scenery, unique attractions. This doesn't give any reason to come to this part of Nova Scotia – people can do this anywhere. Come up with a few specific, truly unique attractions and activities to highlight. Name them specifically, and tell what makes them different and not-to-be-missed.

The sections on the various towns and areas include a "Don't Miss" section at the top. Be sure to provide enough details and information in the text to tell WHY these shouldn't be missed, and how and where to find them.

See & Do Guide Map / Southwest Nova Scotia Arts Guide

This map is a good idea, but this format is awkward. This is a fold-out full-color map, with the same map of southwestern Nova Scotia on each side. Numbers are placed on the map to indicate the locations of each of the surrounding ads for different shops and galleries. What would make it easier to use would be to have the ads placed in numerical order – as it is, it's very hard to find the specific ad to go with the number on the map.

Better yet, consider doing away with the individual ads, and use a directory format instead. Include descriptions of each of the shops or galleries, highlighting what they are best known for. Include their addresses and website information, as well as their hours of operation, and a photo of the shop or some of their specialty merchandise.

See & Do Guide Map / Annapolis Valley & Fundy Shore East

This is a map similar in concept to the one above (#43), but it includes shops, restaurants, and lodging. This map has information about the area further east of what we've been assessing. The same comments made about #43 (above) apply to this map brochure as well. It is difficult to use the map as it's laid out. Definitely, consider going to a directory format instead of the ads.

Annapolis County Festivals & Community Events 2009

This full-color booklet does a great job of describing all the festivals and events in Annapolis County. Pleasing layout, good photos, and there's plenty of information about each to entice and inform visitors.

For the Arts & Culture and Historic Sites & Museums sections, consider organizing them by their locations, rather than alphabetically. That way when visitors are driving through a specific town, they'll easily be able to see and find all of the attractions, without missing one or two because they were on a different page.

Living History Museums in Annapolis and Digby Counties

We found this trifold brochure to be very useful. The map is good, and it's easy to see where attractions are located. The descriptions of each attraction are very enticing, and enough information is provided to make visiting easy. The cover photos are a little too static; consider using photos that show, possibly, a costumed interpreter in front of an attractive view of one of the sites, or children inspecting a display. The cover photos should help make the attractions seem full of life.

Annapolis Royal Walking Tour

Trifold two-color brochure. This is a nicely produced walking tour of the historic buildings in downtown Annapolis Royal. The map is excellent, and the descriptions are actually very interesting. Tidbits of stories are related about the buildings, which is excellent.

Historic Gardens

This full-color trifold brochure is lovely! The photographs are excellent, and the interior map is very helpful for interpretation as visitors tour the gardens. Nice job.

Annapolis Heritage Society brochure, featuring:

- The Sinclair Inn Museum
- The O'Dell House Museum
- North Hills Museum
- The AHS Genealogy Centre and Archives

A full-color trifold brochure, this piece promotes three museums and the Genealogy Centre of the Annapolis Heritage Society. The interior text is a brief, and very nicely written, history of the town. This brochure does a very good job of selling the experience of visiting these museums.



Port-Royal, National Historic Site of Canada Parks Canada

This full-color brochure has very good photography and explains the history of the site. Consider including more explanation of each of the buildings and their uses. The only information provided is name of the building or room. It would be very interesting to learn more about who used the different rooms, how many lived there, how many guards were on duty at a time, what did they bake in the bakery, how did they get their food and what supplies did they need, did the men have wives and families they had left behind, and lots more details about life in Port-Royal.

Bear River Working Studios

A full-color trifold, this beautiful brochure does a fantastic job of promoting Bear River and the artisans. It is very compelling. The photography is outstanding, and the descriptions of the artists and their work are very good. But using the map, and finding the locations, was a big challenge, in part due to the tangle of roads in the area, but also because the map doesn't have enough detail to make anything easy to find.

Visitors are often very hesitant to approach a studio, gallery, or shop when it is part of someone's residence. If the artists want to encourage drop-by visitors, they need to make it very obvious they are open and want visitors. Usually more than just a gallery sign is needed – "open" signs, flags and

banners that say "welcome" or "open" and even more signs can be necessary.

Bear River First Nation Heritage and Cultural Centre

While this black and white rack card with an attached map doesn't have the professional flare of a full-color piece, it does have wonderful descriptions and excellent detailed information. Example: "Our Story Corner is a magical place for children. Set up like the inside of a cozy wigwam, children will delight in our traditional Mi'kmaw stories, tales and legends." It makes me wish I could spend the whole day there – everything sounds fascinating, from the Medicine Trail to the Workshops. Good job. If funding comes available, this piece would be even more effective with photography and color.

Bear River, Nova Scotia – A Place Like No Other!

Bifold full color brochure, this piece has some very nice photos and good information. It is very text-heavy, though, and the layout doesn't help create a good flow or breakup of the text. Consider using one large outstanding photo on the cover, without the text.

Bear River is an outstanding community with very interesting, artistic attractions. Rather than just saying that Bear River is a place like no other (what

does that mean?), tell what makes Bear River so special. There's a lot more than its "simpler low-tech slow pace." Many communities can say that. Bear River is an incredible artisan village set on the steep banks of the tidal river.

Break up the interior text by using bullet points, bolded captions, and cutting the text way back. Make the photos much larger – outstanding photography sells much better than text. Instead of the tiny map of a huge area, include a map of the more local area, and make it larger so that people can read it more easily.

Digby Scallop Days

Newsprint booklet about the Digby Scallop Days festival, August 5-9, 2009. This piece is for residents and visitors attending the festival, and it includes a good schedule of events, more information about the festival, and a very nice map of Digby. It does a good job.

Experience the Digby Area 2009

A newsprint booklet with a glossy, full-color cover, this piece packs a wealth of very good information on its pages. Here visitors can learn about the founding cultures of the region, some famous local people, the tides, local specialty cuisine, and much more. The information isn't too much – it's just enough to be easy to read, and it's illustrated with very good photography.

The maps are very good. This piece doesn't include lodging or dining information, except for a few ads. I suggest being more specific with details: for example, in the Top 25 Things to Do, provide more information about some of the experiences. Number 6, paddle a sea kayak in the Bay of Fundy or one of Digby Area's tidal estuaries – where can a visitor rent a kayak and put it into the water? Where can they get more information about sea kayaking? The teaser leaves the reader hanging with no way to find out enough information to actually do the activity.

Digby Neck, Long & Brier Islands Ecotour Map

First, the photo on the cover of this piece is so outstanding, and so compelling, that it immediately makes people want to go there. Great cover.

The map is very good, and we used it while we drove this route. There were some disappointments though; the map indicates locations of many services and attractions along the highway, and we attempted to investigate many of them. Some really shouldn't be included; it looks like everything on the Neck or islands was listed on the map, whether it's really of interest or not. Try to be somewhat selective about what you promote to visitors. For example, we drove all the way down to Gulliver's Cove – the map and listings show Jenny's Scrapbooking Memories, Gulliver's Cove Oceanview Cottage, the Emu Farm, the Driftwood Greenhouse, and Matthew's Custom Woodworking. We assumed that most of these would be shops that we could visit, and that the emu farm would have a place for

visitors to view and learn about the birds. But none of these were shops, and the emu farm didn't look inviting at all. There really was nothing for visitors to do there. If you want to include everything that's in the region, make sure to note if it is open to the public, or if visitors are welcome, or if it's a local service business.

A Guide to Brier Island

This attractive brochure has an excellent map of the island, and a lot of information about the features of the area, including shipwrecks, lighthouses, fishing, plant and animal life, and more. It also has a listing of businesses on the island.

Consider promoting the island's most outstanding visitor draws: whale watching, visiting the lighthouses, and the few cute shops. Of course, the journey is part of the fun experience of going to the island, but once there, visitors want things to do and food to eat. So specifically highlight those major attractions.



DISTANCE MARKETING ASSESSMENTS:

The following few pages contain assessments by our secret shoppers, who researched the area from a distance, reviewing marketing materials to see if they could find the area, and if the materials were convincing enough to make them want to visit.

Annapolis/Digby Distance Assessment #1

I thought I would try a different Nova Scotia (NS) website and started with Explore NS.com (www.explorenovascotia.com/) which is listed about sixth on Google. I think the website has a lot to offer; however there is no phone number, and I need some contacts. Scenic Destinations feature the Annapolis Valley, and on quick review it looks pretty, but not too exciting as far as things to do. I click on “What to See” and I am given a listing but no pictures—I need pictures without having to search for them. My suggestion is to have larger type and larger pictures.

I think I will head to NS.com (<http://novascotia.com/>), as it is easier to navigate. I click around for awhile and search for Annapolis Royal (AR) and the site gives me pages with AR listed, some are helpful and mostly about the historic gardens located there. I also search for Digby and am rewarded with four pages of articles. I would rather chat with someone (1-800-565-0000) to get the lay of the land.

The representative does a very good job of selling

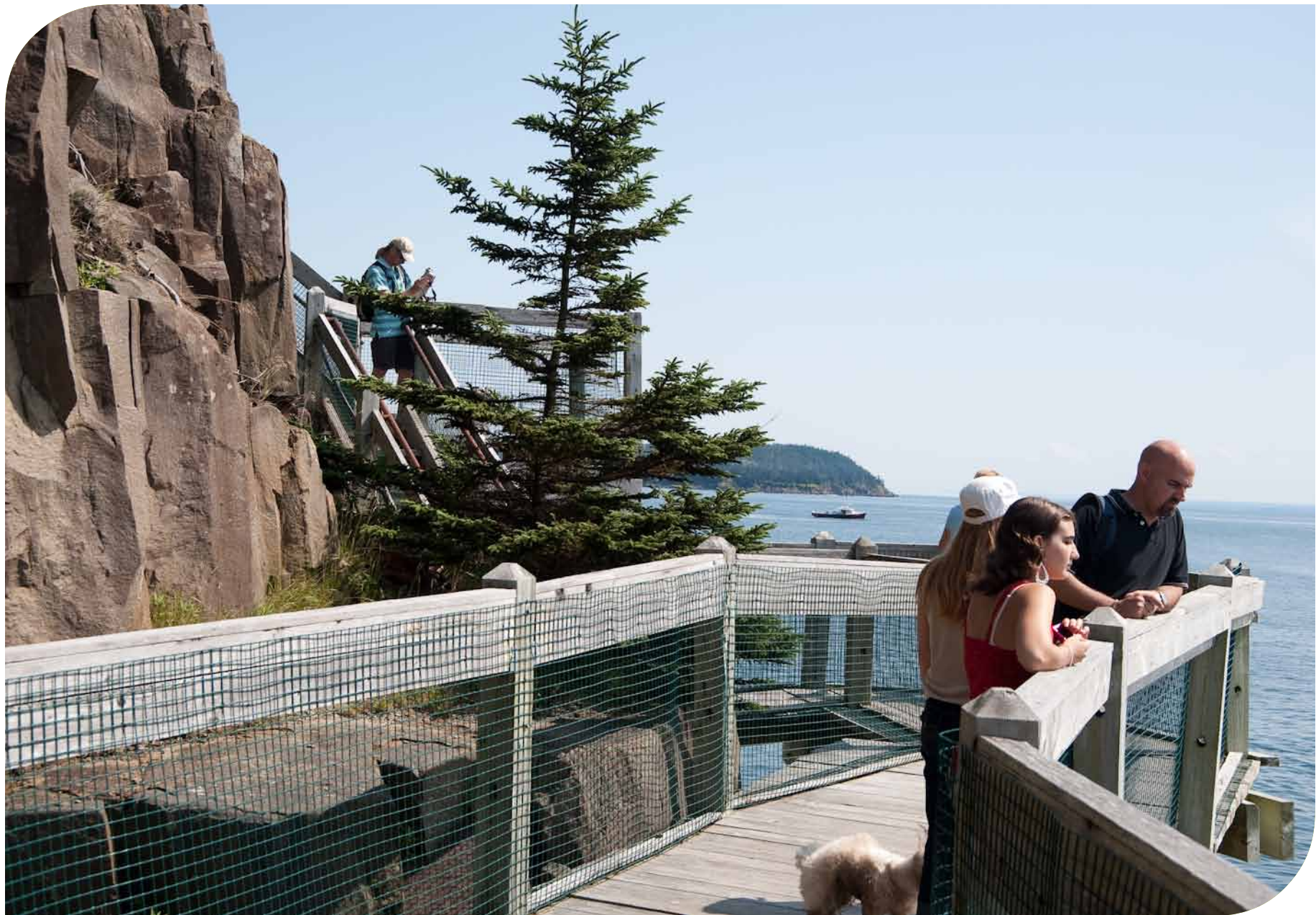
the AR/Digby area to me. He says that all the towns are “picturesque” and that we will have no trouble filling four days with activities. His favorites are: Fort Anne, the historic gardens of AR, Port Royal, Digby Neck, whale watching and the tidal bore of the Bay of Fundy. I try to have him name some other towns, but he said they are all great. He also gave me some names of lodgings (Digby Pines Golf Resort, Thistle Down Country Inn and the Admiral Digby Inn) that I will investigate on line. He did encourage me to use their reservation service as they can guarantee the price quoted.

I visited NS Seacoast.com and thought I would find Digby or AR listed; however they are not part of this site, which seems odd as they are on the coast, but then again nearly all of NS is coastal! The Bay of Fundy is listed however, but it only describes the tide and doesn’t give any accommodations or activities listings.

Googling AR, NS, the first listing is for AR’s visitor information site (<http://www.annapolisroyal.com/>) and the phone number is on the first page! I like the website especially the picture at the top of the page, and I like the sound of the craft shops and artist studios listing on the left. I’m curious to see what they will suggest. Their big seller is history, and the gentleman on the phone really knows his museums and history and was very descriptive. He told me all about Fort Anne, Port Royal with its reenactments, how the Sinclair Inn Museum would appeal to my sons with all the different building techniques used, the O’Dell House with the rotating collections and the North Hills Museum which was a

private collection of furniture and silver that turned out to be more interesting than he expected. He told me to check out Pirate’s Cove Whale Watching, and it is an hour’s drive from AR. He suggested we go whale watching and spend the rest of day exploring Digby Neck and the islands, which have an unusual rock formation. He asked if we had any more time to spend in NS and suggested that on our way back to Halifax we could stay near the Kejimikujik National Park (KNP) at a place called Ravens Haven Cottages, and that we should see Mahone Bay, stop in Lunenburg, and visit the caves called the Ovens. He thought we should stay at the Mountain Top Cottages (MTC) that are just out of AR. Going to their website, the cottages are very clean, simple and the property large, with numerous testimonials from families about what a great place it is. According to their website they are very well located for all the above mentioned sites, and they have direct links so it is easy to check out the entrance fees and hours.

With some quick clicking I check out the nearby attractions: First the gardens which look like they would be worth a visit. Port-Royal would captivate my younger son. The photo of Fort Anne sitting on top the hill makes me want to go just for the vista. The Upper Clements Parks would be the perfect destination for teen boys and it looks very well kept. The whale-watching tab takes me to Ocean Explorations; I like the boating in a Zodiac, and the guide is a biologist, and part of the \$59 fee goes towards environmental education and wildlife conservation. That sounds great. I will check out



Pirates Cove as was suggested. Their website is much more sophisticated and they have been in the business 20 years! They are also less expensive and guarantee a sighting and give rain checks—very unusual. We certainly would be comfortable at MTC and busy visiting all the sights! I did want to pop back to the AR site to check out the art galleries. It is a very impressive listing with direct links to nearly every gallery. So far, AR seems like a great place to visit.

I need to explore other lodgings even though MTC seems perfect. From the AR website I am directed to Southwest Nova Scotia, and they make it very easy to look at choices in the area. I'm growing rather fond of the lodges and cottages along the coast, and narrow my search to these types of lodgings. Admiral Digby Inn was suggested and the website shows a large lodge and cottages, but it doesn't seem as homey as MTC. The two other recommended properties are not listed, I click through several others in the area, and I am surprised about the variety and how tidy they all seem to be. Digby Pines Resort is huge and looks like the take great care of their guests. The Thistle Down Country Inn is very Victorian and has great views, but seems too fancy for teenage boys. It seems that everything in this area is fairly close so I would probably stay at the MTC and make day trips from there.

I would like to find some out-of-the-way towns, not all the touristy places and the tourism offices don't really want to direct you to those places. Roaming about I came across a site I think will

show me all the little towns. The Annapolis Basin (<http://www.annapolisbasin.com/>) lists: AR, Bear River, Clementsport, Cornwallis, Digby, Granville Ferry, Port Royal, Smith's Cove, Upper Clements and Victoria Beach. I thought I would be given direct links to all the above, but it is a page describing the town with a large picture. Who knew that Bear River is "The Switzerland of NS"? It lists many artisans and is pretty. Clementsport is very small and boasts about craft and antique stores but there are no listings. Cornwallis offers nothing on its page, not even a picture. Digby has lots of info: shops, accommodations, etc. Granville Ferry looks quaint and pretty and lists one place to stay. Port Royal looks just like I thought it would. Smith's Cove offers numerous lodgings, and it seems to be a scenic spot rather than commercial. Upper Clements boasts of the amusement park and a nature park. Finally Victoria Beach appears to be more of a fishing village than tourist destination. I think that I would visit Bear River as it had the best page and seems to be a bit more of a destination. Also, Victoria Beach would be worth a visit, as it just looks rather quaint.

I had heard of Bear River and its artists from the woman at the Digby tourism office. She was reluctant to give me the names of accommodations, but did give me several suggestions for my teenage sons: Action Jax, Upper Clements Park, the public pool, KNP to rent canoes and kayaks, Fisherman's Wharf, whale watching with Petit Passage. I asked about swimming at the beaches and she told me the water is too cold—at 42 degrees, I would have

to agree! She said the NS.com website was the best for finding places to stay. I asked her about the Neck and she said you could see it all in a day and we should just drive around and explore.

Perhaps the Digby Neck website (<http://www.geocities.com/TheTropics/6253/>) will help. It is another page listing all the communities of the Neck, and they are far more descriptive than the AR Basin website. It seems Sandy Cove is where you could rest your head for the night and go to church on Sunday and has the most summer visitors. It does seem manageable to do in a day and is rather picturesque.

While the Neck is to the south, what about north of AR? Bridgetown sounds pretty and who doesn't like bridges? Low and behold it is the "Prettiest Little Town in Nova Scotia" according to its website. There is no visitor or tourist tab, and I find accommodations listed on the Business page. They have a nice variety but I still like the sound of the MTC, although some of the listings are located right on the shore. Bridgetown seems a bit more business-like and not as focused on tourism.

Middleton seems to be the next town north. It appears to be a busy town from its website, which is very easy to use. Right away my eye catches two places to stay and they both seem perfect for watching the tide come and go on the Bay of Fundy: Rocky Shores and Seals Cottages and By the Dock of the Bay Cottages. Both lodgings list better attractions than the city site does and they also provide direct links. Many of the attractions are the

same that were listed for Digby and AR.

Once again, Nova Scotia has shown its beautiful shores. I think there could be some cool ecotourism for the Digby Neck, especially if all the operators got together and made a pact to be eco friendly. There is a wonderful, sort of rustic quality about the Neck that I can appreciate and could if I were traveling with adults. My teenage sons might get a little restless between whale watching and hiking. The area around AR is well worth visiting, especially Fort Anne and Pont Royal. Who can resist all that ancient history? There seems to be a lot of charm to the area. The people I spoke with around AR and Digby really worked to close the sale; all wanted me to commit to reservations using NS.com.

Again, this could be a couple's or family trip and definitely May to October. Maybe if I lived really close, a girlfriend/shopping trip to AR could be fun.

Distance Marketing Assessment #2

Making my way towards Kejimikujik National Park in Nova Scotia via the coast, I'd definitely stop and spend time in Annapolis Royal. Frommer's Guide calls it "truly a treat to visit." I'm intrigued by the historic atmosphere and ambiance of the town. I checked out www.annapolisroyal.com for more information and found quite a few things to see and do in and around Annapolis Royal. This is definitely a place I'd spend at least one night as I made my way toward the national park.

From here, I'd want to spend some time exploring the Digby Neck. From what I can gather, there isn't a lot in the way of accommodations and amenities in this area, but it's worth exploring for its "end of the world remoteness," as one description read. This appears to be a region with a lot of scenic, and outdoor opportunities. Hiking and possibly whale watching would be on my agenda.

I didn't find a lot of information on the Digby Neck online, but there was a description and information in my Frommer's Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, & Prince Edward Island guide. The URL www.digbyneck.com is out there, but it's utilized by Graham's Pioneer Retreat, a lodging destination with cabins for rent in Digby. Other than that, I found some information on various other websites that featured Nova Scotia travel information.

Annapolis Royal has a decent web presence, but other locations in the area don't seem to. Like some other areas in Nova Scotia, regions like the Digby Neck could benefit from a unified marketing presence that includes a great visitor website. Even small, remote locations can have a good web presence. After all, Annapolis Royal isn't very big, but they are obviously doing more to attract visitors to their community.

Distance Marketing Assessment #3

To begin this assessment I first plotted out a map on Google of coastal towns along the northern shore to get an idea of timeframe needed for this trip. An

excursion from Halifax to Kejimikujik National Park with a detour to the northern shore along the Bay of Fundy could be easily accomplished over a long weekend—3 to 4 days on a very leisurely schedule. This trip would likely appeal to those interested in history, culture, heritage, scenery and great seafood! But, there also appears to be plenty of activities, and distinctive scenery to appeal to many types of travelers.

In my searches I came upon the Destination Nova Scotia a very good government operated website. I contacted them on 7/20 (800-565-0000) and ordered a "Doers and Dreamers Guide" plus a "Scenic Trailways Map" and a "Festival and Events Guide."

The Town of Windsor promotes many galleries, museums and theatre, but I would probably just stop for a quick lunch here—maybe at Cocoa Pesto Bistro then keep heading for the coast. We find that trying out local eateries with unusual menus is one of the most enjoyable pieces of exploring new places.

Off of Longpoint Road, Harbourville is a hidden little getaway I'd like to take in. There are small cottages right on the bay for a reasonable price and the Fundy Voyager picks you up right nearby for sight-seeing, picnicking on the boat, and deep sea fishing—something I've always wanted to do. This place is off the beaten track enough that I don't think it would be very crowded.

Margaretsville is another place I would plan to stay.

Beach cottages just 40 feet from the Bay of Fundy would provide a first hand watch of the incredible rise and fall of the tides here. Since my husband is a geologist, the tide's amazing effect on the landscape would be something he would enjoy immensely. There are many awesome websites and this one for Fundy Fun does an excellent job of showing the variety of activities available here. Also, the video on the official Bay of Fundy site shows in detail what to expect. I might try an extra adventure here sea kayaking around the Bay at high tide, watching whales, or tidal bore rafting.

Heading further west to the Annapolis Royal website, the "Plan Your Trip" key helped a lot to pinpoint some of the attractions of the area. A link on this site to the website for Southwest Nova Scotia brings up yet another attraction not mentioned on any other sites I've found—lighthouses. Having explored a few lighthouses, I would enjoy checking out some of the more than 50 lighthouses in Southwest Nova Scotia—each one would be different and fun to explore especially the views from the top if that's an option. I phoned the SW Nova Scotia toll free # (1-877-552-4040) to ask for more information. Both individuals I spoke were very enthusiastic and knowledgeable. I requested a copy of the SW Nova Scotia guide and also asked about lighthouses, for their recommendation about ones that are "must see." I was told that they have a lighthouse guide they would send me with information about which lighthouses you can go into, and learned there is also a lighthouse festival in late September. I asked about the fall weather and

learned September is a very pleasant time to visit with warm weather—something to promote more if this is a little slower season than the summer months. I mentioned the Tall Ships assuming that SW Nova Scotia ports did not see them but was corrected and told that they would actually be at Lunenburg the very next day. Also, the Bluenose is a Tall Ship that was built in Lunenburg. My search revealed that Lunenburg is on the southern shore so this trip could turn into a loop with a visit to Lunenburg on the way back to Halifax.

The SW Nova Scotia website also has a diverse list of menu items that I'd like to spend more time investigating, especially Cuisine Cruising and A Bouquet of Gardens featuring the crown jewel of the gardening heritage at Annapolis Royal Historic Gardens. Wandering through beautiful gardens with a good coffee sounds like a great way to spend the morning.

Learning that Digby's #1 industry is plump, sweet scallops sold me instantly—I definitely have to go there. If I have enough time it would be entertaining to take a trip down the Digby Neck to check out some of the many fishing villages near Sandy Cove.

All in all, I think this area of Nova Scotia has done a pretty good job providing easily accessible online (and phone) information for the traveling public. It was time consuming though to go from site to site trying to put together all of this information, especially when you consider that I didn't actually make any reservations—that would add even

more time. Try to make it easier for your visitors by putting together itineraries with estimated travel time between stops, lodging choices at each place, activities, etc. Or, put together some package deals and do the footwork for your visitors. I look forward to visiting someday soon!

Distance Marketing Assessment #4

I was pleased to learn that for my next assessment assignment I would be researching province of Nova Scotia, Canada, again. It is on my list of top 20 places to visit, and I really enjoyed learning more about the province's tourism regions as defined by its Tourism, Culture and Heritage Department. When given the assignment of taking a look at the area between Halifax and the Kejimikujik National Park, I decided to focus on two of the province's regions: Fundy Shore & Annapolis Valley and South Shore.

I had received a copy of the Nova Scotia's "doers' & dreamers'" guide from a previous assignment and used it as a reference to begin my research. I specifically reviewed the regional editorials which highlighted the area's special features, must sees and top events. Really, in a few pages, I was sold on the Fundy Shore & Annapolis region. The introductory copy summed it up best: "... discovering great whales, fine wines and the highest tides." I'd imagine that I would visit this part of the province on a return trip, since my initial visit to the province would be to Cape Breton Island.

There is a lot to “do” in this region. It would be hard to decide what kind of trip to make it. It could be a second honeymoon for me and my husband, or an adventurous girlfriends’ getaway. I could also imagine it as a great family vacation. In any case, I couldn’t imagine visiting the region in just a weekend or a few days, unless I happen to live close by. If I were traveling from the United States, I could easily spend a week or more, probably in late May or August/September since most attractions and tourism-related businesses are open May through October.

Based on what I read, here are my top picks for activities:

Tidal Bore Rafting

The Shubenacadie River near Truro is the only place in North America that you can go Tidal Bore Rafting. The force of the incoming tide changes the flow of the River to reverse direction, forming several sets of roller-coaster waves that can be 10-14 feet high.

Each day, 14 billion tons of water move through the Bay of Fundy and produces the world’s highest tides.

Annapolis Valley Wine Country

Nova Scotia’s Annapolis Valley, at 100 miles long and 15 miles at its widest point, is quickly becoming Canada’s up-and-coming wine destination. The area sounds like a dream road-trip with one perfect little boutique winery after another. Some of the communities with wineries include Falmouth,

Wolfville and Gaspereau Valley. 22 grape growers nurture 400 acres of vines and eight thriving vineyard wineries are producing award-winning wines. Sommelier-led tours of the Annapolis Valley include transportation and a variety of experiences: wine tastings, gourmet lunch pairings and cheese and wine tastings.

Annapolis Royal Historic Gardens

The Royal Gardens in Annapolis feature 17 acres of theme gardens and displays reflecting the history of the area. Special features include Victorian Garden, Governor’s Garden, Rose Collection, Innovative Garden and Acadian Cottage and Garden. The Royal Gardens balances the historical and botanical aspects of horticulture, complementing the rich tapestry of heritage in one of the oldest European settlements in North America.

Brier Island, Digby Neck

At the very end of the finger of land known as Digby Neck you will find Brier Island. Just 4 miles long and 1.5 miles wide, Brier Island is renowned as a sensitive and significant ecological treasure. Several trails lead along the shore to the island’s two lighthouses or to Seal Cove, where you can watch a seal colony at play. Also known for as an iconic whale watching destination, the island offers several whale watching cruises with knowledgeable guides.

Bear River

Approximately 15 minutes inland from Digby,

this rich artistic community features buildings constructed on stilts high above the tidal water. There are shops and studios plus a heritage museum. (Note: the community website really needs help to “close the sale.” It doesn’t do a good job, needing more and better photos and text. Remember – bullet points work well on websites. <http://www.bearriver.ca/introduction.htm>)

Now that I determined what activities and sights, I decided to return to Nova Scotia’s official tourism website <http://novascotia.com/en/home/default.aspx> for more information. I’m not sure if my internet connection was timing out or not, but the site took a long time to load, and I have a high speed connection. The top graphic on the home page and on subsequent pages took several minutes to load. I decided to check out the video section but got pretty frustrated as the videos’ delivery was very choppy.

Honestly, since I’m not very familiar with the province, I wanted the website to be laid out by region like the visitors guide is. I didn’t find the map section very useful; they were not detailed enough for me. By using the search function, I was able to find more information on my interests. Some of the keywords I used included “wine trail,” “tidal bore rafting” and “gardens.” To finalize my plans, I’d want to call the Tourism Department’s toll free number, 1.800.565.0000, to speak with one of their travel counselors. When researching Cape Breton, I called and found their assistance to be very helpful in planning the details of my trip.

Distance Marketing Assessment #5

Any web site that has Twitter, Facebook, flickr and YouTube connections and additional blogs is very in touch with the rapidly changing ways media reaches people and is taking advantage of all the marketing angles. Kudos to NovaScotia.com! I hardly ever find that one site gives me all the information I need. But this one does!

At NovaScotia.com I extensively used the tool that allows you to search for attractions, festivals, dining, outdoor activities, etc. by date, region, and town. It was an intuitive way for me to decide my route and stops. For this Nova Scotia assessment, I referred to the maps repeatedly. When an area is so unfamiliar, maps are incredibly helpful.

I did have trouble, however, with the online travel tour "Check In" for reservations. It would not accept any date in June or July 2010 for check-in date. It would be nice to have a tool that works 12 months out for those early planners.

For this trip on my route to Annapolis, I'd look for a route with at least one stopping point. Looking at the Windsor to Bridgetown route I found numerous historic home museums, but none that I would specifically plan to see. I'd probably take the approach of just seeing when we got tired and letting the day lead us to which town we stop to visit. That said, the only town that didn't seem to have much to offer of interest to me was Kentville.

If we made this a couple's trip in the fall for the Wine and Food Fest, all the wineries would be my focus

with the history and outdoors being the side points until we arrived at Kejimikujik National Park to hike and canoe. If we made this trip in the summer with our kids, we'd certainly make Annapolis a main stop along the way.

Annapolis Royal – Fort Anne and Grand Pre' National Historic Sites seem like great places to learn about the history of the region. Annapolis Royal Historic Gardens look interesting. I don't often stop at places specifically for the gardens, but a place big enough, like this, is always fun. The Blomidon Look-Off seems like a no-brainer must do. The Rutledge Farm Zoo would be a good side trip if the kids were along and the weather wasn't great for shoreline activities. I'm not sure that it's enough of an attraction if the weather was great. Also, if kids were along the Greenwood Military Aviation Museum would be great for our 9 year old son who loves everything about flight.

Digby – With kids in tow or just as a couple, I'd probably try to stay in a seaside cottage or cabin in the Digby area. All of the water-oriented sites: Balancing Rock, Cape D'Or Lighthouse, Burncoat Head Park, Cape Chignecto Provincial Park, etc. provide good places for walking and taking photos. We'd want to try a whale watching tour on any trip to this area (depending on the timing of our visit). And, as the website smartly points out, there are plenty of "rainy day" activities in the Digby area.

Looking at the attractions I hit an unexpected link to [http://www.destinationsouthwestnova.com/explore-the-area/regions-and-communities/fundy-](http://www.destinationsouthwestnova.com/explore-the-area/regions-and-communities/fundy-shore-and-annapolis-valley/digby-neck/)

[shore-and-annapolis-valley/digby-neck/](http://www.destinationsouthwestnova.com/explore-the-area/regions-and-communities/fundy-shore-and-annapolis-valley/digby-neck/)

Which looked a lot like the novascotia.com site, but at a glance appeared to have some differences. I found it very easy to access a list of accommodations there and found one that appealed to me. Graham's Pioneer Retreat, Digby, looks like a very private place with incredible views and beach access. Staying in a place where we could cook some of our own meals makes the trip more affordable, and the rates are reasonable.

Having invested so much time in the novascotia.com site and feeling familiar with navigating it, I went back to that site for sheer convenience.

I found it interesting that this assignment has Kejimikujik as the destination. With the many miles of coastline being so much a part of Nova Scotia's appeal (to me at least), I probably wouldn't spend more than a day or two hiking and kayaking in this inland park.

Instead, I'd make sure my return route to Halifax went along the South Shore. A must-see would be Old Town Lunenburg, and it would be a treat to sail on the Bluenose II. I can honestly say that doing these two Nova Scotia assessments have put the province on my personal list of places to see.



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