



DESTINATIONS
INTERNATIONAL

DESTINATION PROMOTION: A CATALYST FOR COMMUNITY VITALITY

KEY FINDINGS



**TOURISM
ECONOMICS**
AN OXFORD ECONOMICS COMPANY

Longwoods
INTERNATIONAL

CLARITY
OF PLACE 



NextFactor

Today every community is vying for the global spotlight in the race for attention. This race is not just about getting noticed, it is about attracting tourists, consumers, top talent, businesses, and investments. Fall behind, and your community risks being forgotten.

This is where destination organizations come in. Known globally as destination management organizations, destination marketing organizations, regional tourism groups, convention and visitor bureaus, or tourism boards - they do much more than boost brand awareness. They drive visitor spending, fuel business growth, create jobs, and generate tax revenue. These entities also champion their locales to event planners across sectors through conventions, trade shows, and sports, delivering significant economic impact.

Infrastructure, public spaces, transportation, and resident capacity are essential, but they are just the starting point. To truly stand out, a community needs to be seen, heard, and easily discovered. Crafting a compelling and positive destination brand is crucial. It is what piques interest, drives people to visit, live, work, and invest; it encourages them to share their experiences.

Destination promotion by these organizations has a profound impact on community vitality.

The benefits ripple out to affect residents, local businesses, and elected officials. By strategically managing a brand, destination organizations attract attention and inspire people and businesses to engage with their communities. In short, effective destination promotion builds vibrant, thriving communities that draw people in and keep them coming back.

Former Destinations International Chair, Maura Cast, Executive Director at Irving Convention and Visitors Bureau in Irving, Texas, USA, states, "If you build a place people want to visit, you build a place where people want to live. If you build a place where people want to live, you build a place where people want to work. If you build a place where people want to work, you build a place where business needs to be. If you build a place where business needs to be, you build a place where people must visit. It all begins with a visit, and without destination organizations, these visits wouldn't occur."

The diagram below illustrates how promoting a destination acts as a catalyst for broader community advantages and vitality and speaks to the words Maura Cast eloquently stated.

THE WORK OF A DESTINATION ORGANIZATION

1. VISIT

If you built a place where people want to visit, then you have built a place where people want to live.

2. LIVE

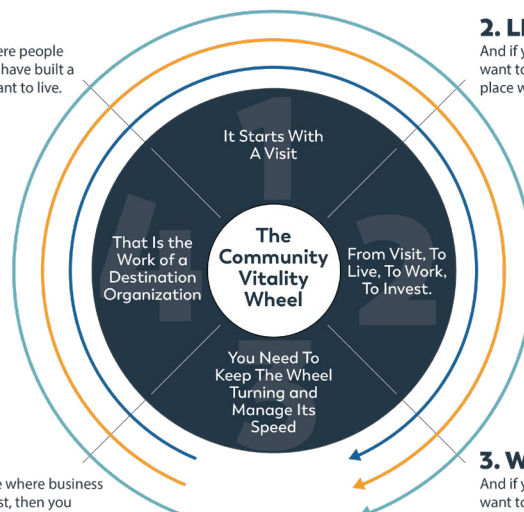
And if you built a place where people want to live, then you have built a place where people want to work.

3. WORK

And if you built a place where people want to work, then you have built a place where business and residents will invest.

4. INVEST

And if you built a place where business and residents will invest, then you have built a place where people will want to visit.



INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, destination organizations have measured their success through the lens of the hospitality sector. But this narrow view misses the bigger picture of what destination promotion can achieve. Destinations International's 2014 study, "Destination Promotion: An Engine of Economic Development," showcased how comprehensive destination strategies can supercharge the entire economy, redefining destination promotion as a pillar of economic growth.

Building on this groundbreaking work, Destinations International teamed up with Tourism Economics (an Oxford Economics company), Longwoods International, Clarity of Place, and MMGY NextFactor. These research organizations were tasked with uncovering the far-reaching community impacts of destination promotion. Their new 2024 study dives into examples from ten North American locales, including Champaign, IL; Chattanooga, TN; Fort Myers, FL; Great Lakes, MI; Houston, TX; Mesa, AZ; Ottawa, ON; Puerto Rico; Seattle, WA; and Victoria, BC. The findings are crystal clear: destination promotion delivers significant, widespread benefits, boosting community wellbeing through strategic investments.

*All findings shared within can be further explored by downloading the full 2024 study at destinationsinternational.org/destination-promotion-catalyst-community-vitality.



ECONOMIC RETURNS FROM PROMOTIONAL INVESTMENTS:

Destination marketing programs effectively influence visitor decisions, leading to increased visits and spending as well as substantial returns from investments in media and taxes, showing \$85 and \$9 for every dollar invested, respectively. *(Chapter 1)*

MARKETING EFFECTIVENESS:

Increased destination marketing spending over the last decade resulted in higher returns, demonstrating significant gains in promotional effectiveness and strategy. *(Chapter 1)*

ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION:

The impact of visitor spending extends well beyond the hospitality sector, significantly benefiting a range of service-producing industries and contributing 60% of additional sales relative to direct spending at the destination. *(Chapter 2)*

COMMUNITY QUALITY OF LIFE:

Residents acknowledge the contributions of tourism to their quality-of-life amenities. Destination organizations act as brand stewards to enhance community well-being through event promotion, placemaking, and investment attraction. *(Chapter 3)*

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND DESTINATION BRANDING:

Destination promotion boosts visitor numbers while also elevating the overall image of the destination for economic development. Destination organizations are crucial in maintaining consistent branding and utilizing creative assets to support economic growth. *(Chapters 4 & 7)*

GOVERNMENT SERVICES AND FISCAL SUPPORT:

Revenue from visitors supports government services through tax contributions. Residents recognize the benefit of visitor taxes in reducing their fiscal responsibilities. *(Chapter 6)*

TALENT ATTRACTION AND RESIDENT RECRUITMENT:

Amenities and quality of life are key factors in attracting new residents and talent to communities. Initiatives led or supported by destination organizations are pivotal in enhancing local workforce development, as well as promoting diversity within the leisure and hospitality sectors. *(Chapter 5)*

MACRO-ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENTS:

A robust visitor economy correlates with accelerated economic growth across the community at large. Enhancements in visitor-related employment influences broader economic and employment growth. A 10% increase in visitor-related employment led to a 2.5% rise in overall employment in the short term. *(Chapter 7)*

The 2024 study, “Destination Promotion: A Catalyst for Community Vitality,” takes a deep dive into how destination organizations are transforming economic landscapes and boosting community vitality. These organizations are not just selling destinations as travel spots, they are promoting them as top-tier places to live, work, and invest. Made possible by The Destinations International Foundation and executed by top-tier research firms, this study uncovers the wide-ranging benefits of destination promotion. Drawing on rich data from across North America, it highlights the powerful, multifaceted impact of these efforts.

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:



1 Enriching and Sustaining Quality of Life:

Destination promotion plays a crucial role in enhancing a community's living standards. By attracting visitors, destinations can support and sustain high-quality amenities, including parks, cultural centers and recreational activities. This improves residents' quality of life and makes the area more attractive to potential new residents.

2 Attracting and Retaining Talent:

Through strategic promotion and branding, destination organizations make their locales appealing not just to tourists, but also to prospective residents and workforce talent. The study highlights how effective promotion helps frame a destination as an ideal place for living and working, which is vital for attracting skilled workers and retaining existing talent.

3 Cultivating Culture and Community:

Destination organizations act as stewards of their destination's heritage and community values. By promoting cultural events, supporting local arts, and celebrating diversity, these organizations help foster a sense of pride and identity within their communities. This cultivation of culture enriches the lives of residents and offers visitors a more authentic and engaging experience.

4 Supporting Public Services:

The revenue generated from tourism through public investments provides essential support for public services. These funds help sustain infrastructure improvements, public safety, educational programs and more. They directly benefit the residents and enhance the overall wellness of the destination.

5 Growing the Whole Economy:

Destination promotion drives broader economic growth beyond the travel and hospitality sectors. Visitor spending permeates the entire economy, boosting everything from retail to real estate. This comprehensive economic uplift is pivotal for long-term economic stability and growth.

Further expanding these themes, the following are a selection of destination case studies and research from the 2024 study that adhere to these findings.



Destination promotion is a linchpin for enhancing community vitality. It extends well beyond the sphere of tourism, playing a crucial role in infrastructural enhancement, cultural development, and placemaking of accessible public spaces. The development of public spaces and cultural districts offers places for recreation, reflection, and social interaction, fostering a sense of community and belonging.

Destination promotion is not only about attracting tourists, but also about curating a place where people want to live, work, and play. It is about integrating economic development, cultural richness, and community well-being into a sense of a place. Through collaborative efforts, destination promotion becomes a catalyst for positive change, ensuring a future where the community thrives economically while also preserving its unique character - improving the quality of life for all who call it home.

DESTINATION CASE STUDIES:

LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENT:

The Fort Myers Beach and Shoreline Program (Fort Myers Beach, Florida, USA) is an instrumental initiative for the preservation and enhancement of the local beaches and natural environments, funded through tourism revenue. Since its inception in 1990, the program has successfully allocated over \$190 million towards various projects across the county. These projects focus on beach maintenance, beach renourishment, and the development of beach park facilities. This collaborative initiative involves various governmental levels, from local municipalities to the federal government, ensuring that the benefits reach both visitors and residents. This funding mechanism also means that residents enjoy these services without additional taxation, reinforcing the community's commitment to sustainable tourism and enhancing public spaces. (*Chapter 6*)

CULTURAL ENHANCEMENT:

Cultural vitality often flourishes in the wake of destination promotion. Ottawa Tourism, the destination organization for Ottawa, Canada, recognizes the vital contributions of past and present Indigenous communities and has actively pursued initiatives to empower these communities in authentic, respectful, and meaningful ways. In collaboration with Algonquin College's Indigenous Initiatives department, Ottawa Tourism introduced the Indigenous Tourism Entrepreneurship Training. This program, developed by Indigenous entrepreneurs and experts, ran across two cohorts from 2020 to 2021. The 10-week curriculum provided local Indigenous tourism businesses and entrepreneurs with the necessary skill sets to meet the needs of the growing business community. (*Chapter 3*)



Destination branding is an engine for community transformation. It is not only about picturesque landscapes and attractions but about articulating a narrative that resonates with potential visitors, students, business leaders, and skilled professionals. Through destination promotion, a destination's brand can encourage educational pursuits, foster business growth, and become a magnet for talent.

DESTINATION RESEARCH:

ATTRACTING SKILLED PROFESSIONALS:

A destination's brand can also be tailored to appeal to highly skilled professionals by highlighting attributes such as a thriving job market, quality of life, and an engaged community. In Michigan's Great Lakes Bay Area, various organizations actively work to attract and retain talent. For example, the Midland Business Alliance is engaging the community through several programs such as the MyPros (Midland Young Professionals) group, Alliance scholarships, the POWER UP Women's Leadership Conference, job shadowing with Northwood University's international students, 'Talent Talks' videos that explore local business challenges and solutions, and a promotional video about Midland. The Midland Business Alliance emphasized the crucial role of the Great Lakes Bay Regional Convention and Visitors Bureau in these efforts, noting its contribution to portraying the region attractively to potential new residents. (Chapter 5)

INSPIRING EDUCATIONAL AND OCCUPATIONAL DECISIONS:

Destination promotion and firsthand visitor experiences significantly shape perceptions of a place for purposes beyond tourism, such as business opportunities, living standards, and educational prospects. Research conducted by Longwoods International over two years across 22 destinations has quantified this impact, demonstrating that destination promotion boosts visitor numbers and economic activity in addition to enhancing a destination's image as an ideal place to live, work, retire, start a business, or pursue education.

This research highlights clear differences in perception among those exposed to destination promotion and those who were not. 43% of respondents familiar with the promotion considered the destination an excellent place to start a business, compared to only 26% of those unaware of the promotion, a lift of 17%. Similarly, visitors in the last two years were more likely to see the destination positively across various life decisions, such as retirement, purchasing a vacation home, or advancing their education. This effect balances the broader role of destination promotion in driving not just tourism but overall community vitality and economic development. (Chapter 4)



Destination promotion extends beyond the allure of landscapes and iconic sites; it is a channel for embracing and showcasing a community's underrepresented voices and cultures. By highlighting unique stories and fostering a sense of belonging, destination promotion can be a powerful tool for community spotlighting.

DESTINATION CASE STUDIES:

ELEVATING INDIGENOUS AND UNDERREPRESENTED COMMUNITIES:

Promotion that foregrounds Indigenous and underrepresented experiences enriches a destination's brand with authentic narratives. Visit Seattle is dedicated to celebrating and honoring the Indigenous cultures within the region, emphasizing genuine relationships and cultural respect. Among their key initiatives is the Native American Heritage Guide, a resource developed in print and online formats. This guide provides a comprehensive overview of tribal museums, cultural centers, and notable public sites significant to the local tribal communities. Produced with the input and review of local tribal representatives, it ensures historical accuracy and cultural sensitivity, offering insight into Indigenous peoples' past and present lives. *(Chapter 3)*

ACCESSIBLE ATTRACTIONS:

In 2019, Mesa, Arizona, was designated as the first Autism Certified City in the U.S. by the International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES). This initiative was spearheaded by the destination organization, Visit Mesa. It began with training for its staff and grew to include over 4,000 community members and employees across various sectors. This expansive training ensured widespread education and support for individuals with developmental disabilities. Building on its inclusive initiatives, Visit Mesa adopted the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower program, in which use of sunflower lanyards and bracelets would indicate a wearer may need additional assistance, making it the first U.S. destination to do so. Additionally, partnerships with Aira and Wheel of the World were established to enhance accessibility, providing visual interpretation services and detailed accessibility information about Mesa, improving the travel experience for visitors with diverse needs. *(Chapter 6)*



Revenues from tourism significantly bolster government services and community programs, which directly influence the enhancement of infrastructure that support the logistics which are crucial for attracting further investment. These revenues are essential for funding core government operations, with destination promotion playing a central role. Destination organizations actively advocate for the long-term needs of their communities, contributing to infrastructure improvements that benefit both residents and visitors. Surveys conducted by Longwoods International reveal that residents appreciate how tourism investment helps offset costs that would otherwise fall on them, which highlights the positive impact of visitor spending on local government services. Overall, the strategic use of tourism revenue supports and promotes essential services, as well as community well-being and development.

DESTINATION RESEARCH:

TOURISM-GENERATED TAX REVENUES BOOSTING PUBLIC SERVICES:

Tourism Economics conducted an analysis to understand the economic impacts of tourism across various destinations. The key findings within the study provide significant insights into how visitor spending translates into tourism revenues. On average, \$1 million of visitor spending generates \$191,000 in total revenues. When broken down, 63% of these investments, are represented at the state and local level.

The composition of these state and local investments reveals that 45% comes from sales taxes, 30% from property taxes, and 11% from occupancy taxes. At the federal level, the impact shows that 46% is from social insurance taxes and 41% from personal income taxes. Within the full study, a detailed breakdown highlights the substantial contribution of tourism to both local and national tax revenues, underscoring its role as a catalyst for community vitality and economic development. (*Chapter 6*)

RESIDENT SENTIMENT ON TOURISM'S INVESTMENT:

Resident sentiment towards tourism's investment contributions were demonstrated across different destinations, as analyzed by Longwoods International in 29 recent studies conducted across North America. The research reveals views on how tourism taxation impacts community services and infrastructure.

Moreover, nearly half of the residents acknowledge that without the revenues generated from tourists, they would face higher state and local taxes to support government programs and services. This indicates a recognition of the economic benefits brought by tourism, despite concerns about infrastructure costs. This complex sentiment underscores the ongoing need to balance tourism development with sustainable community investment to maintain public support and infrastructure integrity. The findings show that having a central entity like a destination organization leading with destination management is a must for handling such delicate sentiment balances across communities. (*Chapter 6*)



Destination promotion is a catalyst for economic diversity and resilience, with its benefits rippling through various non-tourism-related industries. From local spending to employment across sectors, tourism's positive impact serves as a substantial economic stabilizer, particularly evident in times of recovery from downturns.

DESTINATION RESEARCH:

TOURISM AS AN ECONOMIC JOBS RECOVERY TOOL:

In our 2014 study, several econometric models were developed to examine the relationship between employment in visitor-related sectors against broader economic indicators such as employment and wages in other sectors. Utilizing a method known as Granger causality tests which assess the deterministic relationships between variables, the 2024 study analyzed panel data from 1990 to 2019 covering over 200 U.S. cities. This data included employment by industry sector and wage levels, with a focus on hotels, restaurants, and recreation sectors as representatives of the visitor-related economy.

The analysis revealed a clear pattern: U.S. cities that increased their market share of visitor employment subsequently saw broader employment growth within their local economies. Specifically, a 10% increase in visitor-related employment, achieved through gaining a greater share of the national visitor employment market, was associated with a 2.5% increase in employment across other sectors within approximately two years. This relationship indicates a robust structural connection between the growth of the visitor sector with the overall economic development in those cities.

Underscoring the role of the visitor economy in stimulating wider economic benefits, highlighting that investments in tourism can yield substantial returns in employment growth across cities.

(Chapter 7)

STIMULATING GROWTH AND CORRELATION TO DESTINATION PROMOTION:

Cities that prioritize destination promotion often demonstrate robust economic growth. This suggests a positive correlation between a destination's visitor economy and its broader economic trajectory. This relationship has been explored through extensive data analysis covering over 200 U.S. cities across three decades, from 1990 to 2019. The data reveals that cities with a higher concentration of visitor-related industries typically experience faster than average job growth.

Tourism Economics assessed the economic impact of the visitor economy by examining the share of jobs within the hospitality and tourism sectors in 2010 and correlating this with total employment growth from 2010 to 2019. The results show a clear positive trend: each 1%-point increase in the share of visitor economy jobs corresponds to total job growth over the next decade that is 3.4% points stronger.

This research not only underscores the correlation between a thriving visitor sector and general economic health, but also indicates spillover effects in other sectors. The evidence from this detailed analysis supports the hypothesis that destination promotion plays a critical role in driving economic vitality, reinforcing the strategic value of investment in the tourism and hospitality industries.

(Chapter 7)

CONCLUSION

Destination promotion is a trusted means for promoting both well-being and prosperity in a community. It is a crucial investment in creating opportunities and elevating the quality of life for all its residents. For destination organizations, the mission goes far beyond filling hotel rooms or restaurant seats or even driving high ROI. These metrics are simply indicators of how well we are achieving our core purpose: using the power of destination promotion to help the community reach its goals.

Destination organizations deploy strategies to build awareness and foster positive perceptions through brand development, management, communication, promotion, marketing, sales, and visitor engagement. Destination organizations are critical centers of our communities, armed with tools, expertise, and networks to deliver comprehensive solutions. Most importantly, they have an unwavering love for their community, fueling their dedication to sustain success.

This study supports how destination promotion is a catalyst for community vitality, highlighting its multifaceted benefits. By drawing visitors, destination promotion provides investment in maintaining top-notch local amenities. It strives to enhance the quality of life for community members, turning destinations into desirable places to live. This continuous investment in destination promotion attracts potential residents and skilled workers, positioning a locale as the ultimate blend of work and play. It acts as a cultural beacon, enabling communities to celebrate their heritage and diversity, while ensuring public services are well-supported for a thriving local economy.

In essence, destination promotion is a cornerstone for building resilient communities and dynamic economies. When a place is promoted thoughtfully, everyone from residents to businesses and visitors stand to gain.

*Additional insights, indicators, and examples can be found in full at destinationsinternational.org/destination-promotion-catalyst-community-vitality. Including the full reports of:

- **Destination Promotion: A Catalyst for Community Vitality, 2024**
- **Destination Promotion: An Engine of Economic Development, 2014**



The Destinations International (DI) Association is the world's largest and most reliable resource for destination organizations. In short, DI educates, equips, and empowers our members to grow the success of their destinations and excel professionally. Membership grants access to a wealth of important industry resources, educational opportunities and exclusive benefits.

We believe that destination organizations positively impact local communities as a dynamic place to visit, live and work. As such, DI elevates tourism by educating, equipping, empowering, and connecting its members to better fulfill their missions and achieve positive results around the world.

Destinations International's Core Pillars



Community:

DI fosters a strong, global community of professionals and promotes the exchange of information, knowledge, and best practices. Our over 800 member organizations and strategic partners from across the globe connect to exchange knowledge and best practices and network with each other to help their individual communities thrive.



Destination Tools:

DI offers a suite of products built on best practices, insights, and research. We work to raise the effectiveness of destination organizations, increase relevancy among the destination's community, raise the level of professionalism through accreditation, and provide actionable best practices and strategies for the sustainable success of destinations.



Professional Development:

We are the definitive resource for professional development within the destination marketing and management industry. We offer ongoing educational opportunities both in person and online and are committed to providing professional development and lifelong learning for our members.



Advocacy & Research:

DI is the collective voice of destination organizations, empowering destinations on issues big and small. We strive to be champions for our members and recognize the importance of keeping our members abreast of the challenges and opportunities presenting themselves in the marketplace. DI educates, equips, and empowers its members to advocate on behalf of their destination organizations and their destination communities. We use our collective voice to elevate and advance the mission, goals, and efforts of destination organizations. DI is constantly expanding industry knowledge, introducing new ideas and developing forward-focused research and relevant data.

