

Cultural Tourism Itinerary Building Blocks

Creating A Michigan Experience Tour

Overview

The Michigan Museums Association (MMA) is helping museums, convention & visitors bureaus, and other tourism organizations develop self-guided, themed tours of Michigan. Once created, MMA and Travel Michigan will promote these tours to tour operators and travel writers, and will post the tours on the Internet.

The following provides an overview for developing a Michigan Experience Tour, the term that MMA has established to describe the tours created under its auspices. The material is organized into two parts: the philosophical underpinnings of Michigan Experience Tours and the practical aspects of composing the tour information. Using this as a guideline, you'll be able to create a tour that will help travelers discover the cultural richness of our state, and that MMA will promote for you.

Philosophy

Themed Tours

MMA seeks to create tours that reveal the special culture, heritage, and characteristics of Michigan. More than simple laundry lists of attractions and tourism offerings, Michigan Experience Tours provide an insight into our state by focusing on a particular theme or story. Storytelling has been a critical means of communication for time immemorial, and Michigan is rich with stories...stories of adventure, perseverance, ambition, creativity, and struggle. Our stories are different than all others – perhaps because of the subject matter (the growth of the auto industry, for example), or just as importantly, because of the nature of our geography, our history, and the people who live/have lived here. Whatever the story, people are a key ingredient – providing the human link between a distant time or place and the world of today. Essentially, people are interested in people.

Self-Guided Tours

At one time, guided tours were extremely popular but in today's hectic world, many people prefer to travel at their own pace. And indeed, what may fascinate one visitor for hours may hold the attention of another for only a few minutes. Recognizing this, and recognizing the difficulty of organizing guided tours, MMA has opted to encourage the development of self-guided tours of the state. Such tours, which suggest a route to follow and attractions to visit, permit the traveler to spend as little or as much time as s/he wishes on any aspect of the tour. The traveler may decide to pursue the entire itinerary or only to engage in one segment of it; either choice is equally valid. MMA's goal is simply to offer accurate and adequate information to provide a quality experience.

Well-Rounded Experiences

Studies have shown that people have varied interests when they travel. Besides visiting attractions, they need to eat, want to shop, and may need a place to stay overnight. Understanding this, Michigan Experience Tours are not one-dimensional, providing information only about museums or cultural attractions. Michigan Experience Tours provide a complete experience, fulfilling people's interests to dine, shop, and stay overnight, if desired.

(more)

Thus, the primary requirements of a Michigan Experience Tour are that:

- **The tour has a theme or focus that tells a story**

For example: A list of all the festivals in a given region is not a themed tour that tells a story. A tour that invites visitors to discover a region's agricultural heritage and includes food-related festivals as a component of that discovery process could be a themed tour.

A roster of automotive museums is not a themed tour; a tour that talks about the spirit of creativity that kindled the development of the auto and directs visitors to museum exhibits highlighting innovative automotive accomplishments could be a themed tour.

- **The tour narrative emphasizes people**

For example: Using the agricultural heritage theme mentioned above, a tour developer might want to include a "U-Pick" farm as a tour component. Rather than simply talking about the farm's acreage and crops, however, the tour developer would want to include information about the people affiliated with the farm – perhaps there are colorful stories about the family that founded the farm or that operate the farm today. If there are several U-Pick farms in the area, the tour developer might want to highlight the one that offers the human connection or story and then simply list the others. In "The Craft Heritage Trails of Western North Carolina," for example, a tour narrative offers the following information about an early 20th century steam train attraction:

Take one of the trails at the Cradle of Forestry and you'll come across a 1915 Climax steam train once used to haul timber from these mountains. Climb into the cab and discover something even more astonishing: Floyd Rose, the eighty-something custodian who once worked in the logging industry. Wednesday through Saturday he educates folks on the particulars of the train (a geared locomotive) and about how things used to be. The train's impressive, but Floyd's the real find.

- **The tour includes information about things to eat, see, and do that relate to the theme as much as possible.**

For example: In its "Local Heroes Great and Small" tour, the Ann Arbor Area Convention & Visitors Bureau introduces visitors to Washtenaw County through the people who have made an impact on the community or the world at large. In choosing a dining facility to include, it was not a hard decision to pick "Zingerman's:"

***Zingerman's:** In 1982 Paul Saginaw and Ari Weinzweig founded a delicatessen. But they didn't want just any old deli! They wanted to sell the kind of food your grandmother used, whether she was Italian, Jewish, or Swedish. Their great selection of cheeses, teas, olive oils, and thousands of other fine foods has made them famous from coast to coast—some even call them the best deli in the Midwest. Zingerman's also founded and strongly supports Food Gatherers, a non-profit organization dedicated to collecting unsold food from restaurants and stores, and delivering it for distribution to the needy. Stop by and discover some of the best corned beef this side of New York City.*

In some cases, however, it may take some creative thinking to discover a link between the theme and a restaurant or shop. For example, in "Words, Words, Words: A Literary Tour of Washtenaw County," the Ann Arbor Area Convention & Visitors Bureau used the following device to link an Ypsilanti restaurant to the tour's theme:

*A few doors away is **Cady's Grill**, where former President Bill Clinton (the subject of many journalists and writers) ate during one of his many visits to southeastern Michigan. The actual chair he sat in is marked with a plaque and gets moved daily so that everyone can have a chance for a Presidential seat.*

It may not always be possible to find a link between an eatery, shop, or lodging and a tour's theme, but Michigan Experience Tours will stand out from others because we will make every effort to forge that connection. Unlike other tours, we'll try to offer our visitors a complete theme experience whenever possible.

Michigan Experience Tours

10 Step Process for Developing Your Tour

1. _____ Identify the theme of the tour
What is the story you're going to tell?
2. _____ Identify the elements to include in the tour
What are the attractions, eateries, shops, and lodgings that help to tell the story?
3. _____ Assemble information for each element to be included in the tour
Talk to attraction, eatery, shop, or lodging representatives as well as local historians, cvb staff and others for stories and visitor information
4. _____ Write draft descriptions for each element of the tour
These brief narratives peak the reader's interest to visit the site
5. _____ Write an introduction to the tour
This lays out the theme of the tour and its general outline
6. _____ Collect photos to accompany the tour
These images will be used to accompany the text in the promotional material and on the Internet
7. _____ Identify at least one destination marketing organization to act as source for visitor information
The organization will be listed as a source for visitor information
8. _____ Develop the tour route
Identify a route to follow that won't cause these self-guided tour-goers to get lost. Try to include scenic options, if possible.
9. _____ Review your tour with MMA's Cultural Tourism Project Director
The Project Director will help with polishing the narrative, exploring possible additions or deletions of entries, reviewing photos, reviewing the tour route, and insuring that the tour complies with MMA's Michigan Experience Tour Participation Criteria
10. _____ Submit completed tour to MMA for placement on the Internet and promotion to tour operators and travel writers
Once your tour is completed and complies with MMA's Tour Participation Criteria, submit it to MMA for review and promotion

Michigan Experience Tours

Guidelines for Preparing the Narrative

The following offers a guide for preparing the narrative for a Michigan Experience Tour.

I. Introduction

This is a brief overview of the tour that lays out the theme in about three or four sentences. It should specify:

- the overall theme or subject of the tour
- the geographic area to be covered
- whether the tour is driving or walking
- distance to be covered or how long the tour might take to complete

II. Source(s) for More Information

Indicate the organization(s) that can be contacted for more information about the tour and the region covered by the tour. This should include at least one destination marketing organization (e.g., convention & visitors bureau, chamber of commerce) that is familiar with the tour and can answer travelers' questions. You might also want to include a historical society, museum, or another organization knowledgeable about the tour and willing to help tour-goers (this offers a great opportunity to encourage callers to visit your own institution!).

For each organization listed, provide:

- Name of Organization
- Address
- Phone
- E-mail
- Website

III. Tour Itinerary

A. Number of Itinerary Components

Michigan Experience tours should include the following elements. A minimum of:

- two cultural attractions (at least one should be a museum)
- one dining establishment
- one shopping establishment
- one lodging establishment

MMA seeks to present tours that convey the richness of Michigan's culture and heritage. Thus, we encourage you to include more than the bare minimum of attractions, shops, eateries, and lodgings. We recommend that your tour include 12 to 15 elements.

B. Selection of Itinerary Components

1. Relationship to Theme

The elements selected for the itinerary (attractions, eateries, shops, lodgings) should all relate to the theme of the tour as much as possible. Thus, in a literary tour of an area, the attractions, eateries, shops, and lodgings should have some literary connection, i.e. the sites are mentioned in literary works, present literary productions, sell books, or maybe are just great places to read books. To think of it another way, consider the tour as if it were a story and the attractions, eateries, shops, and lodgings are all the characters who help to drive the plot along. In its "Words, Words, Words: A Literary Tour of Washtenaw County" tour, the Ann Arbor Area Convention & Visitors Bureau was able to include these facilities:

Shopping:

Hollanders, on the second level of the Kerrytown Shops & Marketplace, holds a treasure trove of materials for anyone who has ever dreamed of writing their own book—or of decorating one. The beautifully arranged shop features a host of blank books that will appeal to every age and every taste – whether for your day-to-day jottings or for the beginnings of the next Great American Novel. Most amazing is the collection of art books, beautifully (and sometimes fantastically) bound and decorated by local artists. These wonderful creations are actually for sale, but anyone can come and look, and get inspiration for their own projects. There’s even a book repair kit for do-it-yourselfers. A word of warning: the store also has a virtually irresistible collection of cards and handmade papers!

Dining:

The Drowsy Parrot: Just on the other side of Michigan Avenue, in another historic building that was once the town library, is a coffee, sandwich, and pastry shop with a wonderful ambiance. Wooden bookshelves line the walls and an upper balcony level with additional tables overlooks all. The great coffee and pastries keep the locals coming, but the coffee shop also attracts out-of-towners from all over, drawn to its memorable location and atmosphere.

Attraction:

Over the years, many distinguished novelists have made Ann Arbor their home. Charles Baxter, author of the acclaimed recent best-seller, ‘The Feast of Love,’ is a professor in the University of Michigan’s English Department. The book is set in Ann Arbor and beautifully evokes the special ambiance of the city. When the author/narrator takes a late-night stroll as *The Feast of Love* begins, his first stop is **Michigan Stadium**, The “Big House” on the corner of Main Street and Stadium Blvd. When it was built in 1927, it was the largest college-owned stadium in the country, and many expansions and renovations have kept it in that number one spot. Unlike Charles Baxter’s character, you can’t enter the stadium in the middle of the night, but it is open for visitors on weekdays from 7:30 am to 3:30 pm; it is closed on weekends.

2. Authenticity

A key principle of cultural tourism is the importance of authenticity. The National Trust for Historic Preservation, a leader in promoting the development of cultural tourism in America, places “focus on authenticity and quality” as the first of its five basic principles in developing cultural tourism programs. MMA supports this philosophy and encourages all tour developers to select elements that provide an authentic picture of your area and theme when creating a Michigan Experience Tour.

3. Protecting What’s Sacred

Before including an element in a tour, consider whether this is a place you wish to share with tourists. Tour developers in a resort community, for example, might know of a wonderful, homey eatery that dovetails with the theme perfectly – but it’s a charming little place that would lose its ambiance if it were overrun with tourists. It’s fine to decide that some places are “for the community” and not to be shared with outsiders.

C. Description of Itinerary Components

1. Content

The description of each itinerary element (attraction, eatery, shop, lodging) should focus on those characteristics that make the element relevant to the tour’s theme. In the literary tour cited above, each element could be described in many different ways, but the tour developer emphasized the Drowsy Parrot’s and Michigan Stadium’s relationship to the literary theme. Similarly, in the “Local Heroes” tour, Border’s Books & Music is described as follows:

*When Tom and Louis Borders opened their first store in the heart of Ann Arbor they were just one of many book stores in this academic community. But the Borders brothers had something more than most. In addition to an advanced inventory control system that streamlined their operation, they specialized in hiring highly knowledgeable staff. The combination of a "serious" bookstore that was also welcoming and friendly proved to be a winner, and today there are over 200 **Border's** superstores in the U.S. alone. Visit the flagship store in downtown Ann Arbor, just a block away from the original location, browse as long as you like, have a coffee in the café, and discover the real Ann Arbor ambiance!*

Note that the description begins with Tom and Louis Borders, the “heroes” of this book empire. In the literary tour, the Common Grill restaurant has this description:

*People drive from Ann Arbor to Chelsea just to lunch at Craig Common's landmark restaurant, the **Common Grill** (where the actor and Chelsea native Jeff Daniels can often be found dining). And now, Chelsea's most famous restaurant owner has published his own cookbook, *The Common Grill Cookbook*. Published in November 2000, it may not be great literature, but it certainly provides great eating. One reviewer said, "This is a lovely book peppered with beautiful photos and packed with recipes that are quite straightforward, comprehensible and various. Don't forget to look down at the very bottom of the pages—many recipes have wine selections or a quick bit of information included down there." The cookbook is widely available in bookstores.*

Be sure for each attraction, eatery, shop, and lodging listing that the following information is provided:

- address
- telephone number
- hours of operation (if appropriate)
- web site

This information can be simply listed as follows:

***Haab's**, a fixture in downtown Ypsilanti, has been serving steaks and fresh seafood in the same spot for 66 years; the building dates from 1850. Bread baked from scratch, homemade mayonnaise, soup, and pies keep the customers coming in. But once a year, on the restaurant's anniversary, crowds stand in line all day to purchase a meal at 1934 prices.*

*18 West Michigan Avenue, Ypsilanti, 734-483-8200
Sun-Th, 11 am - 9 pm, F-Sat, 11 am - 10 pm*

2. Main Listings vs. Sidebar Listings

Those elements that directly relate to the tour's theme should appear as main listings in the tour. Other elements – shops, eateries, or lodgings – that don't help move the story along (to continue the metaphor of considering the elements as characters in a story) can appear as sidebar listings. These listings are shorter and offer the reader useful information that helps to satisfy visitor needs of eating, shopping, and finding overnight accommodations. For example, in the “Local Heroes” tour, some sidebar listings include:

***Weber's** is a venerable restaurant on the western edge of town that's still a local favorite. Founded in 1937 and still run by the Weber family, it specializes in steak, and prime rib, and fresh fish, with a large wine list—and wonderful desserts.*

*For something different, try the **Parish House Inn B&B**, in an elegant 1893 Victorian Queen Anne house in Ypsilanti's Historic District. Originally the parsonage for the First Congregational Church on North Adams Street, the house was moved to its present location overlooking the Huron River and totally restored in 1987. Both the public rooms and the nine guest rooms feature Victorian flavor*

and color, with era-styled wallpaper and period antique furnishings. Wonderful breakfasts prepared by owner Chris Mason and treats like the "bottomless" cookie jar make your stay even more special.

A sidebar is a great place to list activities/events that relate to the tour's theme but are only available seasonally or on a limited basis. For example, the Ann Arbor Convention & Visitors Bureau literary tour offers information about upcoming concerts in a sidebar listing:

*The **University Musical Society**, one of the nation's top presenters of the performing arts, will celebrate its 123rd season with five concerts that marry music and live readings to recreate the worlds and ideas of authors. One of these performances, "From the Diary of Sally Hemings," features original work commissioned by the University Musical Society. For more information or to purchase tickets, contact the University Musical Society at 734/764-2538 or 800/221-1229; or visit the UMS website, www.ums.org.*

January 26, 2002 -- 8:00pm

Marcel Proust's Paris

*Conceived and directed by Sarah Rothenberg, Da Camera of Houston
Performed by American String Quartet and William Sharp, baritone
The evening combines readings of Marcel Proust, a prolific French author whose massive novel "Remembrance of Things Past" is a fascinating account of French culture and political life in the decades leading up to WWI, with contemporaneous music by France's leading composers.*

3. Length of Description

The itinerary element descriptions need not be long. Remember, readers are mostly likely seeking information for leisure activities, researching academic treatises. We simply want to provide enough information to peak the reader's interest – once the reader is on site, s/he can obtain more detailed information. Descriptions for the attractions that most directly support the tour's theme (main listings) should run between five and eight sentences. Descriptions for other elements (sidebar listings) can run from two to four sentences.

4. Narrative Style

The tone of your narrative should be friendly and inviting. We want to extend a warm welcome to our potential visitors and kindle their interest in coming to learn more about our state's great resources. Remember to use the active voice, evocative words, and don't forget to include "insider" hints – people love to feel that they have the inside scoop on things. For example, the Zingerman's delicatessen description warns: *"But be careful when you order – one sandwich is usually plenty for two hungry people!"*