

GEOTOURISM: SUSTAINING & ENHANCING A DESTINATION'S SENSE OF PLACE



TELE-WORKSHOP SPOTLIGHT SPEAKER



Cheryl M. Hargrove

Associate Director
Center for Sustainable Destinations
National Geographic Society
1145 17th St. NW
Washington, D.C. 20036
Main: 202-828-8045
Direct: 202-828-8062
E-mail: sustourism@ngs.org
www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/sustainable

Speaker Profile:

Recognized as the U.S. National Trust for Historic Preservation's first heritage tourism director, Cheryl Hargrove has more than 30 years of experience in the travel and tourism industry. For the past decade, she served as president of The HTC Group, a cultural heritage tourism management and marketing consultancy. She is a member of the Society of American Travel Writers, former chair of the Travel Industry Association of America's Communications Committee and lifetime member of the International Association of Business Communicators. She joined National Geographic in December 2006. As the Associate Director of the Center for Sustainable Destinations at the National Geographic Society, Cheryl's duties include developing and marketing tools that educate and expand the geotourism community, such as MapGuides and training materials.

GEOTOURISM PROMOTES COMMUNITY-BASED DESTINATION STEWARDSHIP

Geotourism helps local organizations and stakeholders of tourist destinations to identify, sustain, develop and market their authentic assets with a singular voice and a long-term view. Developed at the National Geographic Society Center for Sustainable Destinations, geotourism defines the principles of this community-based approach to destination stewardship and offers strategies to help visitors and residents understand and preserve what makes their places special.

Floyd Thompson, Program Lead for Tourism at the USDA Forest Service, joined the call and introduced the featured speaker, Cheryl Hargrove. Floyd said, "This has a definite byway connection. I see tremendous value for byway organizations and the corridor planning process. It offers a tremendous template for viewing the whole 'place.' The byway concept fits within the umbrella framework of geotourism."

Cheryl directed listeners to view the online presentation of "The Geotourism Strategy: An Opportunity for Byways" during the Tele-Workshop. (This PowerPoint Presentation will remain available through the America's Byways Resource Center; please call for current access instructions.)

The mission of the Center for Sustainable Destinations is to increase knowledge about sustainable tourism and destination stewardship, especially by employing the geotourism approach.

Cheryl pointed out how the geographical character of a place as defined by geotourism is remarkably similar to nationally designated byways' intrinsic qualities and grassroots concerns. The strategy also ensures that local residents benefit from tourism and preservation.

An integrated approach with byways and geotourism offers a significant possibility of

positive impact for destinations across America. She explained that geotourism sees the potential for a "virtuous circle" that moves from place-based tourism toward community benefit and around to encouraging visitors to protect and celebrate the place.

Byway and corridor management plans can link into the virtuous circle, building destination stewardship through geotourism principles.

GEOTOURISM:

Tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place—its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage and the well being of residents

Before moving into the principles, Cheryl shared insights about travelers attracted to geotourism. According to the Travel Industry Association of America (TIA) and National Geographic Traveler research, about 154 million people in the U.S. had traveled in the past three years looking for positive experiences through place-based activities that don't damage the environment. Some 59 percent of those travelers see protection or preservation as important to their travel experience. They also see it as education and a part of bringing world peace and understanding.

"This audience is affluent, educated and savvy about traveling," Cheryl said. She also explained that younger travelers are increasingly interested in geotourism, suggesting that the market includes baby boomers and generations into the future.

(continued inside)

SIGNING THE GEOTOURISM CHARTER

Cheryl explained that after the National Geographic Society learned more about geotourists, the next step was to identify what they value. Integrity of place is a cornerstone, as well as international codes of tourism. The Geotourism Charter adopted these ideas, and invites countries, States, and communities to sign the charter in a declaration of their intention to apply geotourism principles to their activities. Norway and States such as Arizona and Sonora, Mexico have signed the Geotourism Charter.

As part of the Geotourism Charter, a destination establishes a Geotourism Stewardship Council based on local representation from transportation services, government, tourism, business, preservation, and other stakeholders.

“You already have representative groups that are parallel to this in your byway organizations,” Cheryl said. “We applaud your efforts and appreciate them.”

GEOTOURISM STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL INCLUDES REPRESENTATION FOR:

- historic preservation
- nature and ecotourism
- transportation
- traditional arts
- farm/restaurant programs
- beautification
- urban renewal
- local government
- tourism and local business expertise
- tourism promotion
- other characteristics of the place

Byway organizations, of course, fit here, too.

The charter identifies a set of 13 principles to promote sustainable tourism and enlightened destination stewardship. These principles fall within four broad steps:

1. Identifying Geotourism Assets
2. Sustaining Geotourism Assets
3. Developing Geotourism Assets
4. Marketing Geotourism Assets

Cheryl used the online presentation to highlight each of the 13 principles. She drew

THE GEOTOURISM CHARTER GUIDING PRINCIPLES

PRINCIPLE 1: Value integrity of place.

PRINCIPLE 2: Adhere to international codes.

PRINCIPLE 3: Involve the community.

PRINCIPLE 4: Determine community benefit.

PRINCIPLE 5: Ensure tourist satisfaction.

PRINCIPLE 6: Conserve resources.

PRINCIPLE 7: Protect and enhance destination appeal.

PRINCIPLE 8: Conduct appropriate planning.

PRINCIPLE 9: Use land wisely.

PRINCIPLE 10: Foster product diversity.

PRINCIPLE 11: Provide interactive interpretation.

PRINCIPLE 12: Market selectively.

PRINCIPLE 13: Evaluate.

many parallels to the byway community. Identifying geotourism assets resembles the process byway organizations use to complete their nominations for designation. The FHWA emphasis on community involvement in the designation application also fits with the geotourism focus on giving back to the people who live in the tourism area. Cheryl explained that tourism should produce some sort of value to the residents—economic or social. Benefits can include increased community pride or the ability to ensure that the place is managed well or protected. She also noted the importance of visitor satisfaction. Many byway groups have begun to identify ways to ensure authentic visitor experiences, too.

The partnership approach that has proven effective for byways is also significant in the geotourism strategy. The USDA Forest Service joined the Center for Sustainable Destinations and other partners to create the “Crown of the Continent” geotourism model, celebrating the Rocky Mountains connecting Montana and Canada. The project included the Mountain Scenic Loop in Montana and its byway organization (visit the Center for Sustainable Destinations website to see samples from projects). The USDA Forest Service has also signed a Memorandum of Understanding to cooperate among Federal agencies in promoting the geotourism concept.

PLAN FOR QUALITY, NOT QUANTITY

Geotourism seeks to foster destination appreciation and stewardship in all tourists. Specifically, it targets visitors who value local assets and will invest time and money in the destination to help sustain its special qualities.

Cheryl explained that research demonstrates that this audience already exists, and its members are defined as “geotourists.” They want to be involved in local activities and will spend money accordingly. Interactive interpretation that brings visitors in contact with local residents shows the most potential for motivating visitors to financially help preserve the destination’s resources.

To encourage visitors to find geotourism destinations, the National Geographic Society works with the local Geotourism Stewardship Councils (GSCs) to implement the geotourism strategy. A key interpretive and marketing tool is the Geotourism MapGuide. The GSC helps communities, organizations, institutions and individuals submit content for the education-based maps. Cheryl suggested that byway organizations visit the Center’s website and download tools from there (see Resources).

“What you’re doing is important work that expands the geotourism movement and fosters destination stewardship,” Cheryl said.

Byways can tap into the power of geotourism, a strategy very similar to the core concept of the National Scenic Byways Program. Patricia McNally, Marketing and Communications Director for the NSBP, noted the overlapping interests, approaches, and values between America’s Byways® and the Geotourism Charter. She joined Floyd in encouraging byways to explore this exciting opportunity to unite culture, nature, preservation and economics for long-term sustainability. ★

RESULTS FROM THE GEOTOURISM STUDY

The 2002 study commissioned by National Geographic Traveler in partnership with Travel Industry Association of America focused on the 154 million Americans who had traveled in the previous three years. Of these, at least 55.1 million can be classified as geotourists who look for unique and culturally authentic travel experiences that protect and preserve the ecological and cultural environment.

Within the geotourism group, three markets share similar income, amount of travel and strong inclinations toward values related to environmental sustainability:

- **Geo-savvys** (16.3 million travelers) are young, well-educated, and environmentally aware travelers.

- **Urban Sophisticates** (21.2 million travelers) are the most affluent travelers with strong preferences for the cultural and social aspects of travel.
- **Good Citizens** (17.6 million travelers), while older and less sophisticated, are socially conscious travelers.

Other groups identified included three markets with similar income and travel behaviors to the geotourists, yet vary in age, lifestyles, and attitudes.

- **Traditionals** (16.1 million travelers)
- **Wishful Thinkers** (the largest group at 22.3 million)
- **Apathetics** (19.9 million travelers)

The final two segments have extreme attitudes and travel behaviors, therefore very low potential for geotourism.

- **Outdoor Sportsmen** (21.0 million travelers)
- **Self-Indulgents** (19.9 million travelers)

For more information about the study, please contact the Center for Sustainable Destinations at 202-828-8044.

Q&A

Q. Do you have suggestions for capturing data?

A. Geotourism is an exciting concept for the byway community. Beyond marketing, you're trying to sustain and enhance the local community. The emphasis on local benefits suggests this strategy will provide a broad framework for studying the impact of quality, sustainable economic development. As we move forward, the evaluation is going to be important. We're hoping to be able to provide a replicable model for economic studies. The Crown of the Continent project might be a good starting point for a byway looking to bring geotourism into your corridor management plan.

Q. We're working on building and organizing tours that reach several byways in a region. We're looking at virtual geocaches to drive traffic to different destinations.

A. Geocaching is very popular with the younger travelers around the world who are familiar with using the global positioning system (GPS). They use GPS to follow clues like a scavenger hunt. We'd

like more game leaders to be careful with how and where they bury their caches so they don't damage special places. However, a "virtual" cache for your byways is an interesting idea! It could be a very educational and interactive approach to emphasizing geotourism's stewardship aspect. Interactive interpretation is important to geotourism.

Q. "Enviro-tourism" or "ecotourism" isn't helpful to our byway organization. The local residents bristle at those "green" terms. I think "geotourism" sounds like it's easier to sell.

A. Geotourism is really about celebrating 'place,' and the term reflects that essential element. Aspects of ecotourism, such as environmentally friendly activities or preservation, are important, too. But you're right: businesses and local residents do seem more open to learning about the benefits of geotourism because it celebrates their 'place' and emphasizes how visitors can give back to the destination in some way.

RESOURCES

National Geographic Society's Center for Sustainable Destinations

www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/sustainable

"The Geotourism Strategy: An Opportunity for Byways" Tele-Workshop PowerPoint

Please call the America's Byways Resource Center for current access instructions.

Also contact:

Floyd Thompson, III, NRPA, ASLA

National Tourism & Byways Program Leader
Recreation and Heritage Resources

USDA Forest Service
201 4th Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20024
Phone: 202-205-1423
Fax: 202-205-1145
E-mail: fthompson02@fs.fed.us
www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/tourism



America's Byways Resource Center

provides information, connections and expertise that help build better byways. State coordinators, local groups, volunteers and organizations with ties to nationally designated scenic Byways look to us for hands-on assistance in planning, preserving, promoting and managing scenic byways.

Please visit www.bywaysonline.org for
Tele-Workshop Fact Sheet archives.

America's Byways Resource Center
394 Lake Avenue South, Suite 600
Duluth, Minnesota 55802
Tel: 218-625-3469
Fax: 218-625-3333
866-974-6403
www.bywaysonline.org