TOURISM: GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS

A Paper presented at the
62nd TOURISM CONFERENCE OF THE EAST MICHIGAN
TOURIST ASSOCIATION
October 19, 1972
Saginaw, Michigan

I genuinely appreciate being invited back to Michigan and to the
East Michigan Tourist Association's annual conference. The seven
years since meeting with you have witnessed many changes in tourist
development and for the next few minutes I would like to discuss both
positive and negative aspects that I believe are important today.

*Seven years ago, I used this slide in my talk to you to illustrate
the main ways that tourism is beneficial to a community. (Increased
business, increased tax base, new business, and employment and income.)
These are just as valid today. However, they overlook two very impor-
tant aspects if we are interested in total tourism. To these should be
added impact upon the environment and satisfactions of users. Because
this is an age of consumerism and the environment, why cannot the tour-
ist industry take the lead in self-analysis instead of waiting for
innovation to be forced upon them by some higher legal authority?

Everywhere I go I find both good news and bad news about tourism
development. *For example, the canals and the beautiful Dutch architec-
ture, especially the towers, provide the main touristic appeal of
Amsterdam. *Yet, the trash from the many residents and visitors along
these canals creates problems for the visitor. A unique double-lock
and flushing system has been built to help solve the problem.

It is good news that historic sites are becoming more and more popu-
lar with tourists. *From the time the Roman legions first settled along
the Danube until relatively recent times, Vienna, particularly this baroque
palace, was the seat of all European power and culture. *Because of this,
thousands of tourists visit Vienna but are having increasing traffic and
parking problems, just like everywhere else. Here it is bad news because
of the incongruity of images introduced—the ancient and the modern. *The
ancient city of Dubrovnik, Yugoslavia, this year is celebrating its 1000th
anniversary. *However, it may not have its rich appeal for long if
motels, gas stations and car rentals take over the visual corridor along
the main entrance roads to the city.

*I find it good news that other nations are picking up the conserva-
tion ethic and are establishing national parks, such as the Canaima
National Park, Venezuela, shown here. However, on a planning mission
there, it took me 10 days of prodding to get the National Park people to
meet with the Tourism agency. It was a first. *And, it was at this
meeting that the park people were told that the tourism agency was rebuild-
ing the airport to accept jet planes. The park service knew nothing about
what was going on in their own park. This is an extreme case but I wonder
how well we are communicating between tourism and parks in this country.

*Back in America, one of our greatest natural scenic assets, Niagara
Falls, has been good news to millions of tourists since before my generation. However, it may not be long that you will be unable to photograph the falls in their natural setting because so many distracting observation towers are being built.

For the next few minutes, I would like to discuss each of several important tourism components from an environmental and a user point of view. First, let's talk about one of the most critical aspects of tourism: transportation.

*For example, it seems to me that we have made incredible technological progress in air transport since I saw Lindberg on tour with his Spirit of St. Louis in 1927. Yet, anyone who travels by air can cite a great many obstacles that make air travel appear ludicrous at times. On my recent trip to Europe, I spent as much time arguing about plane cancellations, catching up with rerouting of flights, tracking down lost baggage, pursuing unnecessary red tape and waiting at airports as I did in the air. (26:20 hours to get there; 14:12 hours on ground) It seems that no one is concerned about the traveler after he steps off a plane.

*It is good news that we are building some magnificent scenic drives in this country, such as this beautiful drive on Mt. Desert Island, Maine. Yet the majority of the roadides that both business and government provide for travelers function very badly for all. I am not convinced that the clutter of illegible signs is either good business or good leisure travel.

*In recent years, we have demonstrated great engineering advances in highway building. A highway bridge that in the 30's was a major accomplishment is now being replicated monthly by the hundreds across the country. And yet, today, it takes longer to get to work than it did in 1900. Sometimes, I think that tourists today have to work as hard as the carriage travelers on the Grand Tour of Europe in 1700.

*Now let's turn to the infrastructure—services and facilities that cater to the resorers and tourist. In my lifetime I have observed a dramatic improvement in travel accommodations and services throughout the country. I can remember when E. Tawa advertised oil heat and innerspring mattresses in their cabins. However today, it is bad news for the tourist to find this kind of enterprise (a dirty shack for a restaurant) attempting to provide him service.

*Today, we are developing some excellent totally-planned resort complexes, such as at Aspen, Colorado. But, every new establishment is bad news for the older established resort, such as Poland Spring, shown here—finally quit after many years of excellent resort business. It appears that neither new management nor remodeling could save it.

*Many motels today are far superior to our most wishful thinking years ago. And yet, I found bad news this summer in a 6000-mile tour through eastern United States. I found many of the same problems we dealt with 20 years ago: fumbled reservations, dirty rooms, dirty bathrooms, filthy service station restrooms, bad beds, and impossible temperature control in rooms. No wonder that some close down.
How about the attractions? Few countries can boast as much magnificent scenery as we have, particularly in our parks. In my recent seminar there, the people of Yugoslavia couldn't believe that here in a capitalist nation we had so many government-owned reserves for leisure use. However, we have allowed certain uses of our parks to deteriorate the very resource we came to see. Now, almost 20 years too late, we are beginning to recognize that something happens to a forest when we fill it with sewer lines, water lines, automobiles and untidy campers.

For a great many people, canoeing on the Au Sable has meant a very rewarding personal experience—especially on a warm, sunny day in the fall. However, when you see more canoes than Au Sable, what is the quality of the experience?

Disneyland and Disneyworld were the first major theme park attractions to prove that business can be attractive, enjoyable and maintained at a very high level. However, we are finding it bad news on the Texas Gulf Coast that automobiles, people, and trash are all mixed up together.

Now let's turn to what is happening in our information and our direction systems. Advertisers, photographers, artists and printers are now able to do a magnificent job with advertising literature. And yet it may be bad news if we really found out what literature thousands of tourists (like these) really use and how much they believe in it. Your own Executive Vice President is a leader in investigating the quality of tourism literature.

Designers and builders of signs are able to create some works of art as well as identifying labels. And yet, most of our signs are bad news for the traveler. Studies show that too many signs and too-cluttered a mass of signs defeat all identification completely.

Many states are adding welcome stations for the purpose of guiding tourists. Many of these provide clean toilet facilities and a pleasant place to rest. However, this summer we found that every one we used provided such incomplete or inaccurate information that it was impossible to follow—and I believe I am a little better advised traveler than the average. One set of directions by state employees brought us a mile away from our intended destination in downtown Philadelphia.

Of course, I do not need to remind you about the good and bad aspects of the tourists, themselves. But, I would like to ask, how much are we studying people as vacationists and travelers to try to better understand them? Most people are orderly and tidy, especially when orderly and tidy facilities are offered to them. Some, however, are no respecters of property and should be denied the use of facilities if they cannot control their actions, such as throwing picnic tables and waste containers into the park stream.

Most people recognize and accept traditional park policies and philosophies. They realize that their tax moneys are used for certain recreational purposes. However, today, parks are being taken over by other functions and the traditional functions are being tested. Perhaps we need a redefinition of park so that all understand—or, we need new kinds of parks for new functions.
*Now, I have not come to provide solutions to all these problems. There is no easy answer. And, I know that you and your organization are already working toward the solution of many of these. The message I am trying to present is that of total tourism awareness and the need for more joint study and more joint action by all segments of tourism. Tourism is probably the most complicated of all human activities—and yet we are devoting very little energy or money toward understanding it. How many tourism researchers do you have in Michigan?

*Let's compare with another industry—agriculture. It took many scientists and engineers many years to do what has been done to so dramatically improve agriculture. We are now better fed and the land is no longer as abused because of the high level of technology and practice of agriculture in this country. In Texas, we now have about 500 agricultural scientists, engineers, and other researchers at our university alone—and about an equivalent of two people working on tourism. And we are more fortunate than most states. This is not a plea for universities—it is a plea for better research throughout all aspects of tourism. It's my opinion that for too long we have pursued profit-making only from the internal operation practices of each business. Now, we must be as concerned over research of user satisfactions and land assets as we are rewards to ownership and management.

*If we were to study tourism, I believe we would discover that there is a functional system and the better we understand the components and their interrelatedness, the better for everyone. These five elements deserve much greater study by all of us if we are to manage tourism properly: people, transportation, attractions, services-facilities, and information-direction.

*If we were to research tourism I believe we would find that we could identify tourism regions and plan them according to resources and people's needs. *In order to plan a region for tourism I have found it convenient to break it down into three components: the first could be called Community-Attraction Complexes. These units contain all the things to see and do as well as the supporting businesses and services. The linkage between attractions and communities is important. The second would be the connecting links—the visual corridors as well as the functional transportation systems. Then, the remaining portions, called the Non-attraction hinterland would be the remainder. I wonder if you have looked at Michigan this way.

*Have you studied your community for its tourism potential? Within a given radius, you could identify its assets and liabilities, both at present and for future development. *Then, you could plan toward building attraction clusters upon this base, as shown here in orange. You would need to know much about your relationship to markets as well as the resource potential.

*This diagram (attractions shown as central; services and facilities, related) is only to remind us that the payoff comes only if people are lured to attractions. Therefore, it seems important to me to know what new attractions might be possible in your area. Let me summarize some key points in tourism development as I see them today:
1. Tourism-Recreation depends on attractions
2. Trends are toward large complexes
3. Attractions require cities, transportation-access
4. Distance is an important factor—distance between attractions and markets.
Let's look at these four points more closely. First, let me use Texas as an example of the nature of attractions.

*My image of Texas attractions was about like this: dry land, cowboys, and perhaps a few oil wells. These can be found, particularly in west Texas. *But, in addition, I find pine forests, sandy beaches, (Texas has the greatest number of boat owners in the U.S.) *beautiful blue bonnets in the fields and along roadsides in Spring, *and an abundance of wildflowers that make it one of the most colorful landscapes in the country. *And, of course, there are about 1000 miles of seashore on the Gulf of Mexico. *But, of equal importance to these resource assets are the ways in which resources are packaged for visitors. A usually untidy and very undesirable waterfront operation has been converted into a real tourist asset with some care and colorful plantings around these shrimpboat docks. *These magnificent T-heads and the beautiful seashore boulevard provide Corpus Christi with one of the finest waterfronts in the world. But, it has taken years of planning and action by many decision-makers and designers working together.

*Regarding large attraction complexes, let me describe a very successful one. It is Mission Bay Park, a 4,000-acre area of converted tide lands in San Diego, now owned by the city park department. *About 2,000 acres is now recreational water, created by the Corps of Engineers. *Here you see it in the process of being redeveloped for tourism-recreation. *The policies call for 75% of the frontage to be in public use: beaches, marinas, open space. *A promenade runs along the entire length of the waterfront. *However, 25% of the land is leased to private enterprise for hotels, restaurants, and shops. The leases return about $600,000 a year to the Parks Department—an amount equal to their operating costs. Design controls keep the area in esthetic harmony and yet allow individuality. This is an excellent example of team work in environmental development.

*Let me take you to another example of well-thought-out planning and development of a large complex. On the tip of Hilton Head Island in southern South Carolina is located Sea Pines Plantation. You may know of Hilton Head Golf Course—Heritage Golf Classic, next month. Here is a portion of Harbortown—a small village and even a lighthouse—built where there was nothing but marsh grass before. *The entire village was created—was all of this magnificent resort—but in a very special way. The owners are extremely sensitive to both the environment and the need of the visitors. Every tree has been kept and others are being added. *By careful design, using some of the best talent in the country, they are making money from vacation homes and recreation at the same time that they protect and even enhance the environment. *In spite of the fact that already hundreds of people have vacation homes here not one has been built directly on the beach. This is designing and developing with a great intestinal fortitude. They do not want to spoil the attracting forces inherent in their resources. *The beach is entirely unobstructed and the use of vehicles is prohibited. *At only one place is there a beach structure—one available to all the guests. *All natural bayous have been protected and here you see a portion of one golf course. An area has been set aside as a nature preserve and is marked with trails similar to the National Parks. *A concentrated and supervised playground is available to all guests. *And there is even an organic farm for those who want to play at gardening as a pasttime. *The controls are so rigid that any owner who damages the trees is fined $1000 per tree.
I believe that you have potential for attraction complexes such as these. It can be done if you are willing to obtain the right help, be patient, and develop your markets. Furthermore, I think you have potential for attraction complexes based upon your past history. As I recall my Michigan history, the Saginaw Valley, as well as several locations throughout Michigan, was very important to the timber industry. Why not develop a major complex that could be appealing to people from all over the country?

A few minutes ago, I mentioned that cities were important. In terms of tourism, they may be just as important to you as your woods and waters. I wonder how much you have studied your Michigan cities to improve their tourism functions. Cities perform several very important functions. They are travel destinations. Here the traveler will most likely find his best accommodations and services. Here, he is likely to find many of the attractions he seeks, such as entertainment and visiting historic sites. Cities also serve as transportation nodes. All our travel systems are set up to an inter-city basis. Therefore, cities become the hubs of connecting links to all outlying attractions. (This is contrary to the old system when anywhere on any highway had almost equal potential.)

For highway transportation, have we looked at the several levels, from expressways to scenic trails and studied their different design needs?

A major trend today is packaged tours. As the public becomes more and more disenchanted with attempting to put together their own packages, they are increasingly willing to delegate the task to someone else.

Internationally, cruises are booming. Right now, 12 new or refitted ships are joining 90 others from US ports for resort-type cruising in the Caribbean, Pacific, Mediterranean, and other areas. Perhaps by using an entirely new concept for visiting port attractions, this phase of resorting on the Great Lakes can be revived. The Pacific Northwest is already heavily dependent upon its ships for commuter and tourist travel. Ships are now relieving the congested traffic on the Golden Gate Bridge across San Francisco Bay.

The impact of distance is constantly changing. This sounds like a contradiction. The reason lies in the factors of time and cost. For example, Hawaii is almost equally accessible today from anywhere in continental United States. When jets first started going to Hawaii, over half of their tourists came from Los Angeles county alone. Now this county represents less than 1/4 of their business. Right today, I can get a round trip ticket from Dallas to Hawaii that includes 6 free nights in a fine hotel for $300. A round trip flight from Houston to Mexico City is just over $100. As many of you know, the old tedious and kinked highways that took days to get through Kentucky, Tennessee, and Georgia now are replaced by expressways that require much less time.

With this Fall scene of East Michigan, that I took back in the 40's, let me summarize what I have been discussing: I still do not question the fact that profitability is critical to successful tourism. Nor do I question that profitability is related to volume of business and costs of doing business. Those of you in business have every right to be interested in more customers, less taxes, and less labor costs. However, I am convinced that today we must add a few other factors to our formula for profitability.
1.) Profitmaking is related to your regional image. How do you rate as compared to E. Kentucky, E. Pennsylvania, E. Florida?

2.) Profitmaking is related to the quality and capacity of your service centers. How well do your cities serve the tourists?

3.) Profitmaking is related to the quality and capacity of your attractions. How well can you compete with the lures of other areas?

4.) Profitmaking is related to the quality of satisfactions obtained by visitors. Even the best and most powerful advertising still depends upon satisfied customers.

5.) Profitmaking is related to your total environmental ethic. Are we husbanding our resources for long-range protection as well as short-range gain?

I know of no other field today that is more exciting, more challenging or more worthwhile than that of tourism. Working together, I am convinced that we are able to make it better. It is a real pleasure to be back in Michigan again.

Clare A. Gunn, Ph.D.
Professor of Tourism-Recreation Development
Recreation and Parks Department
Texas A&M University, College Station