

First
Impressions...
For Heritage
Tourism Sites

A program for
community improvement

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Things you should know.....

Purpose:

The original version of First Impressions was intended to help a community learn about existing strengths and weaknesses as seen through the eyes of the first time visitor. This revised version of the instrument can be used to gain the same insights for a region but focuses on the historic tourism resources of the region.

Your Group:

Ideally 3-6 people should comprise a team for the visit. Plan to make the visit together as a group (car pool). It makes for a more enjoyable experience and helps to ensure a better end result as well.

Try for diversity if possible. Work for a mix of men/women, business people/residents, young/old, educators, political leaders, etc.

Remember...there are no "experts". Each person's opinion is valid and important. You may want to get together a day in advance to review the manual, ask questions, etc.

The Visit:

Due to the distances and the size of the heritage corridors, an extended trip will be necessary. Like most visitors, you will not likely have time to visit the entire region. Request written materials from the heritage tourism coordinator...Remember, its still early, promotional materials may not specifically refer to the heritage tourism regions. You will be requested to plan a trip based on the materials you receive. By splitting up, you may be able to cover more attractions. Develop a story to explain your visit. Decide who will drive first and who will visit the various attractions, offices, and sites (more than one team can visit, but make sure to cover as much of the region as you can) You get to be an actor for the day. ("I'm looking for some property in the area", "I'm interviewing for a job in a neighboring community", "Just traveling through and decided to explore-looking for a reason to vacation here next summer", etc.)

Do this in silence...take one quick pass through each town you visit, stop along side the road and write down your "five minute impression".

Go back into each town, split into your teams and set a time to meet to exchange driving/walking responsibilities. Note: Have lunch in different restaurants if possible.

Tips:

1. Take a pocket notepad for each person (writing in the manual is too conspicuous).
2. Take notes...take notes...take notes or it will all turn into mush! The driver should stop frequently for note taking. Because you will likely visit several communities, be sure to reference your comments by the community you are discussing!
3. Ask for directions, places to eat, information on towns, etc. Send letter to Chamber for information and see how they respond.
4. Someone may want to take a camera along to document particular points. Send the photos back with the final report (and keep copies that show ideas you want your own community to know about).
5. Look for positives as well as problems... we need to know what we're doing RIGHT, too.
6. There is no wrong way to do this, remember, two people may see the same thing and react differently - that's OK.

7. Have Fun!

Setting Up the Exchange:

Contact Sharon Folcey and inform only her of your intended visitation date. Select a contact person (The local project managers?). This person will be the person responsible for making visitation arrangements, collecting notes from the exchange group, and typing and mailing the final report. They may also be able to go with you as part of your team. If you choose to stay multiple nights, consider staying at different lodging establishments.

The Report

Use the manual to write the report (need not be typed but write legibly). Use descriptive sentences and give examples and suggestions. "Yes" or "No" answers don't do a lot of good (i.e. there was no Chamber Office but some people said there was a "civic" club. No one seemed to know who the president was).

Do this within 3 - 4 days and return to your local contact person.

Contact Person:

When you have all the reports, type up the information in a single composite report. Add a short cover letter that describes:

- a. Profile of team
- b. Weather during visit
- c. Date of visit and time spent
- d. General summary comment on visit and impression of the region. Please make a special note of commenting on why you visited the communities/sites that you selected.
- e. Thank them for doing an exchange and include your name and phone number.

Add standard report cover and mail to Sharon Folcey (Division of Tourism, Heritage Tourism Coordinator, Department of Development, P.O. Box 7970, Madison WI 53701). You will not receive your report from Sharon until both sites have mailed copies of the final report!

Their Report on You:

As soon as you receive it (but not before you have sent the report on their community) you should make copies and distribute them in the following order:

1. Project Manager
2. Heritage Tourism Steering Committee
3. Local tourism and historical societies
4. City/Village officials in the region
5. Media
6. General Public

As you approach a community in the region.....

I. What was my perception before visiting? What did I expect?

II. The "five minute" impression:

Take one drive through each community without stopping as if you were simply driving through the community. As you exit a community, pull over to the side of the road and write down what you felt about the town with only this quick look. Do this in silence, don't talk with the others in your group for this part. In which towns could you quickly sense the historic significance of the community?

As you "drive" around a town:

You now divide into your teams: one team will drive the town for about an hour while the other members will hoof it and start visiting businesses, city hall, etc. After lunch the teams will switch roles so everyone has a chance to drive the community and to personally walk into stores and visit with people.

III. Driving...evaluate EACH entrance.

Go about 1/2 - 1 mile out each road and return. List each road (61 North, etc.) and list positive and negatives for each (does the surrounding "countryside add or detract from your experience?).

IV. (a) Driving...evaluate the downtown business area:

(mix of architectural style, preservation efforts, condition of buildings, Signs, appearance, lighting, presence of a Main Street Program, Historic District, or National Register properties, etc.)

IV. (b) Driving...evaluate other business areas.

V. Driving...comments on residential (Appearance, condition of historic homes, interesting historic residential districts, etc.):

VI. Driving...comments on:

a. Street signs

b. Traffic patterns/street conditions

c. Welcome signs at entrances (Do they capitalize on the community's unique history?)

d. Direction signs to parks, attractions, museums, historic sites, accommodations, services (i.e. police, hospital), etc.

- c. Comment on staff

- d. Was the staff knowledgeable about the community and region?

- e. Other (hours, appearance, locations, etc.)

XVI. Historic Sites/Tourism Attractions

- a. Appearance, quality, significance of the site, etc.

- b. Hours of operation (were they convenient?)

- c. Tour guides/staff (knowledge of the site/area, entertaining, friendly, etc.)

- d. How did the site meet or fail your expectations?

XVII. Scenic beauty (outstanding views, unusual natural features, etc.)

XVIII. Other stuff.....

a. Public restrooms (available, condition, etc.)

b. Payphones (working, phonebook intact, etc.)

c. Parking

d. Water fountains, benches, landscaping, etc.

e. Misc.

WRAP UP

A. Using your "senses"...

1. What does the region TASTE like? (Specialty bakery, unique foods, local cuisine, ethnic foods, etc.)

2. What does the region SMELL like:

3. What SOUNDS did you hear?

4. What did the region feel like (emotional response, i.e. cold/warm, crowded/ deserted, inviting, etc., or physical response, i.e. rough streets, etc.)

B. List the 5 most positive things you observed about the region:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

C. Describe ONE idea that you will steal for use in your own business/community and describe how you will start to implement it within the next 72 hours:

D. Could you suggest any opportunities for promoting tourism in the region they may be overlooked by residents?

E. What will you remember most about the region six months from now:

F. Did you notice any historic "themes" that were repeated or found within the entire region?

G. Did anyone in the region talk specifically about "heritage tourism"?

H. Other comments (that just didn't seem to fit anywhere else!)