

Welcome to the first national conference on Civic Tourism, presented by Sharlot Hall Museum in Prescott, Arizona. Established in 1928, the museum has historically been a major component of the region's tourism industry.

What some of us originally envisioned as a relatively small group of colleagues sitting around the hotel for a few days, to talk about this new approach to travel and tourism, has grown into a major gathering, attracting delegates from more than thirty states, Canada, and Mexico. Clearly, many communities know that "sense of place" is central to their tourism development, economic future, and quality of life. It is indeed heartening to see the interest this Prescott conversation has generated.

Development of Civic Tourism

Civic Tourism is an extension of other "place-based" forms of alternative travel, such as ecotourism, cultural heritage tourism, and geotourism – all types of tourism where the ingredients of place itself (natural, cultural, built) are the principal attraction. We've learned a great deal from studying these programs, and so we want to acknowledge, first of all, the significant contributions that the scholars, advocates, and practitioners of these alternative approaches have made to tourism development.

Extend the Dialog

As mentioned, Civic Tourism is an "extension" of other methods. What we want to talk about during the next few days, primarily, is how communities can build on and amplify the following concepts, most of which find their genesis in earlier tourism approaches:

1. Come Together

"Sense of Place" is more than the natural environment, cultural community, or built sector. It's all of it, working together. *How can advocates of the different place-based approaches work with one another, and then with the tourism industry, to create a more dynamic community identity?*

2. Invest in the Product

Traditionally, tourism bureaus have spent their time and money on marketing. Today, however, more attention is being paid to product development – the actual attractions that the industry sells. *However, when "place" itself is the attraction, who is responsible for conceptualizing and financing new product?*

3. The Public Voice

Like several other contemporary approaches to tourism development, Civic Tourism stresses public engagement. It's one thing to say we should involve the public, however, and quite another to actually do it. *How can we truly make the democratic process work?*

4. Tourism as a Place-Making Tool

Civic Tourism maintains that the industry can help communities preserve the historic, natural, and built elements that make a place special. While critics will probably continue to complain about tourism's negative effects, it's important to recognize that the industry is not going away. It's not a matter of "if" but "how." *How can towns use tourism, rather than allowing tourism to use them? Can it really be win-win?*

Where to Next?

Finally, Civic Tourism is still very much an idea, one not entirely defined. This meeting is part of the process, not an end in itself. We invite you to join your colleagues over the next few days to discuss how our communities can move toward a more appropriate, sustainable, economically viable, and politically expedient form of place-making for tourism.



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