



Cultural Heritage Tourism Strategic Plan 2018-2022

Overview

Vision: We are a collaborative, communicative, and creative consortium of cultural heritage tourism stakeholders that promotes visitation, prolonged stays, and presents a unified voice for Bellingham and Whatcom County to **foster quality stewardship of local cultural heritage assets**, stimulates economic prosperity for local businesses, and enhances resident's quality of life.

Mission: To enhance the economic and social prosperity of Bellingham and Whatcom County by **promoting and delivering quality cultural experiences to tourists, while respecting and protecting the county's unique and diverse ecosystems, environments, history, and lifestyles, and cultures.**

Goals:

- 1. Partnership and Collaboration**
- 2. Experience-Development and Product-Enhancement**
- 3. Marketing**

Strategies:

- 1. Partnership and Collaboration (*Who*):**
 - a. Create a Cultural Heritage Tourism Steering Committee through BWCT to advise on implementation of the Strategic Plan and Action Plan
 - b. Organize regularly scheduled forum for information exchange among cultural heritage tourism stakeholders (e.g., committees, list serve, newsletter, Facebook group, Google Docs, or combined offerings)
 - c. Expand collaboration beyond original stakeholder group to include all cultural heritage providers county-wide (based on visitor-ready criteria)
 - d. Update and maintain CHT Asset Inventory and evaluate "visitor-ready" standards (compliance)
 - e. Host forums to educate stakeholders, elected officials, tourism leaders and front-line tourism personnel on value of cultural heritage tourism to county, and showcase available cultural heritage experiences (local familiarization tour)
 - f. With Lummi Nation and Nooksack Tribe guidance and approval, identify appropriate ways to educate visitors about local Native American culture and heritage (traditions, story poles, fishing, events, etc.)

2. **Experience-Development and Product-Enhancement (*What*):**

- a. Educate all CHT providers about All Tourism Promotion Grant funding opportunities.
- b. Engage with City and County Parks' Departments to help build capacity, develop targeted programs, etc.
- c. Integrate cultural heritage components into redeveloped and/or new infrastructure (wayfinding, signage, gateways, parking, beautification, aesthetics) to enhance Bellingham/Whatcom County's "sense of place".
- d. Establish a county-wide "Cultural Heritage Trail" with map and descriptions of various locations.
- e. Engage students of colleges and universities (BTC, WWC, WWU, NWIC) to promote events and experiences to their visiting families.
- f. Expand retail promotions and evening cultural heritage entertainment options to increase overnight visitation.
- g. Develop county-wide maritime history interpretation (products to connect waterfront cities of Bellingham, Blaine, Birch Bay, and Semiahmoo and increase visitation).
- h. Establish a "Culture Shuttle" to move visitors around the county (from hotels, to downtown Bellingham, to Fairhaven, to Lynden, etc.)
- i. Develop a shared loyalty program (e.g., "Cultural Heritage Passport" with stamps or incentives) to visit.
- j. Create cultural heritage itineraries (thematic and time-based) for specific target audiences (i.e., millennials, Regional/Seattle-Vancouver, recreation-based travelers, etc.

3. Marketing Strategies – (How):

- a. Include all cultural heritage attractions and events on relevant city, county, and government agency’s marketing platforms.
- b. Encourage cultural heritage organizations and attractions to utilize and link to Bellingham/Whatcom County Tourism marketing platforms.
- c. Create and advertise packages between existing venues, events, hotels, etc. to promote specific cultural heritage tourism experiences, especially in the off-season.
- d. Engage students, tourists, and the general public to create *Youtube* videos about their positive cultural heritage tourism experiences in Bellingham and Whatcom County.
- e. Create recommendation lists for visitors (i.e., “If you enjoyed this, then visit XYZ”) to help cross-market attractions and activities around the county.
- f. Host media familiarization tours to showcase cultural heritage assets and experiences in tandem with culinary and nature-based activities.