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 advice 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.)
   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.