



# The Destination Resource Series

Toolkits & Playbooks for Tourism and Hospitality Success

## THE ULTIMATE VISITOR GUIDE PLAYBOOK: Creating a Print Guide that Actually Works (And Doesn't End Up as Car Trash)





# DO PRINT GUIDES STILL MATTER

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**Print isn't dead—it's just waiting for a**



While digital marketing dominates the conversation, a well-crafted, engaging, and visually striking print guide is still one of the most effective tools in a DMO's arsenal. **But here's the catch: not all print guides are created equal.** Some get tucked into backpacks and referenced throughout a trip, while others? Well, let's just say gas stations have plenty of trash cans.

This guide is your one-stop shop for crafting a visitor guide that actually gets used. **No fluff, no outdated tactics—just real, actionable strategies to make your guide a powerhouse for inspiring and helping travelers.** We'll cover everything from curation and design to distribution and engagement.

**And because there's no "one-size-fits-all" in destination marketing, think of this as a flexible framework.** Nail a majority of these elements, and you'll see a significant boost in engagement, visitor retention, and local economic impact.







# 01 Let's get into the Who, What, Why, When, Where, and Hows

Before you start designing, printing, and distributing, you need to ask:

## **What do we want this guide to accomplish?**

A great visitor guide should:

- Inspire a trip – Make someone say, "I HAVE to go there."
- Help visitors plan their trip – Provide clear, valuable information that turns interest into action.
- Enhance the visitor experience – Ensure they have an amazing time, increasing the likelihood of return visits and positive word-of-mouth.

## **Questions to ask yourself:**

- Are people still using your existing guide? Why or Why not?
- How do they access your guide?
- Do you know what pages of your guide visitors find the most useful?
- Do you still need a printed guide? Some destinations say "no" while others rely on it

## **Know your Audience(s)**

Take some time to define the various groups of people who visit your area. Not every traveler is the same. Is your guide for road trippers? Foodies? Outdoor adventurers? Families? Defining your audience will shape your content, tone, and layout. And it will make your guide more useful!

**TIP:** Do a little research. Visit other towns and grab their guides. Are they useful? What features made your visit easier? Borrow ideas that make your guide better!

# 02 Content That Converts (And Doesn't Bore People to Death)

A great print guide isn't just a phonebook of businesses. It's an experience in itself. Here's what makes guides irresistible:

## **1. Itineraries for Every Kind of Traveler**

- Quick trips (1-2 hours) – Perfect for day-trippers and lunch-break explorers.
- Half-day guides – Great for those with a little more time.
- Full-day & weekend itineraries – A must-have for overnights and vacationers.
- Include Themed Itineraries – Spark some action by including curated itineraries like "48 Hours in Town" or "Best Local Breweries" or "Family Weekend Getaway"

## **2. Local Legends & Insider Stories**

- Don't just list attractions—tell stories.
- Feature interviews with local chefs, historians, artists, and guides.
- Include historical tidbits and fun facts to create depth.

## **3. Hidden Gems & Off-the-Beaten-Path Adventures**

- Visitors love a "locals-only" recommendation.
- Offer exclusive tips on unique spots, from quirky boutiques to scenic overlooks.

## **4. Food & Drink: Because Everyone Eats**

- Highlight local must-tries (best burgers, coffee spots, hidden wineries).
- Consider a food trail or themed dining itinerary.



# 02 Content That Converts Continued

## 5. Maps & Wayfinding

- Maps should be clear, useful, and intuitive.
- QR codes linking to Google Maps can be a lifesaver.

## 6. Seasonal Highlights & Events

- Visitors love timely recommendations – feature events by season.
- Include annual festivals and major happenings.

## 7. Promote Sustainable & Inclusive Travel

- Highlight sustainable practices, accessible experiences, and meaningful ways to support local communities and help travelers make a difference.

## 8. Travel Writer content

- If you work with travel writer, consider hiring them to produce content for your guide. They can offer a unique word-of-mouth perspective that your visitors will resonate with.

### TOP 25 THINGS TO DO

From landmarks you can't miss to adventures you won't find anywhere else, there's always something to do in Nova Scotia. Start your planning with our list of the top 25 things to see, do and experience during your stay.



#### Cabot Trail

Enjoy the jaw-dropping coastal views of one of the world's most scenic drives. Be sure to stop



#### Lobster

Nova Scotia is home to some of the world's most fertile lobster fishing grounds and is



#### Beaches

With over 13,000 km of coastline, Nova Scotia has an abundance of beautiful beaches. Unwind with the rolling waves and breathe in the salty air, grab a surfboard or simply relax on a warm sandy beach with a good book.



#### Lunenburg

A UNESCO World Heritage Site, wander Old Town Lunenburg's distinctive waterfront and brightly



#### Lighthouses

For centuries, lighthouses have guided those who have arrived on our shores and have





# 03 Design & Layout (Make It Pretty, But Functional)

## **Size & Format: The Big Debate**

- Magazine-style guides (8.5x11 or similar) – Great for depth and imagery.
- Pocket-sized guides – Easy to carry but may lack detail.
- Hybrid approach – A mix of inspiration (magazine) and practical planning (pocket).

## **Cover Design: First Impressions Matter**

- Scenic vs. iconic landmarks—what works best for your audience?
- Eye-catching colors, fonts, and a bold title that screams “Pick me up!”

## **Typography & Readability**

- Big, bold, and easy-to-read fonts (especially for older travelers).
- Don’t overstuff pages—breathing room matters.

## **Itineraries**

- Add itineraries but remember that they are not expected to be used- they are meant to inspire. So stop worrying about the length or. an actual timeline
- Vary them in topic, size, styles and themes. This is where you can push the envelope with themes!

# 03 Design & Layout Continued

## Maps -show them where to go

- Make them fun
- Put them on the back cover for more visibility
- Consider a fold out map in the center of your guide

## Photography & Visuals

- Invest in high-quality, professional photography.
- Use authentic, diverse images of real visitors enjoying your destination.
- Incorporate bold and modern layouts inspired by major publications (Pioneer Woman, Joanna Gaines' Magnolia aesthetic).
- Save the back cover for what's important to the visitor (like a map) - makes it more valuable than putting ads on the back cover.
- Give me space! Be sure to let the design breathe and add white space.





# 04 The Power of Curation (Less Is More, Folks)

**Your guide should feel intentional and well-edited.**

- People travel by personal interest first; arrange your content by interests
- Avoid the "everything and the kitchen sink" approach.
- Prioritize ranked experiences (Top 10 must-dos, best scenic spots, can't-miss restaurants).
- Use experts and locals to curate recommendations.
- Consider an editorial voice that's fun, engaging, and occasionally witty.
- Consider have 2 print pieces; one to lure and one to inform & guide
- Need an extra boost in local awareness? Get your elected officials to write itineraries to include in the guide








# 05

## Making Your Guide Interactive & Digital- Friendly

### **Ways your print guides can digitally connected!**

- QR Codes: Link to deeper content, videos, itineraries, or live event updates.
  - Social Media Callouts: Encourage visitors to share their experiences.
  - User-Generated Content: Feature real visitor photos and testimonials.
  - Downloadable Digital Guide: A mobile-friendly PDF or web version can expand reach.
  - Design for the future: Keep an eye on how print and digital intertwine for maximum engagement.
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## A vertical wooden post with several directional signs. The signs are white with red and green stripes. A large orange 'C' is overlaid on the right side of the image.

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# 07 Measuring Success & Keeping It Fresh

## How Do You Know If It's Working?

- Track QR code scans & digital guide downloads.
- Survey users (Did they find it helpful? What did they love? What was missing?)
- Monitor social media mentions (Are visitors sharing it?)

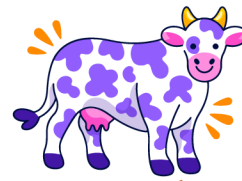
## When to Update?

- Annually for major redesigns.
- Seasonally if including event-driven content.
- As needed for closures or major changes.





## BONUS SECTION



# How to Apply the "Purple Cow" Concept to Your Visitor Guide

If your guide looks and feels like every other town's brochure, it's just another brown cow—forgettable. But if it has elements that are bold, different, and exciting, it becomes a Purple Cow—a must-have for visitors. Here's how to make that happen:

### 1. Standout Design & Visual Appeal

- **Epic Cover:** Your guide's cover should stop people in their tracks. Whether it's bold typography, unexpected imagery, or an artistic layout, it should feel special and different from the sea of other travel brochures.
- **Premium Feel:** A thicker paper stock, matte finishes, or even an unexpected format (like a mini-magazine or fold-out adventure map) can make people want to hold onto it rather than toss it in the trash.
- **Inspiration over Information:** Avoid the boring, info-dump style. Instead, make it visually stunning, immersive, and experience-driven.

### 2. Unique Content & Storytelling

- **Tell Stories, Not Just Facts:** Instead of just listing restaurants, tell the story of a chef who reinvented a dish or a historic tavern with a ghostly past.
- **Feature 'Secret Spots' & 'Locals-Only' Tips:** Make visitors feel like insiders by sharing the hidden gems locals love.
- **Personality-Driven Writing:** Instead of dry descriptions, infuse the guide with wit, charm, and even a little sass. Think of your guide as the cool local friend who knows all the best places.

### 3. Interactive & Engaging Elements

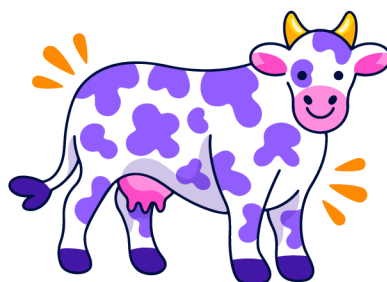
- QR Codes with a Purpose: Not just a link to your website—make them open exclusive video content, user-generated travel tips, or interactive experiences.
- Checklists & Challenges: Include a "Must-Do List" or a scavenger hunt to make the guide fun and engaging.
- Instagram-Worthy Pages: Design spreads that beg to be photographed and shared on social media.

### 4. Make It More Than a Guide—Make It an Experience

- Smell & Feel Factor: Could your guide feature a scratch-and-sniff page for local coffee roasters? Or textured elements to mimic the local terrain?
- Unexpected Size & Format: Maybe it folds out into a poster-worthy map of the area's best food spots or comes with tear-out postcards.
- Surprise & Delight Features: Hide easter eggs—small surprises like a joke, a fun fact, or a secret discount for readers who find a hidden QR code. What about a crossword puzzle or a coloring page for the kids?

A Purple Cow Visitor Guide is unexpected, exciting, and unignorable. It's not just another booklet of listings—it's a piece of art, a travel companion, and a memory-maker. It's the guide people keep, share, and love.

Let's make your visitor guide remarkable—because average is invisible.





*The Ultimate Visitor Guide Playbook* is a publication of Iowa Travel Industry Partners, and is part of the ***Destination Resource Series***, provided through the generous work of the iTIP Resource Committee. We hope you found value in this guide and would love to hear your successes as well as suggestions on future guides.

This isn't just another download. It's your go-to resource for making your destination shine. Each toolkit in the series is loaded with practical tips, real-world examples, and creative ideas covering everything from creating print guides to marketing to niche audiences, attracting more visitors, and wowing them once they arrive. Whether you're running a small-town tourism office, managing a busy attraction, or part of a hospitality team, these resources give you the insider knowledge you need to work smarter, impress guests, and get measurable results.

Best of all? They're a free perk of membership. Because growing tourism should be within everyone's reach.