



Translating Tourism Metrics Into What Matters to a Local Teacher

Plain-language reporting that earns public trust

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Downs & St. Germain Research is a tourism research and consulting firm. We turn visitor data into numbers destinations can use, and just as often, into language their communities can understand. Today is about that second job.

42

THE STANDARD

The Translation Is Our Job

Tourism organizations are surrounded by metrics. But most of the numbers we share only land with people who already work in tourism. Occupancy, ADR, RevPAR, economic impact: second nature to us, a foreign language to everyone else.

The test for any public-facing number:

If a smart, busy person who doesn't work in tourism can't tell what it means or why it matters to their life, we haven't finished the job.

THE TEACHER TEST

Pick anyone who lives in your community but doesn't work in your industry: a teacher, a nurse, a contractor.

If the metric doesn't change how they see their town, it isn't ready to be public.

Five Numbers Every DMO Reports

All five are useful. On their own, though, they rarely mean much to a resident. We'll run each through the teacher test: why we value it, where it falls short, and a clearer way to say it.

- 01 Number of visitors
- 02 Total economic impact
- 03 Jobs & wages supported
- 04 Total tax contributions
- 05 Household “tax savings”

What a Visitor Count Shows

WHY WE VALUE IT

It's the simplest demand signal we have: are people choosing us, and is that growing? Easy to track, easy to compare year over year.

THE PROBLEM

A raw count says little about what visitors spent, where they went, or what they cost the community. It can also imply that more is always better, which isn't always the case: more visitors can also mean more congestion and strain on local services.

A BETTER WAY

Pair the count with yield, what each visit is worth and what it supports, and describe the kind of visitation, not just the volume. Leading with value per visit gives a fuller picture than the headcount alone.

Making the Big Number Believable

WHY WE VALUE IT

It captures tourism's full reach: not just what visitors spend, but how that spending circulates and supports the wider economy. It's the most complete single measure we have.

THE PROBLEM

Presented as one large figure with no story, it's a “42”: hard to picture, with no visible mechanism. Without a way to make sense of it, people set it aside, and it does little to build understanding.

A BETTER WAY

Show the journey behind the number. Follow a single visitor dollar and let the audience watch the impact build, instead of asking them to swallow the total whole.

LET'S SHRINK IT

Following One Visitor Dollar

A visitor walks into a local cafe in your destination and buys a cup of coffee.

That \$5 doesn't just sit on the counter. Watch where it goes over the next few minutes, and you'll see the whole impact figure in miniature.

A LOCAL CAFE

— *Visitor receipt* —

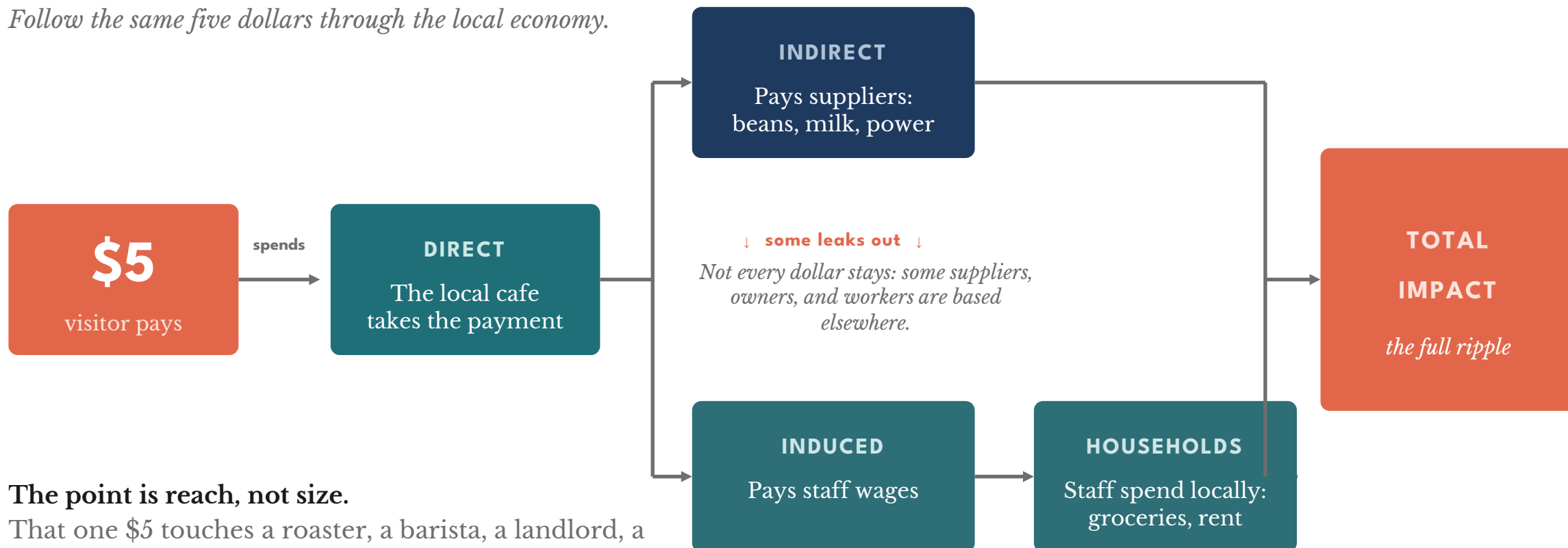
One cup of coffee	\$5.00
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Total spend	\$5.00
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FOLLOWING THE MONEY

Where One \$5 Coffee Actually Goes

Follow the same five dollars through the local economy.

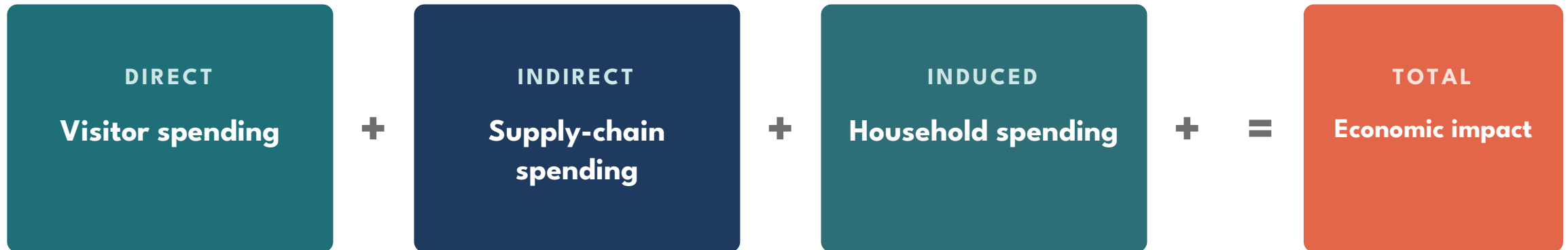


The point is reach, not size.

That one \$5 touches a roaster, a barista, a landlord, a grocery store before it's spent. Total economic impact is just this, repeated across millions of visitor dollars.

PUT TOGETHER

The Three Parts of Economic Impact



Your \$5 cup of coffee, **all the way down.**

Nothing exotic, just the \$5 followed honestly to the end. When the teacher hears the phrase next time, they can picture the coffee.

The Jobs Reach Past Tourism

WHY WE VALUE IT

It's the most human measure we have, connecting the industry to real livelihoods and paychecks, not just dollars. And it's a genuinely strong number worth leading with.

WORTH ADDING

On its own, the count doesn't show the range of jobs behind it, or distinguish steady year-round roles from seasonal ones. Naming that openly, rather than hiding it, makes the figure more credible, not less.

A BETTER WAY

Break it into direct, indirect, and induced jobs, the same journey as the visitor dollar. Visitor spending supports the obvious tourism jobs and non-tourism jobs across the community: the supplier's bookkeeper, the grocery clerk, the mechanic. Pair the count with wages and year-round stability.

What Visitor Taxes Contribute

WHY WE VALUE IT

It's the most tangible proof that visitors give back, not just take. Real dollars into public coffers, paid by people who don't live here.

THE PROBLEM

Stated as one lump sum, it stays abstract, and it blurs two very different tax paths that are governed and spent in completely different ways. Residents can't see themselves in it.

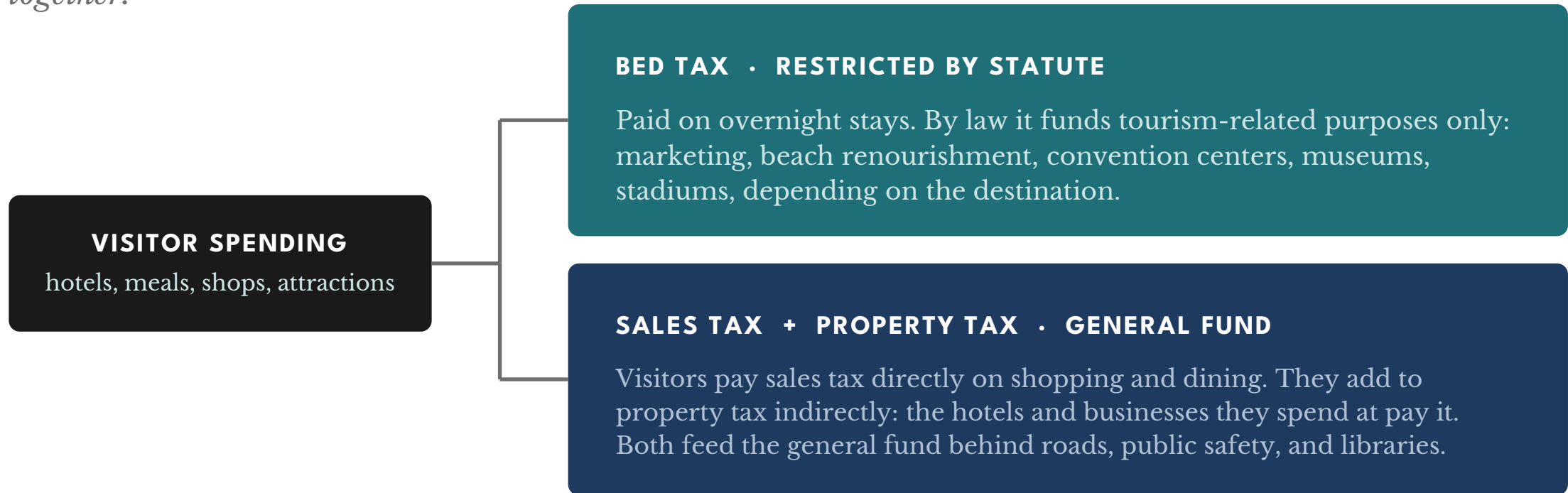
A BETTER WAY

Split the two paths, then follow the general-fund path all the way to a fire truck, a library, a paved road. That's where the resident finally appears in the data.

TWO TAX PATHS

Where Visitor Taxes Actually Go

Visitor taxes split into two separate streams, governed differently, spent differently, and they should never be blurred together.



Keeping these two paths separate, in every chart and every sentence, is what keeps the tax story clear and credible.

The Limits of the “Tax Savings” Framing

WHY IT'S TEMPTING

“Tourism saves your household \$1,490 a year” is concrete, personal, and quotable. It's the version officials and press love, and most published figures arrive pre-wrapped in it.

THE PROBLEM

It overstates the benefit and misconstrues what's happening. Visitors don't lower anyone's tax bill; they contribute taxes while here temporarily, then leave, and residents keep enjoying the services those taxes helped fund. The “savings” framing invites two easy rebuttals.

A BETTER WAY

Restate it as addition. Visitors add to the shared pot, expanding what the community can fund without making a promise about any household's tax bill.

HOW TO FRAME IT

A Contribution, Not a Discount

The subtractive version sounds persuasive, but it invites two reasonable objections, and it isn't strictly accurate. The additive version avoids both.

SAY THIS • ADDITIVE

“Visitors contribute to the shared pot that funds the services we all use.”

True, durable, impossible to argue with.
Credits visitors without promising anything about a tax bill.

NOT THIS • SUBTRACTIVE

“Tourists save every household \$___ in taxes.”

Substitution rebuttal: “then we could pay a bit more and be rid of tourists.”

Scaling rebuttal: “so more tourists means my taxes keep dropping?” — which isn't true.

A short, solid teal horizontal bar.

Reading the Metrics Honestly

Two last ideas that protect your credibility once the numbers are out in the world.

Direction Alone Isn't the Story

A metric's direction is rarely the whole story. Tourism's impact is holistic, economic and social, and shaped by how it's managed in a community. A single up-or-down arrow can't carry all of that.

“Up” isn't always good

Record visitor counts can also bring congestion and strain on services. Growth is most valuable when it's managed alongside resident quality of life.

“Down” isn't always bad

A dip can reflect a deliberate shift toward higher-yield, better-managed visitation, which can be healthier for residents and businesses alike.

Context is the metric

What changed, for whom, and at what cost? Pairing the number with that context is the reporting residents can trust.

Tailor the Metric to the Audience

Elected officials

- Lead with hard tax dollars and the general-fund connection
- They resonate with concrete revenue and budget impact
- The two-path and budget-flow slides are built for this room

Tourism stakeholders

- Already fluent in the value of the industry
- Top-line metrics land as-is, little translation needed
- Spend your time on nuance and management, not basics

Residents (the teacher)

- Need the most context and the least jargon
- Break every number down to daily life: coffee, classroom
- This is where the teacher test does the heavy lifting

A Checklist for Public Numbers

- 1 Could a smart non-industry neighbor say what this number means, in one sentence?
- 2 Have I shown the mechanism, the journey, not just asserted a big total?
- 3 Are the two tax paths separate, with the general-fund story made visible?
- 4 Have I resisted “up = good, down = bad,” and given the context instead?

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

The Five Metrics, Translated

The same numbers most DMOs already publish, each retold so a resident can see what it means for them.

AS USUALLY PUBLISHED

NUMBER OF VISITORS

4.2M

TOTAL ECONOMIC IMPACT

\$2.3B

JOBS & WAGES SUPPORTED

38,000

TOTAL TAX CONTRIBUTIONS

\$185M

HOUSEHOLD “TAX SAVINGS”

\$1,490

TRANSLATED FOR RESIDENTS

→

About **4.2 million visitors** chose us last year — the demand that keeps our restaurants, shops, and attractions open year-round.

→

Don't lead with the big number. Show the mechanism: each visitor dollar pays a barista, a supplier, a landlord — the local economy tourism helps sustain.

→

Roughly **38,000 local jobs** and the paychecks behind them — at hotels and restaurants, and the suppliers and services behind them.

→

About **\$185M in visitor taxes** — funding beaches and venues through the tourist tax, and public safety, parks, and roads through the general fund.

Retire the per-household “savings.” Report the total — and where it goes:

→

TOURIST DEV. TAX

Funds tourism assets — **beaches, aquariums, museums, event venues.**

SALES TAX → GENERAL FUND

Funds public services — **public safety, parks, libraries, roads.**

Same data, translated — nothing added or exaggerated. Figures illustrative; swap in your destination's own.



**A metric the community understands
is a metric the community can trust.**

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