



Assessment Findings & Suggestions Report

Northumberland Shore, Nova Scotia

Fall, 2009



Community Assessment

INTRODUCTION

In July and August of 2009, a Regional Assessment of the Northumberland Shore, Nova Scotia was conducted, and the findings were presented in a two-hour workshop in late September. The assessment provides an unbiased overview of the region - how it is seen by a visitor. It includes a review of local marketing efforts, signage, attractions, critical mass, retail mix, ease of getting around, customer service, visitor amenities such as parking and public washrooms, overall appeal, and the community's ability to attract overnight visitors.

In performing the Assessment, we looked at the area through the eyes of a first-time visitor. No prior research was facilitated, and no community representatives were contacted except to set up the workshop and agreement for the assessment. The towns and surrounding areas in the region were "secretly shopped." Any person looking to relocate their business, industry, or residence will come as a visitor first. Tourism is the front door to all your economic development efforts.

How easy is it for potential visitors to find information about the region and communities? Once they find information, are the marketing materials good enough to close the sale? In the Marketing Effectiveness Assessment, we assigned two (or more) people to plan trips into the general region. They used whatever resources they would typically use in planning a trip: travel books, brochures, the internet, calling visitor information centers, review of marketing materials, etc. - just

as you might in planning a trip to an unfamiliar destination.

The region has five opportunities to close the sale:

- 1) Personal contact (visitor information centers, trade shows, etc.)
- 2) Websites
- 3) Brochures and printed materials
- 4) Publicity (articles)
- 5) Word of mouth - the most effective means

We tested all of these methods by contacting area visitor information services and attractions, searching the internet for activities, requesting and reviewing printed materials, looking for articles and third-party information, and questioning regional contacts. We reviewed both commercial and organizational websites promoting the area, state tourism websites, and read travel articles and guidebooks.

The marketing assessment determined how visible the region was during the research, and how effective the marketing was in convincing a potential visitor that the area and communities would be worth a special trip, a stop, or an overnight stay. The key to the marketing assessment is to see if you have a primary lure that makes you worth a special trip of a two-hour drive - or from further away. The question on most visitors' minds is: What do you have that I can't get closer to home? What makes you worth a special trip?

Where most places falter is when they merely provide "lists" of what the region has, whether it's truly "unique" or not. Nearly every town and

region in North America promotes the usual list of diversions: local museums, shops and restaurants, plenty of lodging, golf, outdoor recreation, historic downtowns, scenic vistas, etc. Of course, nearly every visitor can do these things closer to home. So, what makes your region worth the trip?

Always promote your primary lure first - what makes you worth that special trip. THEN, promote your diversionary, or “complementary” activities. Would you go to Orlando, Florida if Disneyworld wasn’t there? Do you think that Universal Studios minds that Disneyworld gets all the glory? Of course not. Eighty percent of all tourism spending is with those secondary activities. Disney does the heavy lifting in terms of advertising and promotion, and the diversionary activities benefit.

In a nutshell, the Marketing Effectiveness Assessment looks for what makes your region worth a special trip, or a great place to live, or to do business. The secret shoppers look for details, details, details. Do you give a reason for visiting, and do you provide enough information to make it easy to plan a trip? Are the marketing materials good enough to close the sale?

The second part of the assessment process is the On-site Assessment. During this part of the assessment, we spent a week in the region, looking at enticements from freeways and highways (signs, billboards, something that would get a visitor to stop), beautification and overall curb appeal, wayfinding (ease of getting around), visitor amenities (public washrooms, visitor information, parking), activities, overall appeal, retail mix (lodging, dining, shopping), critical mass, customer service, area attractions, pedestrian

friendliness, gathering spaces, evening activities, and the availability of marketing materials and their effectiveness.

The communities benefit from tourism when visitors spend money, and they do that in the local gift shops, restaurants, hotels, etc. Therefore, the On-site Assessment includes a candid look at private businesses as much as public spaces and amenities.

For every shortcoming or challenge we note during the assessment process, we provide a low-cost “suggestion,” where possible, on how the challenge can be corrected or overcome. The suggestions are not termed “recommendations,” as they were developed without consulting the communities first about possible restraints, future plans, or reasons why the suggestions may not be appropriate. Hopefully this assessment process will open dialogue within the region, leading it to adopt some or all of the suggestions, taking them from suggestions to recommendations.

It’s important to note that to increase the region’s tourism industry, fulfilling one or two of the suggestions may have little impact, but implementing a number of them, if not all, can have a profoundly successful impact on the area’s ability to tap into the tourism industry.

Implementation of these suggestions must be a region-wide effort, involving both privately owned businesses as well as local, county, and provincial agencies, where appropriate. Every local organization plays a role in tourism, downtown revitalization, or economic development efforts. A Destination Marketing Organization (DMO, CVB,



Chamber, TPA, etc.) cannot be successful if the tourism effort is not region-wide.

In many cases, issues may come up that you are already aware of and are already working on. In that case, the assessment validates those efforts. But more often than not, the assessment will point out things that you are aware of but can't mention or bring up without paying a political price. Local politics can be a killer of the tourism industry.

While marketing efforts are important, product development is the most important factor of a successful tourism industry. Visitors want activities, not just things to look at. How much time can a visitor spend enjoying activities - that cater to their interests - in the region? Do your communities have truly unique attractions the visitor can't get closer to home? You must be able to deliver on your marketing promises - otherwise visitors might come once, but they won't come back. It's much more cost effective to bring people back, than to always go out and entice new visitors into town. "Been there, done that" communities eventually run out of visitors and find they don't have a sustainable tourism industry, or simply become pit stops or gateways on the way to somewhere else.

After spending several days reviewing marketing materials and assessing the region, we have looked at all of these issues, developed some suggestions and ideas the region can discuss and possibly implement to help increase tourism spending locally.

SUCCESSFUL TOURISM TRANSLATES TO CASH

Tourism is successful when the region imports

more cash than it exports. When residents spend their hard-earned money outside the area, the area is exporting cash - often referred to as "leakage." Tourism helps fill that gap, importing cash into the local economy without the necessity of having to provide extended social and other services. Visitors come, spend money, then go home. When you import more cash than you export, you have a positive "balance of trade." Communities with successful tourism programs easily see that the industry subsidizes the community, whereas other communities find that they subsidize visitors - providing services visitors use without them leaving enough money behind to cover the cost of those services.

The primary goal of the tourism industry is to bring more cash into the local economy. This doesn't happen when visitors come into the community, get out of their cars, and take photographs. And it doesn't happen when visitors go swimming in the lake, are sunning at the beach, or playing at a local park. It doesn't happen when visitors hike down your trails, enjoy your interpretive centers, or stroll through your lovely arboretums. These are all great things to do, and, of course, you do want your visitors to do these - but, you also want to entice them into your shops, your cafes, espresso stands, restaurants, galleries, B&B's, and hotels, ultimately opening their wallets to make purchases. That is what helps your local economy, your small merchants, your hoteliers, and your tax coffers.

To entice visitors to spend money in your community, you need to have places for them to spend it - you need to have the right mix of shops, restaurants, entertainment, and lodging facilities,



all in an attractive setting, as well as attractions that make them want to visit you in the first place.

THE THREE TYPES OF TOURISM

1. Visiting friends and family

The number one reason people travel is to visit friends and/or family. If you did nothing to promote tourism, you would still have tourism in your region. However, when friends and family come to visit, do your residents take them out to eat, shop, dine locally? Or do they head to a neighboring area? Do your locals even know what you have to offer? An effective tourism marketing effort also includes educating locals as to what you have and how to find it through effective wayfinding signage, gateways and advertising.

2. Business travel

The second most popular reason for travel is business. Included in this category is educational travel: colleges and universities, as well as conventions and meetings, corporate travel, vendor travel, etc. Like leisure travelers, this group is looking for things to do “after hours” while in the area. The most successful convention and trade show towns are the result of their secondary activities or “diversions,” not simply because of their convention and exhibition facilities. Think Disneyworld, Disneyland, San Antonio’s River Walk, Banff, to name a few.

3. Leisure travel

The third, and most lucrative of all types of visitors, is the leisure traveler. They have no personal connections to the region, but are coming purely to enjoy themselves. They stay in commercial lodging

establishments, eat virtually all their meals in local restaurants, and their top diversionary activity is shopping and dining in a pedestrian-friendly setting.

The average leisure visitor is active 14 hours a day, yet typically only spends four to six hours with the primary lure. They then spend eight to ten hours with diversionary activities - things they could do closer to home, but will do while in the area. A good example of this is Branson, Missouri, the “live music-theater capital of the world.” This town of 6,500 residents hosts 7.5 million visitors a year. The primary “lure” is the 49 music theaters. The average visitor attends two shows a day over about four hours. During the other hours of the day, the visitor will shop in local outlet malls, head to the





water parks, theme parks, and other attractions, play a round of golf, hike, bike, fish, do some bird watching, and participate in any number of other activities they could do closer to home, but will do while visiting Branson.

THE THREE STAGES OF TOURISM

1. Status quo

If you take no action to develop the tourism industry, you will still have an element of tourism, simply because some travelers will pull off local highways or freeways for gas, food, or lodging, as well as the fact that the number one reason for travel is to visit friends or family. If you have residents, you will have some tourism.

2. Getting people to stop

The first priority of developing a successful tourism industry is getting people to stop. Imagine how successful businesses in the community would be if just 50% of the vehicles traveling through pulled off the highway and spent just 30 minutes in your community – buying gas, an ice cream cone, a sandwich, a gift or souvenir?

If there's a strong pull, imagine the money spent if visitors stayed two hours in your communities, which nearly always translates to additional spending.

The first goal is to get those travelers to stop.

3. Becoming the destination

To become a destination region you must have attractions and supporting amenities that convince visitors to spend the night. And those attractions must be different from what the visitor can get

closer to home.

Overnight visitors spend three times that of day visitors, and nearly ten times that of visitors using your communities as a pit stop on the way to somewhere else.

THE FOUR-TIMES RULE

Visitors will make a point of stopping or staying in a community if it has enough activities that appeal specifically to them and will keep them busy four times longer than it took them to get there.

In other words, if a person has to drive 15 minutes to visit you, do you have enough for them to do to keep them busy for an hour? (4 times 15 minutes) If a visitor has to drive an hour, do you have the activities and amenities to keep them busy for four hours?

The more you have to offer, collectively, the further visitors will come, and the longer they will stay, and of course, the more they will spend. This is why it is so important for communities to market more than just their immediate geographic areas. By marketing neighboring activities and attractions, you present much more for a visitor to do, and you make the visit worth the trip.

Visitors don't care about city limits or county lines – so market the broader package and you'll be able to keep people in the area long enough to translate to another meal, some more shopping, and hopefully, an overnight stay.

SELL THE EXPERIENCE, NOT GEOGRAPHY

Nearly every destination marketing organization

is charged with promoting a geographic area, yet visitors couldn't care less about those boundaries. They are looking for activities that cater to their interests, and location is second to the experience. ALWAYS promote the primary lure first, then the location. If I want to go see Andy Williams, I don't care whether he's in Muskogee, Oklahoma or in Branson, Missouri. People by the millions head to Disneyland, Disneyworld, Dollywood and other attractions. They are not going to Anaheim, Orlando or Pigeon Forge.

Always sell the activity - the experience - THEN the location.

LURES, DIVERSIONS AND AMBIANCE

Too often regions promote the list of diversions that nearly every area has. The primary lure is the activity that a visitor can't find closer to home.

Always promote your primary lure, then the diversions. Do not try to be all things to all people. Have you ever gone anywhere because they had "something for everyone?" Of course not - you go there because they have something specific for you. Find your niche and promote it like crazy.

Historic downtowns provide ambiance - they are not attractions, diversions, nor are they a primary lure. It's what's in the buildings that makes a downtown a destination.

The same can be said for scenery. Unless your vista is a world-class scene, such as Niagara Falls or the Grand Canyon, scenic vistas create wonderful ambiance, but don't translate to spending, and they only last a few minutes. Then what?

All too often communities promote their heritage as a primary draw. How far would you travel to visit a mining museum? A timber museum? An agricultural center? A county historical museum? Heritage must be outstanding and pervasive throughout the community to be a primary lure, such as Plimoth Plantation or Salem, Massachusetts.

Thousands of communities are the "capital" of something. For instance, in California, Borrego Springs is the grapefruit capital of the world. Gilroy is the garlic capital. Modesto is the tomato capital. Gridley is the kiwi capital. Oxnard is the strawberry capital. Fallbrook is the avocado capital. But here's the question: Have you ever gone anywhere because it was the capital of a fruit or vegetable?

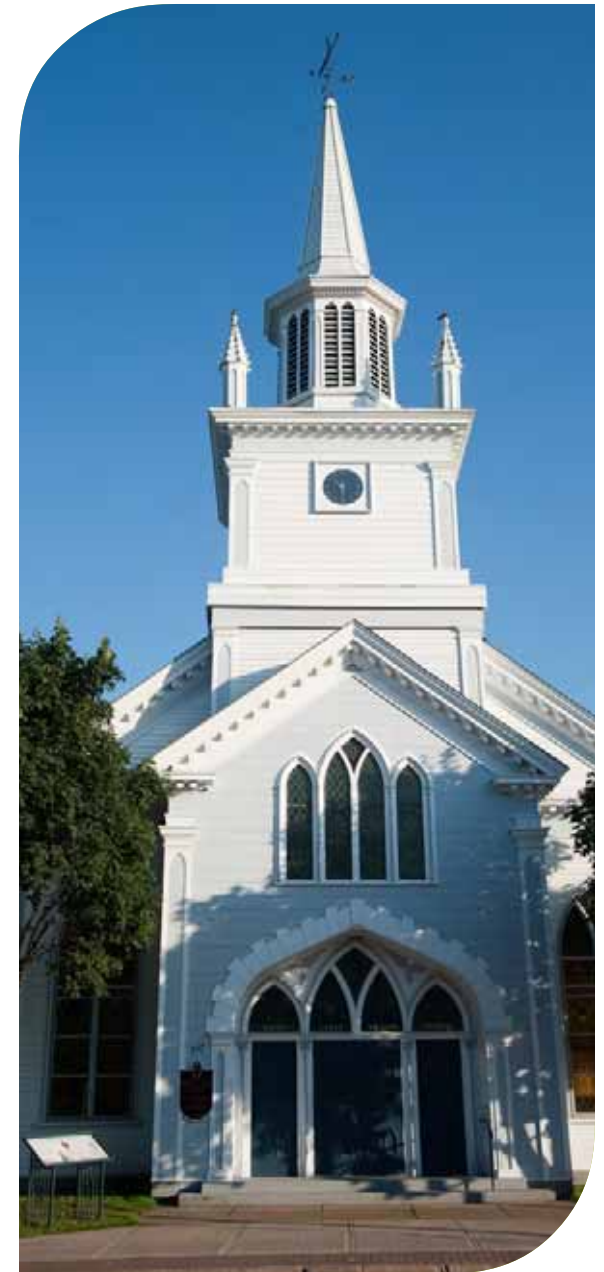
Your local heritage is important to the community and can set the ambiance, even becoming a diversionary activity. But to the vast majority of potential visitors, it's not a reason to make a special trip.

BE DIFFERENT OR THE BEST

Why should a visitor come to your region if they can enjoy the same activities closer to home? Too many areas promote "outdoor recreation" as their primary draw. Unfortunately, that is the same attraction promoted by nearly every region in North America.

If you are different, then you have a reason for travelers to choose to visit you. If you are the best, then visitors will generally flock to your doors.

If you have great hiking trails, then market their unique qualities. Be specific and paint the image of how wonderful they are in the minds of





your potential visitors. If you have one fantastic restaurant in town, let people know about it – a unique dining experience is something many people will travel far to enjoy.

Ashland, Oregon, previously a depressed timber town, began its Shakespeare Festival, which now runs nine months of the year and draws hundreds of thousands of visitors who spend an average of six nights in the community. The Shakespeare Festival made Ashland different from any other community.

Leavenworth, Washington, another dying timber town, adopted a Bavarian architectural theme and produces dozens of Bavarian events every year. Some now say the town looks more genuinely Bavarian than towns in Bavaria. It is now one of the primary tourist destinations in Washington state, hosting more than 2.5 million visitors annually. They offer a different experience, an experience that is pervasive throughout town.

Okanogan County, Washington is an outdoor recreational paradise – just like 37 of the 38 other counties in Washington. So why go to the Okanogan? Because they are the best. They researched guidebooks, newspaper and magazine articles, and pulled quotes they could use in their advertising efforts. Like, “Pinch yourself, you’re in Okanogan Country with perhaps the best cross country skiing on the continent.” This, and other quotes like it, make it worth the drive to visit Okanogan Country. The third-party endorsements show that they are the best.

Set yourself apart from everyone else, and you’ll see that in being unique, you’ll become a greater attraction.



CRITICAL MASS MEANS CASH

Although it may not be the primary reason why visitors come to your region and communities, shopping and dining in a pedestrian setting is the number one activity of visitors. Besides lodging, it is also how visitors spend the most amount of money.

Do you have pedestrian-friendly shopping districts? It only takes a block or two. If not, can you create them? Many communities have been highly successful with the development of a two or three block long pedestrian “village” including visitor-oriented retail shops, dining, visitor information, washrooms, etc., all in an attractive, landscaped setting.

The general rule of thumb in those two or three blocks (not spread out all over town) is 10+10+10: Ten destination retail shops, which includes galleries, antiques, collectibles, home accents and furnishings, artists in action, book stores, logo gear (clothing), souvenirs, outfitters, tour operators, activity shops such as kites, jewelry, wine or tobacco shops, and other specialties. The second ten is for food: ice cream, fudge and candy stores, soda fountains, sit-down dining, coffee shops, cafes, bistros, delis, etc. And the final ten are businesses open after 6:00 pm. This includes entertainment: bars, dance clubs, theaters (movies and performing), retail shops with activities (piano bar in a wine shop), etc.

The important point is to group these businesses together to create the “critical mass” in a pedestrian-friendly setting. This will attract visitors as well as locals, and make it worth their while to stop and shop. People are always drawn to the critical mass – the opportunity to have multiple choices, multiple

experiences, all in a convenient and attractive setting.

TOURISM IS AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY

The goal of successful tourism is for people to come into the region, spend money, and go home. Tourism is nearly a \$650 billion dollar industry in the U.S., nearly \$75 billion in Canada, and supports millions of jobs. Ninety percent of tourism industry businesses are small businesses of which 90% have less than 15 employees. Tourism provides the opportunity for entrepreneurs to get started, for small family-run businesses to thrive, for artisans and craftspeople to find a market, and creates a basis for unique niche-retail environment including wineries, artists, crafts, etc. Tourism provides a diverse market within the community, expanding its potential. Enhancing the communities through beautification efforts creates an attractive setting for both locals and visitors, key in revitalizing a community's downtown. And a tourism-friendly town will attract non-tourism industries faster than others – new businesses will see the community as a visitor before they make a final determination about the community. Tourism is the front door to your economic development efforts.

The benefits of a healthy tourism industry can rejuvenate an area, foster community pride, encourage economic diversity, and lead the way to a vital, successful region.

NEXT STEPS

The findings and suggestions in this report will provide your region with many ideas, strategies,



and goals to reach for. We hope that it fosters dialogue in the area and becomes a springboard for the communities in enhancing its tourism and economic development industries, leading to greater prosperity, rejuvenation, and enjoyment by all the citizens.

This report offers a first step in reaching that goal. To fully realize the benefits of this assessment, the region should take these findings and suggestions, discuss them and evaluate them, and develop a plan for implementation.

A detailed "Community Branding, Development and Marketing Action Plan" builds on the results of this assessment, adding in-depth research, evaluation, and local input to develop a unique brand and implementation program. The assessment process essentially provides a look at where you are today.

The next steps in the planning process would be interviewing local stakeholders, providing public outreach, and reviewing past and current planning efforts. This determines where you want to go as a region.

The third step involves research, feasibility and market analysis, and determining your brand - what you are or hope to be known for.

Then comes the "development" portion of the plan or the "how to get there" program: determining what product development initiatives need to be undertaken to reinforce and grow the brand. This also includes defining the roles of the various local organizations. Brand-building takes a village - everyone pulling in the same direction, each with its own "to do list."

Finally, there's the detailed marketing plan: how and when you will tell the world who you are and what makes you special: the place to live, work and play.

The Branding, Development & Marketing Plan should be an "action plan" as opposed to a "strategic plan." You want a to do list, by organization, not just general strategies, goals and objectives.

For every recommendation the following elements should be detailed:

1. A brief description of the recommendation
2. Who would be charged with implementation
3. When it would be implemented
4. How much it will cost
5. Where the money will come from
6. The rationale for making the recommendation

The recommendations should provide all the necessary steps for your region or community to be successful in attaining its goals of a more diverse economy with an enhanced tourism industry and to become a more attractive and enjoyable community for both visitors and citizens.

If you move forward with the development of the Action Plan and hire outside services, always hire the most qualified team you can find (issue a request for Statement of Qualifications), then negotiate the scope of work and cost with them. If you are not able to reach an agreement, then move to number two on your list. A good plan will provide a program to get local residents and the business communities pulling together to enhance the region, building its unique image in the minds of visitors and residents alike. The result

of your efforts will be a prosperous, enjoyable environment in which to live, work, and visit.





Findings & Suggestions

Tourism is an economic development activity, resulting in a \$1.3 billion industry in Nova Scotia. The province hosted 2.1 million visitors in 2007. Are you getting your fair share?

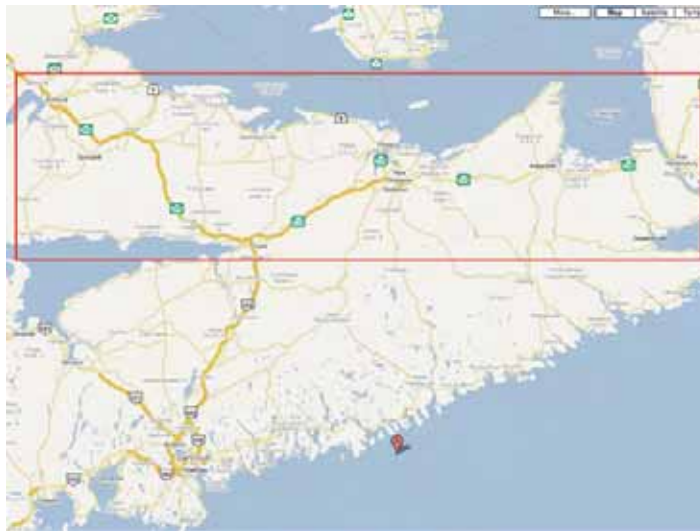
Industry creates jobs; jobs create demand for residential development. That drives the need for retail, restaurant, and recreational projects.

The number one reason people travel is to visit friends and family. And number two is for industry. This is why the larger populations always have higher visitor spending.

And having visitors bolsters your retail sales, services and lodging. A successful tourism industry can help improve quality of life for residents.

Quick Facts:

- Geography-based tourism is dead.
- Visitors are looking for “activities” - THEN the location.
- Experience-based tourism is alive and is the future of tourism.
- The days of marketing “lists” are over - visitors want details.





This really makes a statement - and was always busy.



The border coming into Nova Scotia is very good. A great first impression.



But Mallory was the biggest hit. She knows how to draw a crowd!



The Northumberland Shore is a very broad area, beginning at the New Brunswick border - the only land route to Nova Scotia - and extending east all the way to the Canso Causeway. For visitors driving from New Brunswick to Halifax or Cape Breton, Highway 104 provides the quickest route east, but also bypasses most of the Northumberland Shore. So, what will entice travelers to drive the longer, coastal route? What will entice visitors to stop in the towns and communities along the Shore? Would the Northumberland Shore be a visitor destination? What makes you worth a special trip or an overnight stay - specifically? It can be as simple as a great restaurant or an exceptional activity.

We drove through Amherst and across the provincial boundary into NB, then turned around to re-enter Nova Scotia, starting our Northumberland Shore assessment. The provincial welcome center was exceptional! What a great entrance into Nova Scotia!

The visitor center was very busy with visitors enjoying the gardens, walkways, interpretive displays, and especially the bagpipes. Mallory made the visitor center an experience, not just a place with information. Hundreds of photos were taken at the visitor center in just the hour or so we spent there. Every one of those photos will be shown to other people, posted on websites, social media sites, etc. What a great promotion for the province!

Having artisans, musicians, and other experiential elements at your borders creates an incredible "sense of place" that endears the visitor to the area.



The Centre was well laid out and had a ton of information.



Why are these across the street and out of the way? It doesn't make any sense. Suggestion: Move them over to the Visitor Center.



With the wealth of information at the center, everyone was easily able to have their questions answered.

Consider moving these billboards (top right) to a location closer to the visitor center, where they will be seen by people on foot. It doesn't really make sense to have visitor information in two different locations so close to each other. The time to sell Amherst is when we're out of the car and in the visitor center - or the parking area.

Perhaps somewhere in this area?



Jettison the generic. "Faith in our People - Pride in our Products" could fit anyone, anywhere. Sell activities, not things to look at.

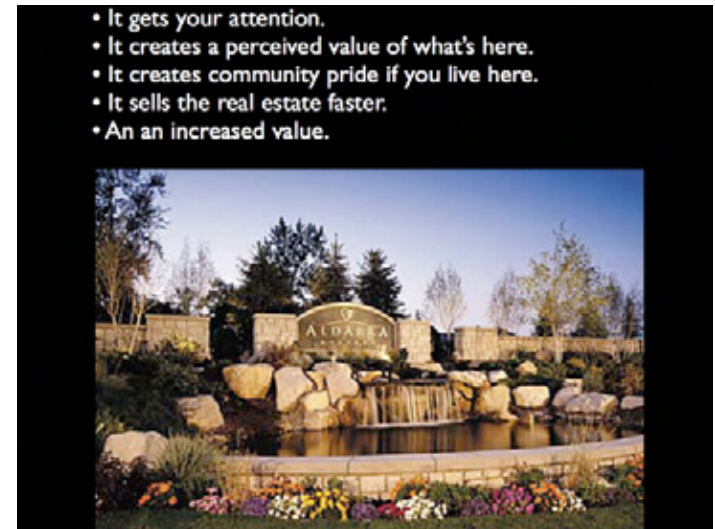


Amherst's billboard (bottom right) doesn't really give visitors a reason to stop. Visitors are looking for activities, not cities or towns. Pull them in with an enticing *reason* to stop, and be specific. Is there a great restaurant that features a specialty item? Is there a local shop that has handcrafted wares? Promote them. Set your community apart - make it distinctive. Promote your "Best Of" eating establishments, activities or shops. "First choice" is clever, but doesn't provide a reason to stop.

Amherst's welcome signs are very nicely done (top left). This one (top right), however, should be moved to a slightly different location. Seeing the sign for the tattoo parlor along with Amherst's welcome sign might not give the town the desired first impression.

What impression does Othello's welcome sign (bottom left) give you of that community? Does it look like a town you'd want to visit?

Your gateway, or welcome signs, are a visitor's introduction to the community. What they look like, and where they're placed, gives visitors their first impression, which is a lasting impression. Be sure to always place your gateway signs where they will make the first, best impression, and that is not necessarily at your city or town limits.





This one here is good. Suggestion: Never put text over graphics on signage. They can't look like ads.

What impression does Lakeport, CA's welcome sign present? (top left) It really sells the town short, especially with the litter strewn along the highway beside it. Downtown Lakeport (top right photos) is actually a very charming and attractive city.

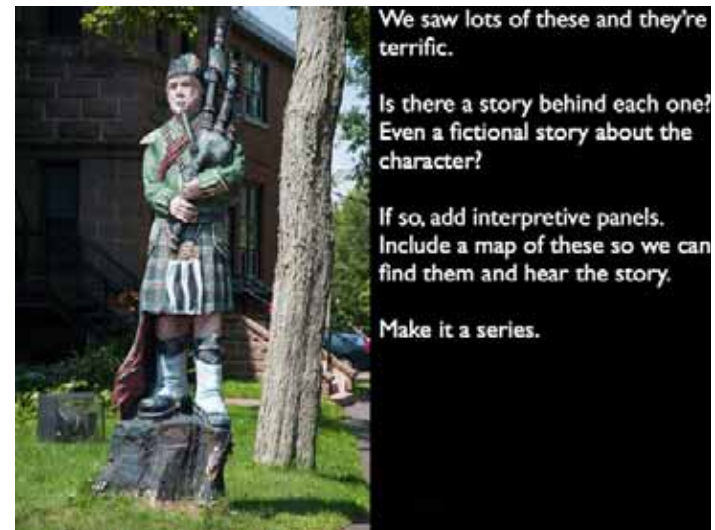
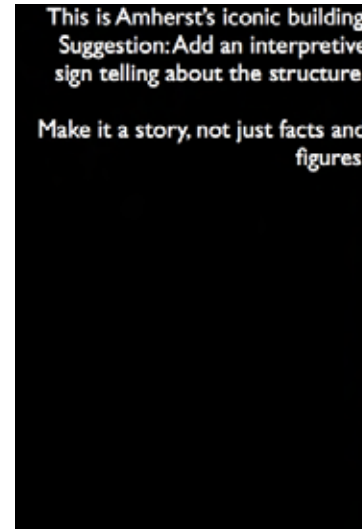
Oroville, WA, a town of 1,650 residents, has placed these attractive monument signs (bottom left) at each end of its three-block long downtown. At the city limits are signs that say "Historic Downtown Oroville - ahead one mile." That, in essence, says "don't judge us yet, you still have a mile to go." And it teases people to go that extra mile. Once there, you are greeted with these signs, which slows traffic and gets visitors to take a look, translating to additional spending.

Never design signs or billboards to look like print ads. While this is attractive (bottom right), it's difficult to read because of the extensive graphics.

Amherst is full of very beautiful historic buildings. The sculptures and murals are beautiful.

Make your public art come alive by telling stories about it using interpretive displays. Why were these particular statues carved? Do they portray specific people, or are they representative of an era in Amherst's history? In either case, tell stories about the people and their lives at that time in Amherst - this will capture visitors' imaginations and make the experience more interactive.

If they are simply carved statues not tied to a particular person, consider creating a story (fiction) that incorporates all the carvings. Number them. Have people go to each, read that part of the story, then they go to the next one to read that chapter. Make it engaging or even humorous. Have fun with it. This will get you publicity, will keep people in town longer - and that translates to increased revenues for your businesses.





These could be woven into quite a story.

Without something like this, the town's public art and architecture are static.

"Been there, done that" things to look at

We walked up and down the streets of Amherst, and we enjoyed the town's architecture and sculptures, but there wasn't really much else to do. The problem? Amherst doesn't have the critical mass of shopping and dining to make it a stand-alone "destination" for visitors or for local residents.

Amherst has a golden opportunity to capture untold visitor spending, but the town lacks "critical mass."



Critical Mass is More Than a Religious Experience
The 10+10+10 rule

Successful downtowns need to have a “critical mass” of like businesses. This would include a minimum, in three lineal blocks:

- TEN places that sell food: soda fountain, coffee shop, bistro, cafe, fine dining, family restaurant, wine store, deli, bakery, confectionary
- TEN destination retail shops: galleries, antiques, home accents, outfitters, collectibles, books, kitchen supplies, garden, etc.
- TEN places open after 6:00 pm: entertainment, theater, performing arts, bars and bistros, specialty shops, dining, open air markets, etc.

80% of all non-lodging tourism spending is spent on shopping, dining and entertainment in a pedestrian-friendly setting. This is why Disney has now built “Downtown Disney” (top right) outside each of their theme parks - they can capture that 80%.



Think Argyle Street in Halifax.





Places like this offer a great start. But you need more. Suggestion: Add some pots, planters and beautification here.



- Think of the success of:
- Antique Malls: They do ten times the business when grouped together.
 - Auto Malls: They do seven times the business when together. This is often referred to as “clustering.”
 - Think food courts, corner gas stations and fast food establishment, and lifestyle retail centers.

Consider Argyle Street in downtown Halifax. The 22 restaurants here (in just two and a half blocks) have built decks over the sidewalks to accommodate tables and chairs (photos opposite bottom and this page top and bottom left).

Note the lush plantings that every restaurant provided. Beautification is very important, and the restaurants all do their best to create an attractive setting. They’ve also used plants and planters as barriers to help create a feeling of intimacy for their dining patrons.

Curb appeal can account for 70% of first-time sales at restaurants, wineries, lodging, retail shops, and golf courses.

Would you eat at this restaurant? (top right) It doesn't have much appeal nor does it do anything to draw customers in.

Sisters, OR (bottom left) has worked hard to beautify their town and develop critical mass. As a result, they have the highest retail sales per capita of any town in Oregon.

A research study had four towns plant street trees every 30 feet along one block (bottom right), and then surveyed sales in that block for a year. Sales in the block with the street trees increased 18% - three to four times that of the rest of town! Street trees create a wonderful ambiance in any downtown, and people place a higher value on shops and their merchandise where there are street trees - they are willing to spend more.





Neenah, Wisconsin (top left) did a downtown makeover. Note the streetscape in the top left photo. Although it's clean and neat, compare it to the street just one block down (top right), after the makeover. Note how the planters soften the facades and create a fresher, more inviting sidewalk. Retail sales in the block with the beautification increased by more than 25% that of the un-beautified street.

The brick sidewalks, lampposts, awnings, benches, and A-board sign look very nice (bottom left). Enhance the effect even more - add potted flowers and shrubs under the windows.

Take a look at what LaRua, a restaurant in Whistler, BC (bottom right) does to attract customers. This stunning scene attracts patrons - people love to sit among beautiful surroundings, which increase the perceived value of the shop or restaurant. They do this in Whistler, year round.

A few of the businesses have done a good job, as in these two examples. But even here, take it up a notch.

Invest In Beautification
The rule of invitations & staying power

Streetscapes are one piece of the puzzle that makes a downtown successful. Storefronts are another piece - when they're attractive and inviting, people are much more likely to be enticed inside and spend money. Good curb appeal - the combination of streetscapes and storefronts - is an investment with incredible return.

In Ellensburg, WA (top left), merchants adopt a corner park adoption program, keep it planted and maintained, and get credit for their work on small plaques located in each small garden. Consider developing a similar program in Amherst.

This shop in Banff, AB (top right) uses deer-resistant shrubs in the lower areas, and flowers above.

This merchant (bottom left) in Blaine, WA began setting up this outdoor display every day, and credits it with saving her business.

The bright spots of color and hanging baskets outside this restaurant in Door County, WI change this facade from drab to outstanding (bottom right).

Suggestion: Create a corner park adoption program.





Wilson's Restaurant (top left), a simple lunch spot, creates a beautiful outdoor dining area with flowers along the railing and a bright awning.

The Nic-L-Inn (top right) in Cattaraugus Co, NY is a stand-alone restaurant in a rural area, but it is a "destination restaurant." People are willing to drive quite a distance, not only for the food, but for the beautiful ambiance, as you can see with their landscaping.



This streetscape in Ellicottville, NY (bottom two photos) is also very inviting - the hanging baskets, tables and chairs, awnings and decorative signs create a stunning, inviting scene.

Beautification efforts don't have to be elaborate to be effective. This simple scene, with the freshly painted bench and barrels of flowers outside the shop window in Fort MacLeod, AB (top left) is a case in point.

The most successful downtowns have excellent curb appeal - the city and merchants jointly create and maintain beautiful streetscapes - year round.

These photos (top right and bottom two photos) showcase Fredericksburg, the most visited small town in Texas. With a population of only 12,000, the city hosts two million visitors annually. The appeal? More than 80 shops, galleries, boutiques and emporiums, in a pedestrian-friendly, beautiful historical setting. The town is always "decked out" in its finest.

The pictures on this page were taken in early March. Note that they use a lot of evergreen shrubs and plants to keep downtown green and inviting year round.





Note these storefronts and street scenes (photos this page) in Jonesborough, TN - all decked out in October's finest.

When merchants enhance the entryways to their shops and restaurants with seasonal beautification like this, they pull customers into their stores. And the attractive downtown invites people to linger and spend more time there. The longer people linger, the more money they spend.



Along the Great Smoky Mountain Art Trail in Gatlinburg, TN (top left), merchants use benches, flowers, trees, and decorative signage to create a wonderful ambiance. Does it make you want to go in?



Amazing Grace, the shop shown top right, lures customers into the store with an inviting entrance including pillars, potted plants, and silk garlands.



In December, this shop (bottom left) in York, PA decorates with seasonal holly, ivy, and evergreens. These are silk plants.



Amherst has many elements of a beautiful destination downtown in place already - with the wide sidewalks, some street trees, the distinctive architecture. But it needs more.

Curb appeal can account for 70% of first-time sales at restaurants, wineries, lodging, retail shops, golf courses.

But at the end of the day, it's what's IN the buildings that ultimately makes you a draw.



Without beautification, it's hard to tell who's in business, and who isn't.



Suggestions: Street trees every 10 meters. This block should be a stunning destination. Instead it's very stark, bare & uninviting.



Can you tell which of these shops is open or in business? (top left) With no beautification, they simply look stark and empty.

Suggestion: Enhance downtown Amherst with street trees along the entire main street - every ten meters or so. Add planters with a combination of evergreen shrubs and seasonal annual color. Particularly on each side of retail doorways. Merchants should think of the sidewalks in front of their shops as their own entrance at home - make it appealing and inviting!

If you were passing through, how much time would you spend here? Suggestion: Use blade signs instead of sandwich boards.



20/20 Signage Equals \$\$\$
The rules of retail signage



Can you tell what shops are in any of these buildings? (top right, bottom left) The retail signage is all flat against the buildings and too high for pedestrians. You can really only see them from across the street.

Signs placed perpendicular to the building allow drivers and pedestrians to read them easily, even from a distance. Note the use of blade signs in Leavenworth, WA (bottom right). Businesses with blade signs see an immediate return on that investment.

Here are additional blade sign examples in Nantucket, MA (top left); and Carmel, CA (top right).

Perpendicular signs are seen ten times more frequently than facade-mounted signs.

Blade signs should be decorative and placed between seven feet (bottom edge of the sign) and nine feet (top edge), and typically no more than 42 inches wide. They should be double-sided, and fit the ambiance of the town and architecture.

They should contain no more than four to six words.

Decorative retail signs can enhance the ambiance of downtowns, as well as attract customers. These decorative A-board signs (bottom photos) do an excellent job.





Architecture and streetscapes are inseparable. Make it shine.

You have a HUGE opportunity - and a responsibility - as a primary gateway community in the province. The bar was set high at the VIC.

Suggestion #1: Clean up the weeds all over downtown.



Suggestion #2: Don't allow plastic banners and sign clutter. Rule: 2 weeks, 4 times a year, special sales & events only, with fines.

We don't know the story about this wonderful old building in downtown Amherst (top left), but its deteriorating condition was very sad, and reflected poorly on downtown. We were surprised that the sidewalk in front of the building looked like it hadn't been swept in months or even over the past year. And there were weeds growing in the sidewalk as well. Even if the building is vacant and abandoned, the sidewalk area should be maintained and kept clean and weed-free.

Finding things in Amherst was a challenge.



Suggestion: Plastic banners should not be allowed as permanent signage - they look "cheap" and temporary. They should be limited in use: by permit only, for only 2 weeks at a time, for special events or sales, and a maximum of four times a year. Fines should be assessed for violators.

We had a hard time finding the amenities in Amherst. A comprehensive wayfinding system would help visitors find what you have to offer and where it's located.

Create a Wayfinding & Gateway Signage System to address wayfinding (directional signage), gateways and entries, attractions, amenities, billboards and marketing displays. Since, nationally, less than 5% of visitors stop at visitor information centers, comprehensive wayfinding is critical to help visitors find what it is you have to offer.

Wayfinding signs should be decorative and fit the ambiance or brand of the town. Some good examples: Appleton, Wisconsin (top left). Note how they include a pedestrian map of their downtown. Oak Harbor, WA (top right) has signage that reflects their nautical theme, and they use different colored signs for visitor wayfinding and community services.

Be sure to develop signs to indicate where visitors can find parking, and be sure to include RV parking as well (bottom left).

Solvang, CA (bottom right) has these monument signs in each of their parking areas, and they've included a visitor information display to "sell" visitors as soon as they get out of their cars.



Amherst has more potential than almost any community in the region. And it has the infrastructure in place. Take it up a notch and you'll become more than a gateway community. Really.



On gateway signs use one simple graphic. "All things to all people" gateways are difficult to decipher from a distance.



Avoid being a "something for everyone" community. For Pugwash, play up the "Village of Peace."



After leaving Amherst, we continued heading east to explore more of the region. We drove along Highway 366 towards the shore and the beaches and then along Highways 6 and 104, exploring anything that grabbed our attention off the main highways.

The marketing literature we picked up and brought with us promoted the beaches and hiking. It's a beautiful area, and we visited a number of beach parks along the way.

Approaching Pugwash, we came across several different gateway signs. Often communities want to showcase everything they have to offer on their signage: golfing, fishing, beaches, etc. We refer to that as the "We have something for everyone" syndrome. It doesn't work to entice visitors - visitors are looking for unique places - places that offer something that they'd be interested in. Play up your strong point - what sets you apart from everyone else.

Pugwash should, and does, play up its "Village of Peace" theme (top left). It is an amazing story that has enduring appeal. The gateway sign is beautiful.

Avoid sign clutter - when there are several signs in one place, not only is it unsightly, but drivers have a hard time reading them all.

A wayfinding system developed for the entire Sunrise Trail would alleviate these kinds of problems. (top right, and bottom photos)

There are five signs here and everyone is different. There is no continuity and so most, if not all but the highway sign are likely to be ignored.



This is why you need a Sunrise Trail wayfinding system. This is a mess. Nine signs in one intersection. A mish-mash mess.



These should be consolidated into one sign. What's the Route 6 Windsor sign?



Suggestion: Use a dark green sign with yellow block lettering: "Visitor Information" and a yellow arrow.



Good retail signage. Pewter seems to be a "brand" here.



We were a little disappointed that the famous Seagull Pewter store and sign were not well maintained.



While the store was terrific, the exterior and landscape were in very poor shape. Suggestion: Hire a landscape maintenance company.



Overall a great shop and an "anchor tenant" that should be promoted specifically.



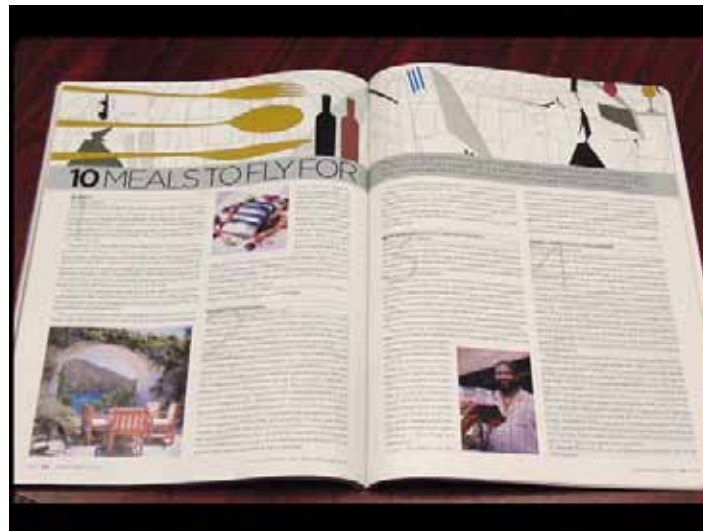
There is definitely a pewter "theme" in the retail stores in Pugwash. Promote those shops specifically - people will drive a distance for a specific retail theme.

The shops were terrific, but be sure to maintain retail signage and the shop exteriors as well as interiors. It does matter! First impressions pull customers in and set the stage for what to expect inside. A high quality exterior translates to high quality merchandise. Segull Pewter is top of the line, but would you know it judging from the shop's sign and exterior?

When the building, sign or landscaping looks run down, worn, or uncared for, it decreases the perceived value of the shop and its merchandise. An impeccably maintained shop exterior helps pull customers in.

Be sure to promote your anchor businesses. Like every mall, every town relies on the anchor businesses to pull customers in. All the other businesses benefit from their presence.

A good case of an anchor tenant is the Southern Baptist Texas Barbecue in Huntsville, Texas (top left). Would you eat there? The Barbecue was started as a fund raiser for the little church next door. You might not want to eat there unless you had heard about it - and many people have. Visitors by bus loads come from more than 100 miles away: from Houston and Dallas for lunch. Gentleman's Quarterly Magazine (GQ) listed it as one of the "top ten meals to fly for" in the world! It is now Huntsville's "Anchor business." No town or downtown area can thrive, just like a mall, without an anchor tenant or two, or three.





Develop a “Best of Nova Scotia’s Sunrise Trail” brochure. Use a vetting process to determine which businesses to include. Criteria might include:

- Must be open year round
- Must be open on weekends
- Must be open until at least 7:00 pm on weekends
- Must have good curb appeal
- Must be highly regarded by someone other than themselves

Ottawa, Illinois, 1.5 hours southwest of Chicago, produced a brochure to specifically promote their anchor tenants - each page includes one or two photos and descriptive text about a shop, activity, or restaurant, that visitors couldn’t find closer to home (top photos and bottom left). They sent one to each household in the area and distributed the rest throughout the area.

Within six months, Ottawa’s hotel occupancy rates increased by more than 30%, and their downtown shops were actually getting more business - not just from visitors - but from locals as well. Promoting your anchor tenants is a winning strategy.

The Chatterbox Cafe was a fun and busy place (top photos). Great beautification! And the sign is very good, but should be repeated on the back to entice people from both directions.

There were several fun shops to visit, but overall, Pugwash didn't have enough critical mass to hold visitors for long.

Remember the rule of Critical Mass - the Ten+Ten+Ten rule described earlier in this assessment report.

The more you have to offer, the further people will travel to visit you, the longer they will stay, and naturally, they will spend more - the ultimate goal of tourism.



It seemed like a town really struggling. We assumed this business was out of business.



Good job with signage and beautification. This business sets the standard for curb appeal.

We enjoyed walking around Pugwash, with its lovely park on the water. It's a picture perfect setting.

Keep in mind that a historical town should try to maintain that ambiance. Consider developing merchant-driven signage guidelines, which would limit the use of plastic banners and provide design guidelines for retail signage. Try to maintain the flavor of an historic seaside town.

The park is stunning.



In historic towns, avoid the use of plastic banners. This really hurts the appeal of what is otherwise a beautiful building.



This little gallery was also fun to visit (top photos). Very nice sign.

Suggestion: Let visitors know about upcoming events at the park or in town with a readerboard at the park. This will invite people back! Always take every opportunity to invite people back again and again.

Great job with the interpretive panels! Visitors always enjoy learning about the places they are visiting, and interpretive panels are one of the best ways to do that. It builds a connection between the visitor, the place, and its history. It keeps visitors in town longer increasing spending opportunities.



Another nice little gallery. Good sign and teaser.



Suggestion: Add a calendar or readerboard of upcoming events at the park. Does much go on here?



Good interpretive panels.

I was eyeing this house wondering if it were for sale. A local set me straight with "not on your life."



The story is good but nowhere does it note that the house here is the one I was looking at. Tell us that it's right next door.



It was fascinating to learn about Thinkers' Lodge and the peace conferences held in Pugwash. What a wonderful "brand" and heritage for the community!

Visitors are reluctant to "intrude" on what may be someone's home, even when it does have a sign outside indicating it's a business. Do more than that - add an additional sign making it obvious visitors are welcome. Encourage visitors to enter using the words: "Welcome! Please walk right in!" Indicate your shop's operating hours. If you leave a car or two parked out front, it appears other customers are already there which encourages visitors to stop. And remember - plastic banners are no substitute for permanent retail signage.

For home-based businesses: make sure it's obvious your open. Say "Walk right in" to make it inviting. Leave a door open. Park a car or two out front. Get rid of the plastic banner.



Suggestion: Develop 24/7 visitor information including brochure distribution.



Always provide visitor information 24 hours a day/7 days a week. Visitors don't just travel during business hours - and here, there wasn't staffing to allow the center to remain open all day. Put up one or two weather-proof brochure holders to accommodate visitors arriving when the center is closed.

All the more reason to provide outdoor 24/7 visitor information (top left). Don't send your visitors away frustrated.

We next headed south towards Oxford, and while there visited the Wild Blueberry & Maple Centre. The staff there was exceptional. Too bad there wasn't more to do there. This one attraction hardly makes the trek worth the time and really limits additional spending in the town.

In our case, we accidentally locked the keys in the car and while waiting for help we had some time to kill, but there was nothing to do, no place to go, and no shops were open that would appeal to visitors.





We even photographed the "world's largest blueberries."



The displays were very nice.

The Centre displays were enjoyable. Try to include more interactive displays which engage the visitor. Too often, museums and interpretive centres are "been there, done that" attractions, and might occupy a visitor for an average of just 20 minutes or so. But if you tell stories and make the exhibits interactive, visitors can be kept occupied for hours. If you can keep them entertained or engaged for two hours or longer, they'll want to have a snack, or a meal, or buy a souvenir, etc.

But the only thing interactive (besides the beehive) was out of order.



It did have a nice store and we purchased quite a bit of stuff.

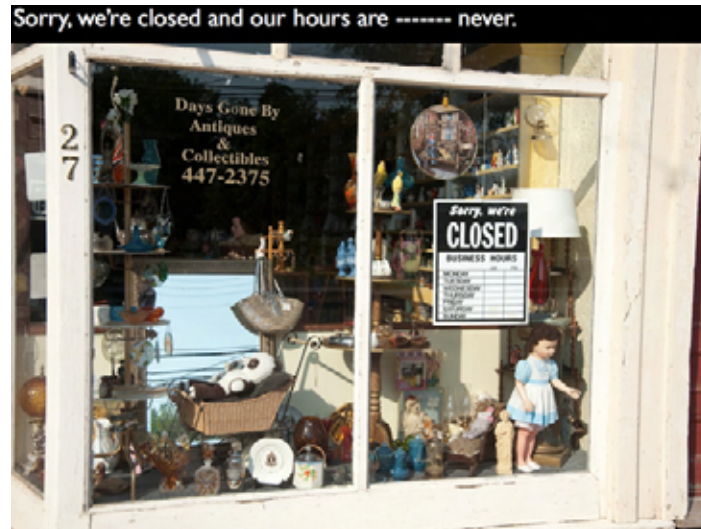


Perfect example: Since the keys were locked in the car, we spent a lot more time in Oxford than we originally planned. The result: We spent a lot of money at the Blueberry Centre gift shop! (Which has a lot of great stuff!) The rest of the town missed out.

Always treat your customers like guests. Welcome them! Create invitations, not rejections.

Don't just post "Closed" signs on your shop windows. "Closed" signs effectively tell visitors to go away. Instead, tell visitors WHEN you will be open. Invite them back! Get rid of all closed signs.

This shop in Grass Valley, CA (top right) does a great job of welcoming customers. Does it make you want to go in? By the way, the flowers are silk.



This restaurant in Banff, AB (bottom left) not only entices patrons in by posting their menu, they created a decorative display for the menus that tells customers how much they value their patronage. Once again, it's pretty enticing.

Suggestion: Use signs such as these (bottom right).





For the most part, Oxford was pretty much a ghost town - even in the middle of the day. Seems like a bedroom community.



Other than the Blueberry and Maple Centre, the town had really nothing to offer visitors. Certainly not worth the 4X Rule.



This shop in Wickford, Rhode Island (top right) has a very welcoming entry. They also post a sign on the door letting customers know where they can find public washrooms - a much better strategy than sending customers away with a “No Washrooms” sign.

Side trip: The Country Store (top right) also has a small sign to the left of the door that reads “Your husband called. He said you can spend whatever you’d like.”

Fact: Women account for nearly 80% of travel spending. This is another reason why curb appeal is so important. They also make nearly 70% of the travel destination decisions.

In a nutshell, Oxford didn’t really have anything for visitors besides the Blueberry and Maple Centre - and not enough to convince people to go out of their way for.

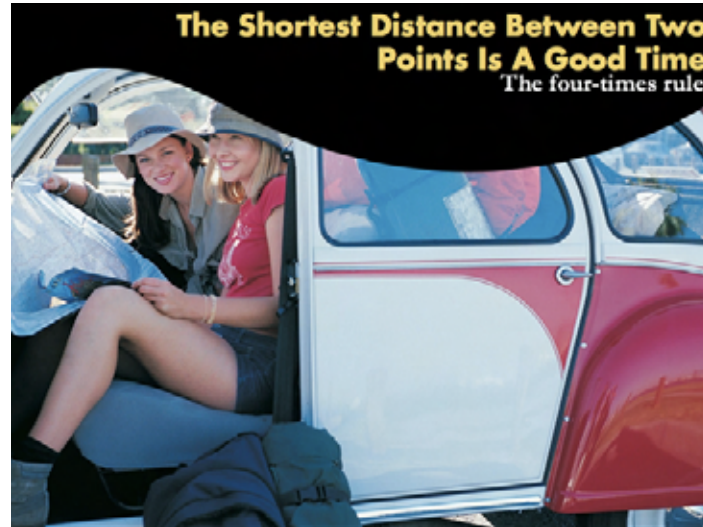
People determine their travel using the Four-Times Rule:

People will visit your community if it has activities that interest them and keep them busy four times longer than it took to get them there. So if it takes an hour to get to Oxford, do you have four hours of activities?

If it only took 15 minutes, is there an hour's worth of activities? (Four times 15 minutes).

The more you have to offer collectively, the farther people will travel to reach you, and the longer they will stay. Sometimes it's necessary to develop more activities to have enough to offer to make it "worth the trip."

After leaving Oxford, we headed back north towards Wallace. Wallace's "welcome" sign didn't make a terrific first impression. Consider replacing it with a decorative sign and placing it in a more attractive location. The weeds and tall grass almost obscure the sign.



Suggestion: Consider a decorative sign that fits the "beautiful place" promise. Put the sign in a better location.



Suggestion: Every time there is a key, add the distance. That way you don't need multiple signs.



Some have distances, but no name, some have a name but no distances, some have just a key and an arrow... Create some consistency to these!



This is great, but we can't take it with us. Suggestion: Develop a map and a put it in a brochure holder here.



Redevelop the sign. Make prominent: "Fascinating stories. Heritage Gardens. Walking Trails. Open daily 10 to 6"



The "key" signs are a good idea, but they need to provide additional information to be useful. Always include the name of the attraction plus the distance. There were a few times we didn't know the distance, and gave up because it seemed like we must have gone too far.

Remember that most travelers aren't prepared with pen and clipboard to write down the information from your displays (bottom left). Make it easy! Use weather-proof brochure holders, and keep them stocked with maps, brochures, and information.

Sell the experience! A sign could attract more customers if it sold the experience first - "Fascinating stories. Heritage gardens. Walking trails." And always post your operating hours.

Never use more than 12 words on any roadside sign. The fewer, the better. Ideal: 4 to 8.

Throughout North America, the average museum visit lasts between 20 and 40 minutes. If you can captivate the visitor for two hours or longer, spending in the area will increase.

When museums tell stories, rather than simply displaying artifacts with facts and figures, they are able to captivate their visitors.

The Wallace & Area Museum does an excellent job telling captivating stories about the people and events that have shaped the community. And it's great that they were asking for visitor feedback about the displays! That's the best way to find out what visitors enjoy most.

Great job and an example we'll use throughout all of our travels. We spent more than an hour at this little museum.



The Wallace & Area Museum does an excellent job telling the stories.



While in the area we did visit the Jost Vineyards & Winery.





Another anchor - and perhaps the biggest anchor - of the Sunrise Trail.



What visit to the Northumberland Shore would be complete without going to Jost Vineyards and Winery?

Jost is definitely one of the biggest “anchors” of the region, and it lives up to its reputation. Beautiful wine shop, excellent service, and great wines!

They should be at the top of the list when you specifically promote your “anchor tenants.” Don’t let politics kill your efforts by being forced to promote everyone. Always promote the anchors, and other businesses in the area will succeed. Disney World is a perfect example. They are the anchor that pulls people to Orlando, and Universal Studios and more than 100 other attractions benefit from them being there. The same holds true here, although on a smaller scale.



And Jost even provides outdoor visitor information! Good job.

The Salt Mine Museum has a very good sign, and we drove out to it only to find it closed.

Suggestion: Add a snipe to the sign letting people know the museum's operating hours. That way they can plan to visit the museum at the right time, during the open days.



We drove to the museum. It was closed.



When you leave the winery, you certainly can't miss the Salt Mine Museum. Good job!



Since we weren't sure what the focus was, we didn't make it back.





As we continued driving east along Highway 6, we came to Tatamagouche. And boy were we were hoping to find public washrooms!

Suggestion: Use public washrooms as an economic development tool. Really. The number one reason travelers stop is to use the facilities - and once they stop, they are far more likely to spend money on a snack, a souvenir or gift, lunch, or an ice cream cone.

First things first. Where are the washrooms?



Toilets really do attract more than flies. They are an investment - not an expense.

Washrooms can be an important sales strategy. Never just tell customers to go away. Tell people *where* they can find the washrooms! As noted earlier, relieved visitors do spend more.

This shop in Wickford, shown earlier for its curb appeal (top right) has posted a small decorative sign on their door (bottom left) letting visitors know where the public washrooms are located.

Make sure no businesses put “no public washrooms” or “for customers only” in their windows.

The Little America Travel Center advertises their washroom facilities on the highway (bottom right). Located 150 miles east of Salt Lake City and 300 miles west of Cheyenne, Wyoming along I-80, this little oasis has built up a huge business over the last 60 years, and their biggest strategy is to try to get those travelers to stop along their journey.

Suggestion: Make sure you include visitor information and brochure distribution

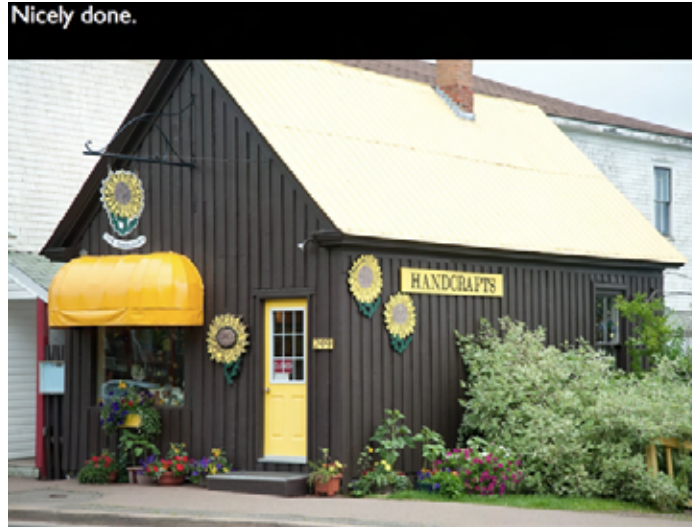


where your public washrooms are located. Where do you do most of your reading? This way you combine 24-hour visitor information with your washrooms.

Most of the merchants understand the power of curb appeal and it was a very busy town.



Nicely done.



We love the iconic Nova Scotia colors. Suggestions: Limit in-window fliers to just four.



It was hard to find a place to park - on a weekday. That's the power of being able to stop traffic with curb appeal.



Tatamagouche was a very popular place - and on a weekday no less! Visitors filled the shops and sidewalks, AND the parking spaces.

It's easy to see why! These merchants do a very good job of making their shops and eateries attractive and appealing. The buildings are delightfully painted, there are flowers and shrubs everywhere, the sidewalks are clean and swept, and benches are provided to encourage lingering and enjoying the town. Good job!

Even the local variety store made a great display using chairs (top left). The bank did its part (top right), and these intimate outdoor seating and dining areas (bottom left) encourage visitors to linger.

We had an excellent lunch at this little restaurant (bottom right). The huge expanse of a gravel parking lot somewhat detracted from its visual appeal as we drove up, but the restaurant was wonderful. If possible, consider breaking up the parking lot with one or two planting areas for trees and flowers. Create a strong buffer between the shop and the parking lot. There's a good start, but even add more. Consider hanging baskets.



These little "gathering spots" are a critical element for success. Great job here.



The Taste of Nova Scotia brought us here. Otherwise we wouldn't have gone in. They "delivered on the promise."





Signage rules:

- Never use outlined text
- Dark background, yellow lettering
- No text over graphics on signs
- 1" tall lettering for every 12' of viewing distance
- Upper and lower-case lettering
- No more than five items on a sign
- Promote the primary experience



Signs should always be perpendicular to the traffic - not a v-shaped sign.

Sorry!

We almost missed seeing this sign (top photos) because it was nearly parallel to the street.

Drivers - especially when they are visiting and are unfamiliar with the area - tend to keep their eyes forward; they're watching traffic, possible pedestrians, traffic signs, etc. If they have to turn their heads sideways to read a sign, chances are they'll miss it. Signs need to always be perpendicular to traffic.

This is a great attraction, which we missed the first time through the area. Suggestion: Add a calendar of events or readerboard with hours.



Good information display. Develop more of these.



To make signs easy to read, it's also important to use contrasting lettering (dark background with light letters), never use outlined text, and do not put text over graphics.

Also, people have four seconds to read a sign. Resist the urge to put everything you have to offer on the sign. Promote the primary lure that will pull us in.

The Creamery is great - be sure to post operating hours and a calendar of events to invite visitors back.

24-hour visitor information is easy to provide with kiosks. They can be designed in innumerable ways to fit the ambience of the area. Always include brochure distribution.

These examples of outdoor visitor information are from Ashland, Oregon (top left); and Teton Pass Trail, Idaho (top right).

This small kiosk (bottom left) was built by volunteers in Moses Lake, Washington. The graphics could be better, but it does show a number of “must see” local attractions.

This kiosk display in Skamania, Washington (bottom right) was built by local high school students.





This visitor information kiosk in Kingsport, Tennessee (top left) includes a weather-proof brochure holder (top right). There is a \$5 per month charge to include your brochure, and that fee pays for maintenance, keeping it stocked, and to help fund construction of the next kiosk. If you place kiosks in a location where visitors can spend money, you'll receive a double benefit.



We were confused. Which is the REAL Anna Swan museum? Or is one a display, one a museum?



This Visitor Information gazebo (bottom left) was built in Beatty, Nevada from a kit by volunteers. A local craftsman built the display and brochure racks inside. It makes a near-perfect visitor information display.

Develop visitor information kiosks throughout the region that provide brochure distribution. Use them to cross-sell attractions and amenities across the area.

The Anna Swan museum was very interesting - a good story about a truly unique person. The signs for the museum were confusing though - can the information be consolidated?

Avoid sign clutter whenever possible (top right). Take a close look at anyplace that has more than two signs posted to look for ways to combine or cut back.

With all the signs here, we totally missed what we found out to be one of the areas best places to see and visit.

As we drove along the coast, we checked out a number of the small beach parks.



Someone said there's a great attraction here. We missed it. Too much sign clutter here. Suggestion: Create a directory, cut the text by half.





The shoreline parks are very nice - great day trip destinations.



We also visited many of the beaches, which seemed more of a local draw than a visitor destination.



The beaches looked great - and people were out there enjoying the warmest salt water north of the Carolinas. The beaches weren't very busy, and we got the impression they were more of a draw for local and area people to spend the day than for visitors. While the beaches are terrific, there are few spending opportunities there, thus the need to get visitors to stop as they pass through the towns.

Suggestion: Perhaps there's a business opportunity for summertime vendors at the parks: ice cream, hot dogs, kites, umbrella rentals, beach towel rentals or sales, water and drinks, etc.

We continued our drive east, heading into River John.

Remember, drivers only have a few seconds to read signs - there's no way a driver could read everything on this sign (top right) without stopping for a minute or longer. Most will pass on by ignoring all the listings. Suggestion: Just use key words like:

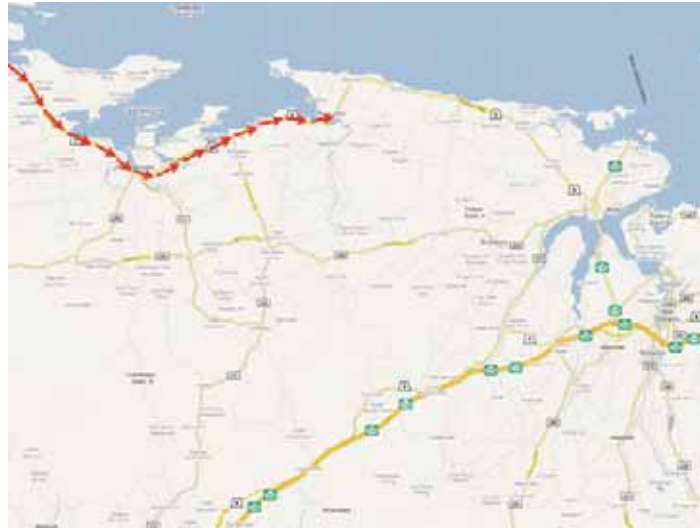
Food

Lodging

Gifts & collectibles

Camping supplies

Here's another key sign - add distance to this sign (bottom left). If we don't know how far it is, why bother? There doesn't seem to be any consistency to these signs.



We didn't have time to stop for five minutes to read through all of these. Suggestion: Create a simply directory. One line p/business.



Thanks a lot. How far down the road is this?



We did find the museum. Because we were so pressed for time, we didn't get a chance to visit. It looks like a great attraction.



Nice gateway sign.



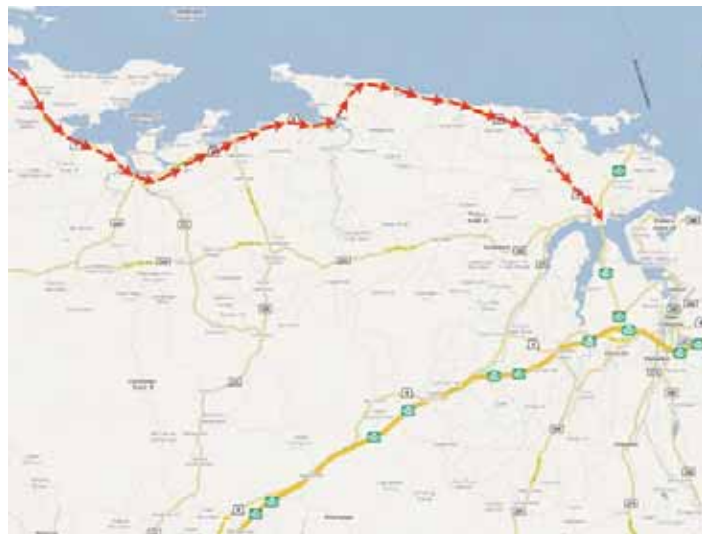
We never did find the visitor information center - unless this is it at the local church.



Very impressive entry to River John! (top left)

We weren't able to find the visitor information center there, though (top right). Be sure your wayfinding signs continue all the way through to the destination. Is the church the visitor information centre? No, that can't be right.

Seafoam Campground wins the "Best signage" award of the Sunrise Trail. You know it exists and can't miss it. It seems to work.



Seafoam Campground (bottom left) looks like a great vacation spot! They do a very good job with their signage and introductory curb appeal.

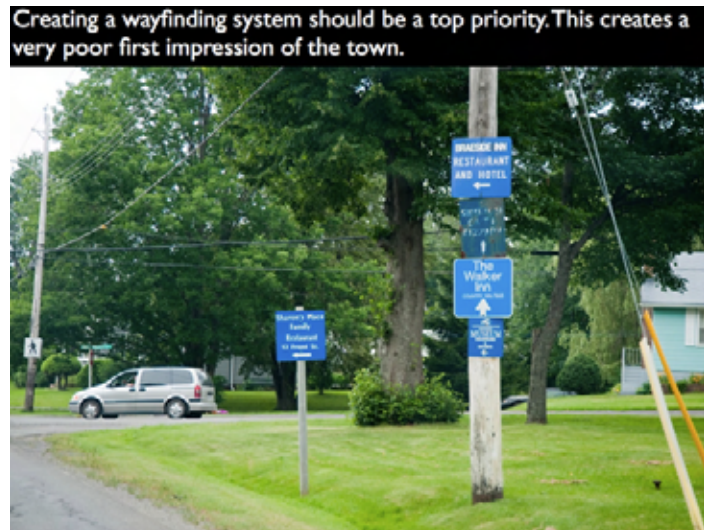
We continued our drive east, heading towards Pictou. (bottom right)

Pictou's welcome signs are very nice - they build a lot of anticipation for a great Scottish experience.

The expanse of gravel around this entry sign (bottom left) detracts from its appeal. Either move the sign or enhance the grounds around it with landscaping or a even a low-maintenance rock garden. Consider turning this into a little "park" area, with a couple benches and gardens.

We had a difficult time navigating through Pictou (bottom right). Wayfinding signs need to continue all the way through to the destination - marking each turn.





In fact, the wayfinding in Pictou is really a start over destination.

The clutter of various wayfinding signs in Pictou was very confusing.

Suggestion: Develop a comprehensive wayfinding system that includes attractions and amenities. It should be decorative and easy to read.



The Fisheries Museum looked like it was no longer in operation. The parking lot, building, and entryway looked uncared for.

Suggestion: Increase the maintenance of the grounds and the building, and add several planters and hanging baskets. Make it inviting! Make it obvious you're open.

Pictou has many incredibly attractive historic buildings. A great foundation for an overall theme or brand.

Still in operation? It looks as though it's closed. Suggestions: Make it obvious you're open. Add planters, make it inviting.



Suggestions: Cut back the weeds, pick up the trash, develop some better, permanent, signage. Add beautification.



Pictou has some great architecture. This looks like a terrific place to stay.



What a great opportunity for an architectural and merchant theme.



These are architectural gems that could make this an outstanding destination - for both locals and visitors alike.



These old buildings really help bring the history to life. Consider developing small plaques for the historic buildings to tell a little about each structure, when they were built, and what the original use was.

What a gem of an architecturally unique town!



What a great opportunity.



We really enjoyed seeing Pictou for its wonderful historic buildings combined with the seafaring ambiance of the town. There was lots to enjoy! It was also very pedestrian-friendly - a must for towns hoping to become stand-alone destinations (as opposed to pass-through communities).

The pole banners with the Scottish family tartans are wonderful (as are the streetlamps) (bottom left). A job well done.





But what happened? What could be outstanding now looks like a free for all - do whatever you want proposition. How sad.



There are great elements all through town. From flags, to the crest, to historical displays...



And how does this fit into the New Scotland brand? It seems as though Pictou lost its way somewhere along the line.



Some spots in town don't fit the Scottish or seaport image (bottom left and right), which is a real shame.

It would be great to keep that theme in focus and make sure that all new development does fit in with that brand. That's what sets Pictou apart from every other town and seems to be a missed opportunity here.

When people arrive you want them to step into another culture, or country, and another time. It seems as though Pictou lost its focus and ended up with a jumbled mix of hodge podge buildings, businesses and displays, making what could one of the provinces top attractions just a modest place to visit. But - it's not too late! Put together a plan to make Pictou the destination it certainly deserves to be.

The Hector Heritage Quay was terrific. The waterfront area is extremely enjoyable. Pictou, with a redevelopment effort, has plenty of activities to keep visitors busy and happy for a few days.

Many of the merchants do a good job with beautification, but it could still be improved upon. Some shops (bottom left) would benefit from some additional pots containing shrubs and flowers outside their doors.

Merchants should use blade signs to make it easier for visitors to see what shops are available.

Regardless, once you get to the waterfront, it's a gem. This is the town's anchor tenant, by far. A great place, a great shop.



Excellent displays. Well done.



There are some great shops. Suggestions: Add some planters, pots, blade signs.



Good job of getting us to head down the boardwalk to the entrance.





"Washroom use with purchase only."
No, no, no.



What is the deCoste Centre? Always promote what it is you sell, before the name of the business (or facility).

Never just send people away. When you limit the use of washrooms to "purchases only" you send away potential customers. McDonald's has a policy of never posting washroom signs stating "for customers only." They know that if someone comes in to use the facilities, there is a very good chance they'll buy something while they're there. "Guilt sales." In fact, 75% of washroom visitors buy something.



20/20 Signage Equals \$\$\$
The rules of retail signage - part 2



The deCoste Centre (top right) should make it more obvious what they are about with better signage. Promote what you are, rather than just the name of the facility. Where's the calendar of events? Upcoming shows? Invite us back!

Always promote what you're selling before the name of the business. Can you tell what type of store "The Black Swan" is? (bottom left) Neither could anyone else - it is now out of business. Grizzly Rick's Market (bottom right) saw a dramatic increase in sales after they added the second sign: snacks, sundries, drinks - the lure to pull customers in.

Try to incorporate the Scottish seaport theme into all new building projects throughout town - keep the theme alive and pervasive.

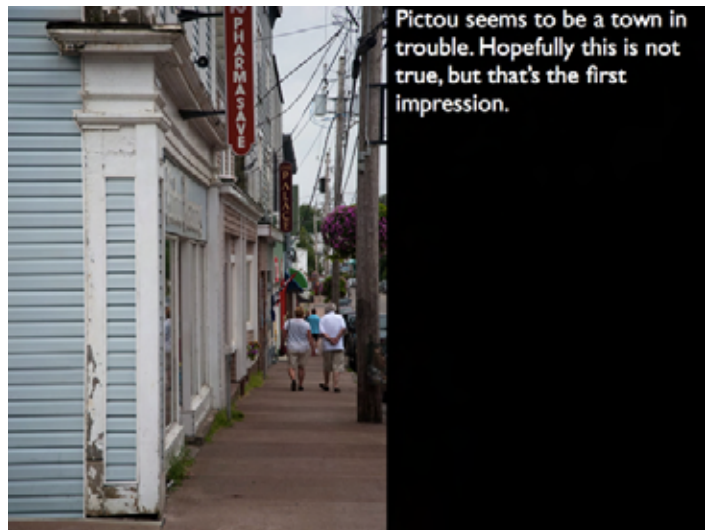
Consider facade improvements, even to these kiosks (top left) to tie into the overall brand and theme.

Once you get away from the waterfront, many businesses seem to be uncaring about maintenance and upkeep of their storefronts. They need to keep weeds out of the sidewalks, keep the sidewalks swept, and add more beautification - more potted plants, trees, and flowers, benches, etc. Beautification is an investment with an incredible return. Don't just blame the town, this needs to be a partnership effort.

Suggestion: Consider removing the pavers (bottom right) and making this a garden area, or an exterior dining area. Anything but this eyesore.



What an eyesore. We hope Pictou can get back to its brand, its roots, and really make a statement. This is sad.



Pictou seems to be a town in trouble. Hopefully this is not true, but that's the first impression.

Parts of Pictou are run down and looking pretty shabby. Consider having an annual or semi-annual clean-up downtown day. Focus on purging the sidewalks of weeds, repainting building facades, potting flowers for entries, etc. Have everyone work together - make it an event with food and entertainment. Hold fundraisers to purchase paint and supplies.

Limit the use of temporary signs and banners (bottom right). They should only be allowed for two weeks maximum, by permit only, and for specific events.



In such a great historic town, control the plastic banners and portable signs. Take us back to Scotland.



If you were to go back to the Scottish and seafaring roots, don't allow them at all.

There were a number of fun little features throughout Pictou that helped make it a fun and charming place to visit. The lobsters in the sidewalk (top left) are a great way to lead people to the museum. The photo opportunities (top right and bottom left) are also great. Where else can you have your picture taken as a kilt-clad Scottish warrior? I doubt if I'll be fooling anyone.

Pictou has so many great features and amenities already in place, and potential to be so much more. Work on a plan to make the town even better - adding more in-depth historical elements, more beautification, signage and wayfinding, carrying the Scottish theme throughout. Consider having a "Branding, Development and Marketing Action Plan" developed for the community.



We spent some money here. Even this building could be developed with a New Scotland theme - or trompe l'oeil murals.



Turn your facades into photo opportunities
The rule of trompe l'oeil



Some buildings would be good “canvases” for murals. Consider trompe l’oeil, (French for “fool the eye”) to disguise blank walls with scenes and architectural details painted so they look real. This is an excellent, less expensive, way to build on a theme.

The photo top right shows a wall painted to look like the outside of an old-fashioned grocery store. The awnings, the windows and doors, even some of the shrubs, are painted.



These photos show some trompe l’oeil projects in progress. The artist (bottom left) working on the beginning of the mural, and the finished work (bottom right).

The blank wall, and the work in progress (top left), and the completed work. This wall was originally an entirely blank brick building - even the archway is painted.

The top right and the bottom two photos are of buildings in Huntsville, Texas, where they used a "facade easement" program to help building owners finance the trompe l'oeil murals. These are excellent examples of how a very plain, blank wall can appear to have intricate architectural details.





More examples of outstanding trompe l’oeil art. Note the “before” picture top left. Just a plain blank wall. The photo below it shows the “after” scene, and the photo top right is a close up of part of the wall. This is all painted, including all the people.

The bottom left photo shows a concrete block wall in Virginia City, Nevada. With the town’s gold rush heritage and historic theme, a blank concrete wall was unsightly and out-of-place. This mural makes the building look like it belongs and it easily fits the towns brand. All the brick, the railing, the windows, and even trim are all part of the mural.

A famous mural in Winslow, Arizona (bottom right) depicts the famous Eagles song, Take It Easy. This wall is entirely painted as well - the bricks, all the windows, even the reflections in the windows are painted. In fact, the building is not even there. Just the facade remains. This mural attracts nearly 1.5 million visitors a year, who also spend money in downtown Winslow.

Power lines always get in the way of seeing beautiful architecture, so if the opportunity ever arises, move the power lines underground.

Pictou has a mix of lovely places, like this small park (top right), stunning architecture, beautiful residences (bottom left), Scottish seaport culture, fun shops and sites, as well as some areas in need of maintenance and care. A new comprehensive wayfinding system would be very helpful.

Suggestion: Strive to keep the focus of the town's development on the Scottish seaport theme.

If the opportunity arises, put the power underground. It will show off some terrific architecture.



A tremendous opportunity.



By the way, we did eventually find the Hector Exhibit Centre. Not too sure what it is, but we did find it.





From Pictou, we journeyed south to New Glasgow. The welcome signs were very nice, creating a great first impression (bottom photos). Keep portable retail signs out of the welcome sign area, though.

Always put your gateway signs where you make the first, best impression - not at the city limits. In this case, the signs ought to say "Historic New Glasgow - ahead 1 km." That tells visitors "don't judge us yet, you still have a kilometer to go!"



A very, very nice gateway sign.



Suggestion: Don't allow portable signs here. It ruins the ambiance.

When visitors see your “welcome” signs, they immediately assume they’ve arrived, and they judge your town based on what they see right then. So, although New Glasgow’s welcome signs and landscaping are very nice, right after that visitors see a not-so-attractive street scene (top right). Remedy? On your “welcome” signs, add the snipe that let’s visitors know the destination is still ahead. Don’t give up on us.



Limit the use of portable signs - they are unattractive. Allow their use only on a temporary basis - the same as for plastic banners. Two weeks maximum, by permit only, for special events, grand openings, and special sales.



A comprehensive, decorative wayfinding system would be very helpful in New Glasgow (bottom left).



The entry to the historic downtown is excellent! (bottom right). This is one of the better gateway signs we’ve seen throughout the province.

Wayfinding, even when downtown needs some help. This is confusing and not helpful at all.



A great event center. The town was prepping for Jubilee. Looks like a lot of fun!



Suggestion: Turn your parks into plazas. This would make a great public market square or event plaza.



New Glasgow was getting ready for Jubilee, and there was lots of activity downtown.

One of the key ingredients for a successful downtown is providing “gathering places.” People love to be in active, vibrant, beautiful surroundings - where other people hang out. These can be plaza areas, wide sidewalks, or “bulb-outs” - sidewalks that bulb out into the street in place of a parking space or two.

Pocket parks, such as this one (bottom right), can be turned into wonderful plaza areas that are perfect for small events or as a permanent location for an outdoor market.

Kalamazoo, MI, has invested in several downtown gathering areas including Arcadia Creek Festival Place (top photos and bottom left) - after seeing the success of their first one, they went on to create additional plaza areas (top right). By developing these places, they became popular event venues and now Kalamazoo is a very popular weekend destination for visitors living in both Chicago and Detroit.

The heart and soul of every community, besides its people, is its downtown. If locals won't "hang out" in your downtown, neither will visitors. Remember that.

Give people more reason to want to spend time downtown by bringing it to life with outdoor entertainment. These musicians in Greenville, SC (bottom right) perform under the street trees on the wide sidewalks downtown, attracting visitors and locals as well.





In Asheville, North Carolina, (top photos) musicians are encouraged - even paid to perform downtown. Restaurants will hire musicians to perform outside, and even though people outside can listen without eating, the restaurants fill with hungry patrons when the music is playing.

Fallbrook, CA (bottom photos) removed a dilapidated building from their downtown, and turned the space into this permanent open-air market, as part of their downtown revitalization strategy.

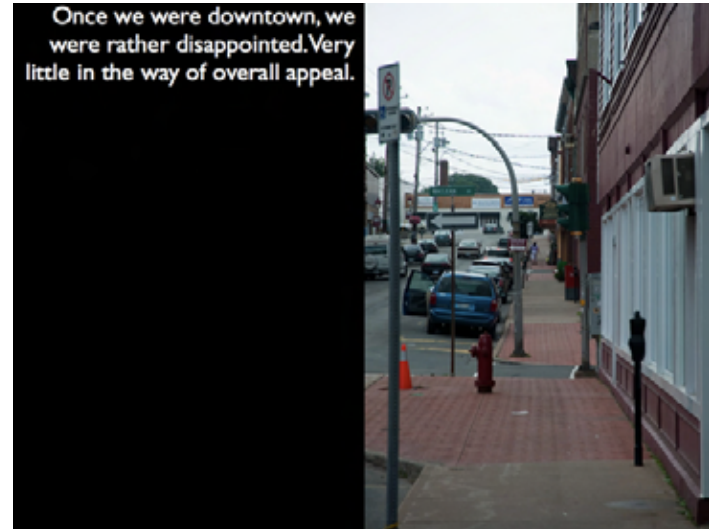
Fallbrook, California



This open air market is on a corner lot - approximately 70 feet by 80 feet in size. The city leases it to a local business person who operates the market and earns a living from vendor space rentals. It's become the town's central gathering place.

These types of markets change by season from produce and food goods, to landscape goods, artists in action, to music shows, to seasonal holiday displays: a Christmas tree forest, for example. These photos (top two and bottom left) are also of Fallbrook's market. Note the variety of products offered - from crafts to produce to baked goods.

Consider developing a permanent open-air market downtown. Open-air markets have been steadily growing in popularity for residents as well as visitors. People are drawn to the activity and vibrancy of that type of market place, as well as the opportunity to interact with the farmers and craftspeople who sell their wares. Open-air markets usually have the feeling of a festival, and people love it.



Once again, some great architecture, but a hodge podge mix of businesses and little in the way of curb appeal.



Start by creating a Business Improvement District to leverage a plan - what do you want to become?

Your brand?



Downtown New Glasgow also has some beautiful architecture, but not many merchants add any welcoming beautification to their storefronts. Most of the streets are stark and hard. There is no critical mass of retail shopping and dining, which would help pull more people downtown. Particularly during evening hours.

A few businesses are working to make downtown attractive.



Some of the businesses make an effort at beautifying their storefronts (bottom photos). But they can't do it by themselves. It takes a village to achieve success as a destination.

Consider creating a Business Improvement District to focus energy on improving the downtown core. Decide on a focus for downtown: do you want a business and office center, a restaurant and entertainment focus, or a core of destination retail? The BID can work on beautification, marketing, and recruitment of desired businesses to help meet your goals and eventually create the critical mass necessary to make downtown the central gathering place for both locals and visitors alike.

Suggestion: Develop a merchant-driven signage, facade, and outdoor display program, with guidelines for their design and use. Outdoor displays can be part of your beautification efforts, but they need to be an extension of window displays, not just piles or racks of merchandise. You don't want downtown to look like a garage sale.

Outdoor displays need to be decorative and attractive.



But overall, it seemed more like a garage-sale type of downtown business mix.





This is promising. People want "third places." Places to hang out.



This outdoor merchandising (top left) just looks like clutter. This shouldn't be permitted downtown. There's a big difference between extending window displays to exterior spaces, and outdoor retailing. Avoid the latter.

Outdoor dining (top right) has tremendous appeal for both visitors and locals. Encourage outdoor dining - even if you have to lose a couple of parking spots so you can extend sidewalks - and bring downtown to life. Think Argyle Street in downtown Halifax.



Nice decorative signs. Not too sure what they are or what they signify.

Suggestion: If you ever redo them, avoid script text, and increase the lettering size by about triple.

Remember that curb appeal can account for 70% of first time sales - particularly at restaurants.



This was a popular spot (bottom right). Both of these outdoor dining areas (top and bottom right) could use beautification: potted shrubs and flowers, hanging baskets. There is so much hard stone and concrete downtown - it needs to be softened with plants and seasonal color.

There is so much great architecture in New Glasgow (top right). This building has tremendous appeal.

Consider trompe l'oeil art for some of the buildings downtown (top right and bottom left). Take another look at the examples of trompe l'oeil murals earlier in this assessment report. You can use trompe l'oeil even over plywood coverings.

Never just tell people "No Washrooms," or "For paying customers ONLY." (bottom right) What this says is "GO AWAY." Instead, tell people where they can find the public washrooms. Train your merchants to be customer friendly.



A great candidate for a Trompe l'oeil mural - and at a key intersection of town.



Same here.



Wrong. No, no no.



Town Hall is beautiful. And they have the least to gain - in terms of revenues. Businesses, take note.



There are some great little places, and you need to promote them specifically - your anchor tenants.



One of the most attractive buildings and beautification efforts was on display at Town Hall (top left). This is stunning and really sets the standard that merchants should follow.

New Glasgow has a lot of potential - there are some great spots: the riverfront is very appealing, the architecture is stunning, there's some great B & Bs. Promote your best shops, restaurants, and attractions specifically - your anchor tenants.

We did find the marina.



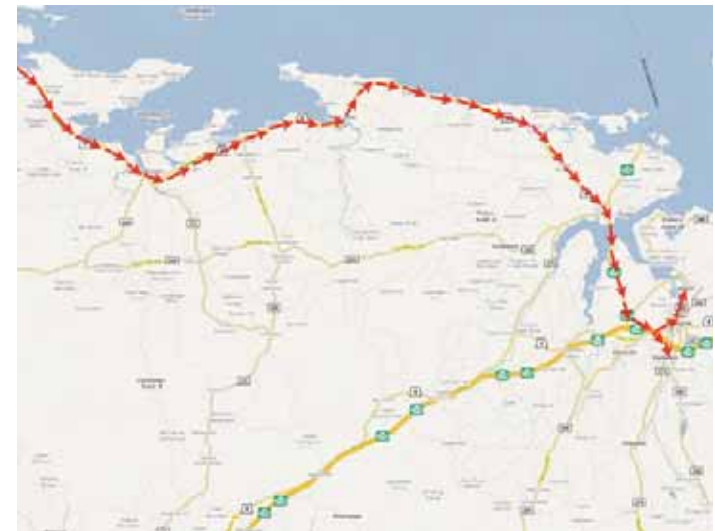
Some nice B&Bs.



Take advantage of display boards to promote specific shops, restaurants, events, and attractions. Don't miss the opportunity.

Put these to use! Never let them sit there blank.

After spending time in New Glasgow, we then continued on down the road to Stellarton.



Whenever possible jettison the generic. "Spirit, People, Pride" could fit virtually any community in Canada - if not the world.



Nice gateway sign, good location.



Communities usually want a slogan for their marketing efforts and to express their self-image. Unfortunately, they usually come up with a slogan designed to "make everybody happy" - one that is so generic it could be applied to any community anywhere.

Stellarton's slogan, "Spirit. People. Pride." really doesn't say anything that's different from any other town. If you want to stand out from the crowd, develop a slogan that is distinctive to your community - that focuses on the best you have to offer, your theme. Every town has people. Hopefully, they all have spirit. And hopefully they have pride.

Stellarton's gateway signs are very nice.

The parking and no parking signs were confusing (bottom right).

Like the other communities, work on wayfinding. No more than five items, no more than six lines of text. Got 3 minutes to read this?



What are the parking rules? (top left) No parking, or parking for 1 hour between 7:00 and 9:00? Suggestion: Start over with your parking rules and regulations.

We saw this directional sign for the Convention Centre (top right), but we couldn't find a convention centre at all. What is this for? Where is it?

Use blade signs (perpendicular signs) for businesses downtown (bottom left). As people drive through town or walk on the sidewalks, it's very difficult to tell what shops are in the buildings since the signs are flat against the buildings.

Add beautification here (bottom right). This building is so stark and bare, we thought at first that it was empty. But a lot of people were going in and out! Add planter boxes with trees, shrubs, and flowers against the building, and repaint the facade. There is ample space on the sidewalk to set up for outdoor dining as well. This could be a showcase!

Is it a pizza place or a bar?





This popular restaurant (top photos) does a great job with beautification, outdoor dining, and food! It has such great curb appeal we were pulled right in. Yes, we had dinner there - in spite of the parking situation (we hoped we wouldn't get towed or ticketed).

Some of the shops in Stellarton do a very good job with their curb appeal (bottom photos). Once again, be sure to promote your "anchor" businesses - specifically.



This shop sets the standard for the town. So does this little restaurant (bottom left).

The Museum of Industry in Stellarton is absolutely wonderful! Its interactive exhibits are some of the best we've ever seen - we could have spent hours there. In fact, we did. This is a real "anchor" for the whole region.

While "industry" doesn't have a lot of appeal to some folks, this particular museum easily breaks the mold and is a provincial "must visit" destination.

It is fun, entertaining, educational, and interactive - what every single museum should strive to become. Absolutely top notch and a highlight of our entire week in the region.

We've been trying to think of a word or words that can be used besides "industry."



Stellarton's parking enforcement officer. Very cute.



This is one of the very best museums in Nova Scotia, if not the Atlantic Provinces.



And a lot of fun.



Positively, another anchor tenant.



We learned a lot at the Museum of Industry, and it was incredibly fun as well. You can't find a museum experience any better than this. And we've seen and visited literally thousands of museums. We understand the expense involved, but every museum should do what it can to become entertaining and experiential - things to do, not just things to look at.

While in the area, we also visited Trenton - their welcome signs and gateways looked very nice.

Nice gateway to Trenton.



Nice parks and facilities.



Trenton seems like a nice bedroom community. Consider using vinyl or wood fencing instead of chain link and barbed wire, which give the impression of a prison - particularly at a community park and pool.

We then continued along the coast to Cape George, which was a very pleasant drive. We stopped to see St. Marys Church (bottom right) in Lismore. We couldn't pass up seeing the oldest wooden Catholic church built by Highland Scots in Nova Scotia. It is beautiful.





It's remarkable that this beautiful church was built in 1834 - the interior is exceptional as well.

We went on, and stopped at the beginning of the trail to a cairn commemorating the Battle of Culloden. We weren't sure if it was all right to go in past the locked gate, but we took our chances.

Suggestion: Add signage at the road to indicate the distance of the trail out to the cairn. It isn't far, but when a visitor has no idea, they might give up and turn around too soon, which we almost did on several occasions.



Is it open? Can we go in? Ok to park here?

How long a hike is it? What will we see?

The cairn is in a beautiful serene setting, very fitting for a memorial (top left). It was worth the walk, but wish it told the story. We left wondering about the battle and what happened.

As we drove on, we came to the Arisaig Provincial Picnic Park. The displays (bottom left) were very good, and the park is another must-stop location. If we had more time we would have walked the trail (bottom right).

So far, this drive out to Cape George has already been full of "hidden gems" and pleasant surprises.

Suggestion: Create an itinerary for this drive. That would get us to go this way, rather stick to the primary freeways to Cape Breton.



We saw lots of foxes.



The Cape George Lighthouse is about as serene as they come.

A nice spot.

We came across several foxes jogging along the road. Our first time seeing foxes in the wild! And lots of them.

Cape George Lighthouse is gorgeous! And what a spot! This route is worth the drive just for that. Luckily, the fog was just lifting by the time we got there.

We then headed along the coast the road towards Antigonish.

We weren't sure what this building was or when it was open (bottom right). If this is an operating business, use signage to let people know what your operating hours are.

We assumed it was permanently closed.



Ever open or out of business?

More pleasant surprises along this route were waiting for us! The Bluefin Tuna Interpretive Centre looked very nice. And this spot has lots of great hiking. The trails were well-marked, which is excellent. Unfortunately we didn't have time to stick around, but had we known (itinerary anyone?) we would have planned additional time for this drive and its attractions and gems.

Up to about this area we wondered why this was called the "mini Cabot Trail." But then we started winding along the shoreline and it all made sense.

So here's why this route is called the "Mini Cabot Trail" (bottom right). What a great view - what an enjoyable drive.



A nice interpretive center.



Looks like a great hiking destination.



Aha! Finally, the "Mini Cabot Trail."

Make sure you tell stories. Make them fun. Make them fascinating.



The Cape George Heritage School Museum looked very nice as well. Emphasize telling the stories of the children and teachers, plus the families, who used this one-room schoolhouse. The sign (top left) is great. Good job.

This restaurant (bottom left) could use more inviting curb appeal - Welcome customers with an open or welcome sign, add more pots of these bright red flowers, and use a decorative sign.

A good place to eat? Could use some additional curb appeal and less institutional signage.



Our first time into town we came in the "back way." If not, we probably never would have found the museum.



We drove into Antigonish from Cape George - coming into town through what seems to be the back door.

We saw the sign for the Antigonish Heritage Museum as we approached town, but then the signs disappeared. Where is it? It took some searching, but we eventually did find it. Always be sure your wayfinding signs continue all the way to the destination.

Nice gateways and welcome into Antigonish (bottom photos). Perhaps not the best location (bottom right) but a nice sign.



Now what? Make wayfinding your top priority.



For such a gorgeous campus this is all the better you can do? We had a hard time figuring out what this is. "StFX" doesn't help a lot.



Antigonish needs a comprehensive wayfinding system more than any community we've visited in the province (and that's most of them) - as do all the towns on the Northumberland Shore. We found locating downtowns, attractions, and amenities to be a real challenge.

We were surprised that the University's introductory sign was this simple little "Welcome to StFX" (top right). Consider replacing it with a monument sign that portrays the beauty and honor of the institution. It deserves better than this.

This is a world-class University. That starts with your gateways.



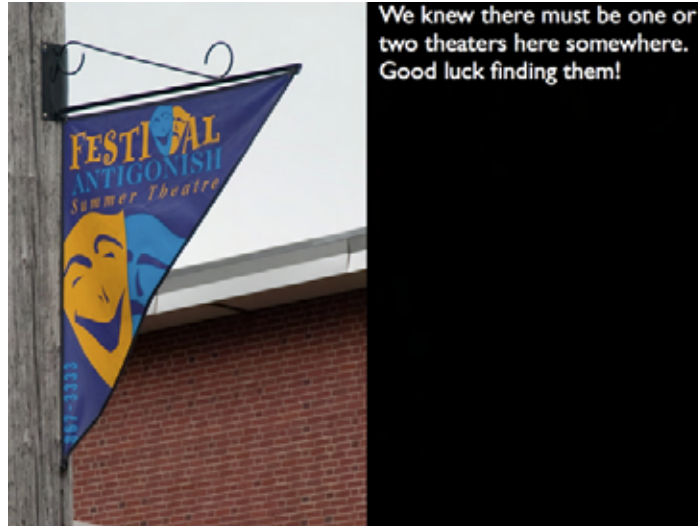
StFX needs a wayfinding system once on campus. Head over to the Annapolis Royal area and visit Clements Park.



The campus is stunning - but it also could use a good wayfinding system for pedestrians as well as drivers. This photo (bottom right) shows the pedestrian wayfinding in Clements Park in the Annapolis Royal area. Develop something along this line. We had a heck of a time trying to find the theaters.

Good pole banners promoting the theatre (top left). But we had to really search to find it - finally did! (top right)

The church on campus (bottom right) is stunning. We would have gone in, but church was in service (and we had work to do).



No matter how you try to get to Antigonish, the wayfinding is simply horrible.



Does this make you want to take Exit 33?



A new comprehensive wayfinding system would alleviate the challenges of directional wayfinding, sign clutter, and unattractive signage.

It's easy to miss the sign you need when there are so many other signs up around it! (bottom right) We passed this one several times before noticing it.

Let's try it!



Sign clutter. It's easy to miss the Visitor Info sign.



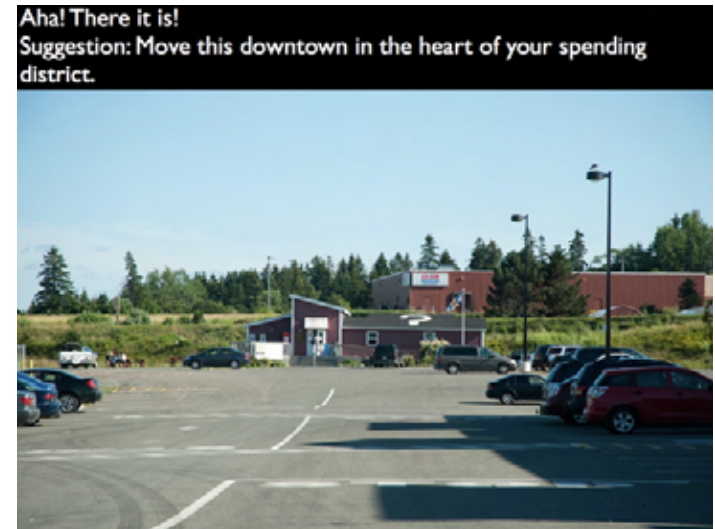
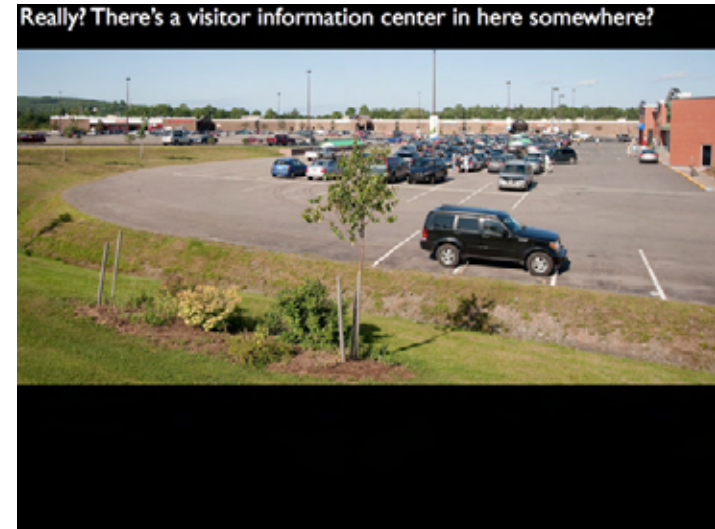
We were looking for visitor information, trying to follow the sign from the highway - it was a real challenge! Is there a visitor information center in the mall? Is it in the grocery store? Where the heck is it?

It is best to locate visitor information services in a location where people can spend money - for Antigonish, that means downtown where they would find "visitor" or "destination retail" not general big box stores that cater to local residents. Give visitors another reason to drive into downtown. While there, they'll most likely want to visit a shop or restaurant. It's a good way to increase visitor spending.

Be sure your wayfinding signs connect all the way to the destination - you don't want visitors to give up before they find downtown.

At this point we're not even sure Antigonish HAS a downtown.

On our third trip into the mall parking lot, we finally found the visitor info center.



Add 24/7 information. The staff here was very good.



This looks like we might find something good.



We did venture into the visitor center (top left), and the staff was exceptional - answering all our questions, and being very helpful. When in the center we learned that Antigonish actually DOES have a downtown. Go figure. We thought what we saw along the highway was it.

Suggestion: Add weather-proof brochure holders outside to provide visitor information when the center is closed. It should always be working, 24/7, 365 days a year.



What the...Where did this come from? What a real shock - and it's not just us. We heard it a LOT from other visitors as well.



The bridge as you enter downtown Antigonish looks great with all the flowers (top right). It builds anticipation for a wonderful downtown experience. We have our fingers crossed.

What a surprise! Downtown is outstanding! (bottom right) The hanging baskets look wonderful, and the buildings are gorgeous.

After passing through Antigonish dozens of times over several years, we had no idea whatsoever that the city actually had a downtown. What a missed opportunity that signage could remedy.

We weren't expecting to find such an appealing downtown. The beautification is great; the lampposts are decorative; even the power lines are underground.

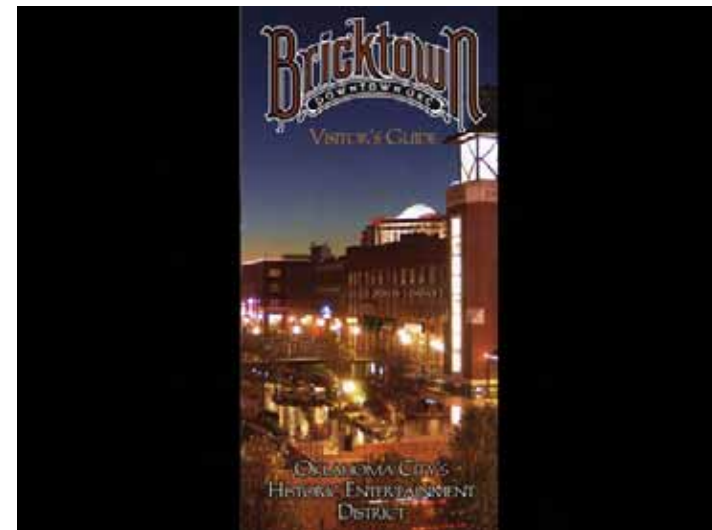
Consider giving downtown its own name. Giving it a name helps makes it a-destination, not just a place or geographic designation. "Downtown" is a place. "Pearl Street" is a destination. A gathering place.

As you travel down a highway and see signs for "business district" or even "downtown," does that pull you from the freeway? But if you saw "Pearl District - Downtown" you get a feeling that this is a special destination, not just another business center.

Some popular downtowns:

- Vancouver, BC: Gastown
- Seattle, WA: Pioneer Square
- San Diego, CA: Gaslamp District
- San Antonio, TX: The Riverwalk
- Denver, CO: Larimer Square
- Boulder, CO: Pearl Street Mall

Hundreds of downtowns are naming and identifying their districts, which makes them definitive destinations.



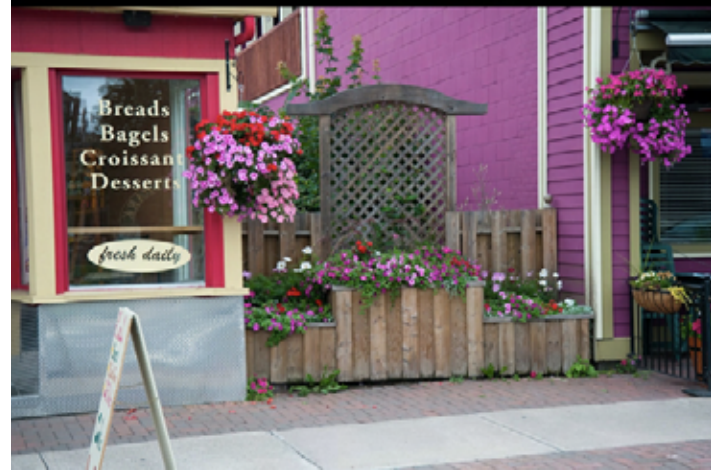
Some of the beautification efforts are outstanding. These are terrific.



Very creative. And very nice.



A terrific way to screen alleyways and empty spaces. Other communities can use this as a great example.



Where is Exit 31? James Street? Don't send us back out to the highway. Once again, wayfinding could fix this dilemma.



There were many spots downtown that had excellent, and creative, street displays and gardens.

Instead of posting a sign that tells you that the Farmers Market is at Exit 31 (bottom right), develop a wayfinding system that will guide people to the Farmers Market from downtown. When is it? Visitors don't have a clue where James Street or Exit 31 are - but directional signage will get everyone there. Do that for all of your attractions and amenities.

We really enjoyed our visit to downtown Antigonish, and we spent a lot of money there too!

This restaurant was excellent (top left). Good job cross-promoting other attractions in town - with our check at the restaurant was this flier promoting the theatre (top right). Other merchants should follow suit. It was a strong invitation to come back.

Excellent job.



Great job with the menu board, seating area, planters.
And great food as well.



Twitter folks said to eat here. Unfortunately, the owners were out of town and it was closed.
Good job though with the curb appeal.



Really, quite a stunning downtown.



Downtown Antigonish is very close to reaching "critical mass" - the necessary 10+10+10 rule of destination downtowns. A minimum of ten destination retail shops; ten places that serve food; and ten places open after 6:00 pm. Keep encouraging more of these types of businesses in your downtown core - the more you have to offer, the longer visitors will stay, and the more money they will spend.



Some merchants could do more with beautification (bottom right). Pots, planters, and a bench or two would really increase the appeal of this particular shop.

This is an excellent example - Village Greenery & Gifts in Fort Macleod, Alberta (top left).

Some more examples on this page:

- In Hubbards, this outdoor display of baskets (top right) showcases a beautiful way to display merchandise outside without succumbing to the “garage sale” look.
- In Mahone Bay, this deli and bake shop (bottom left) attracts a crowd with its flowers, signage, and great curb appeal.
- A restaurant in Mahone Bay (bottom right) uses planter boxes overflowing with flowers and a brightly colored chalkboard to entice customers.

Consider planning a “best-practices mission” to Mahone Bay to get ideas. Talk to the merchants there. They really “get it.” Downtown Antigonish could be another showcase town for the province.



Suggestion: Plan a trip to Mahone Bay - even this time of year.



These photos all show additional shops in Mahone Bay. Note the decorative signage - and the blade signs - as well as the creative use of color to add appeal to the buildings. Doesn't it look like a fun place to visit? No wonder the place is always hopping - and not just during the summer months. Head there in October during the Scarecrow Festival. They work hard to make the town appealing year round and it pays off.



Two additional shops from Mahone Bay (top left and right) showing excellent curb appeal.

This gallery (bottom left) would be much more attractive with planters under the windows.

Blade signs throughout downtown would help both drivers and pedestrians see what shops are available. In most cases you only know what's in a shop when you're across the street.



Also work on blade signs. Great architecture and a great feeling downtown.



Excellent mural.



But...Work with merchants on curb appeal improvements and work on weed abatement. Visitors notice these things.



It's easy when you see downtown everyday to not notice when weeds and litter start accumulating (top right and bottom two photos). Be sure to keep the sidewalks free of weeds and trash.

When you water planters, naturally, some water and fertilizer seeps through igniting weed growth in the sidewalks, which almost cancels out the beautification efforts. Think Round Up.

The weeds eliminate the attractive planters - or at least diminish their effectiveness.



Also work on trash cleanup. Looks like lots of pine needles - from fall of 2008.

Some additional spots that need weed removal - all photos this page. The grass tends to grow among the paver stones - keep on top of it with regular maintenance. Merchants should take responsibility for the sidewalk areas in front of their stores, sweeping daily, keeping it free of weeds, and providing beautification. It is perceived as an extension of their store.

Add benches (top photo), additional planters - soften the transition of brick siding and brick sidewalks. In fact, why not take out the pavers and make this a garden area? It could be stunning. Perhaps a local garden club or Master Gardeners would adopt it.



Suggestion: Remove the weeds, add benches and planters. Make it inviting!



Merchants should take the lead on sweeping sidewalks - daily. Here, add planters. Make it shine!



Another "anchor business." One of the better galleries we've seen in Nova Scotia. Very, very good.



Looks like a great place to stay. It was full every time we came by.



We visited some great shops and galleries in Antigonish!

Suggestion: Develop standards for downtown outdoor displays and signage - merchants can "police" their peers, provide guidance, and perhaps start a coop for plants, flowers, planting soil, etc. Include hanging baskets in your efforts. People spend more time and money in beautiful settings. Think Victoria, BC, the "World's Garden City."

Avoid the garage sale look.



Same here.



Avoid the "garage sale" look (bottom two photos). Only allow the extension of window displays to exterior spaces - not outdoor retailing. It diminishes the quality of the shop and downtown.

Many downtowns have 2 hour parking limits, primarily to keep office workers and downtown employees from taking up all the parking spaces during working hours, so that shoppers have no place to park. The methodology: "We can't get our employees to park in all-day parking areas, so we're going to punish our customers with two-hour limits." The problem with 2 hour limits is that this doesn't provide enough time for most visitors to accomplish all that they want. You don't want to send visitors away before they're done spending money.

The solution is to also offer enough longer-term parking - 4 hours as well as easy-to-find all day parking areas. It should be within two blocks of downtown. Be sure to put up signs telling visitors **where** they can find 4-hour and all day parking.

After we left Antigonish, we continued driving all the way out to the Canso Causeway (bottom right).



You certainly can't miss Mother Webb's. Not exactly appealing signs, but probably effective.



We've arrived - thank goodness. Hopefully the signs will stop now. The place is always packed. Must be good!



As we drove, there were the usual freeway sights, which we previously thought of as "downtown Antigonish." We wondered how many tens of thousands of other visitors have had the same impression, missing a great town.

This stretch of highway is one of the most unappealing in the entire province - and yet it's the gateway to one of the world's ten best driving destinations. Thank goodness this all goes away once you cross over the causeway.

What a mess. Unfortunately, we previously tied this all to Antigonish.



This actually looks nice.



At the Canso Causeway we turned around and headed back west.

We turned off the highway to experience more of the coastline but had no problem getting lost along dirt roads, beautiful little communities, and parks.

Suggestion: Add distances to the signs for the parks (bottom left). We really didn't know how long a drive it would be to Pomquet Beach Park - and it was on unpaved roads (bottom right). We eventually found it, but would have given up had we not been performing an assessment. Once again, the wayfinding is dismal to non-existent - at best.



These are good to have around since few visitors know what the key stands for.



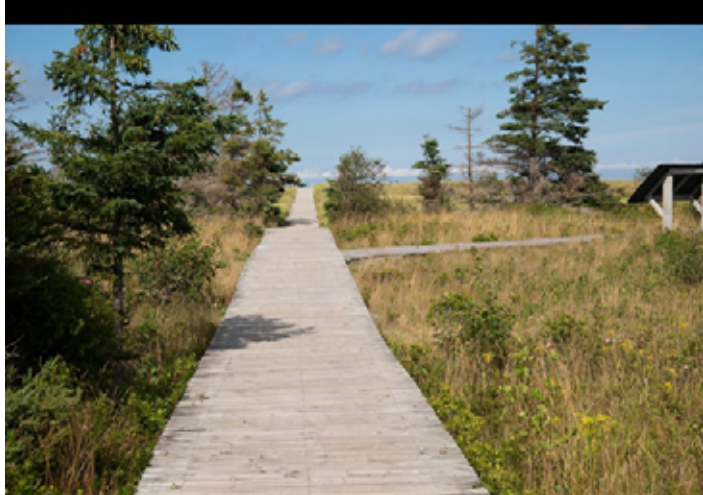
Suggestion: Add distances to these signs.



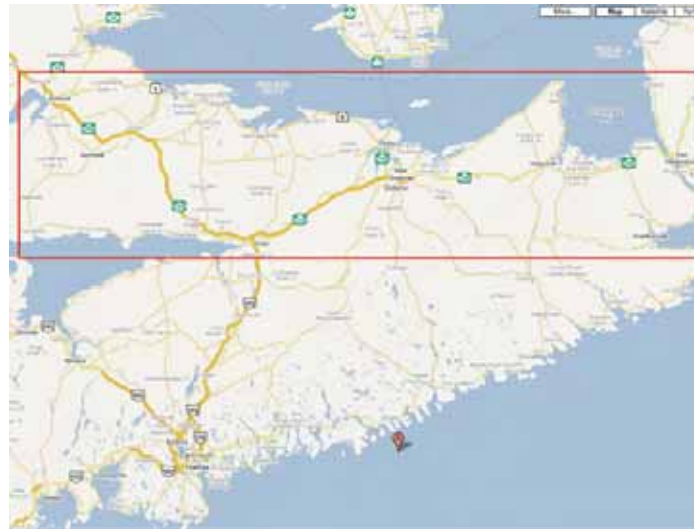
Hmmm. Perhaps not such a good idea.



But worth the effort. A great boardwalk and beach.



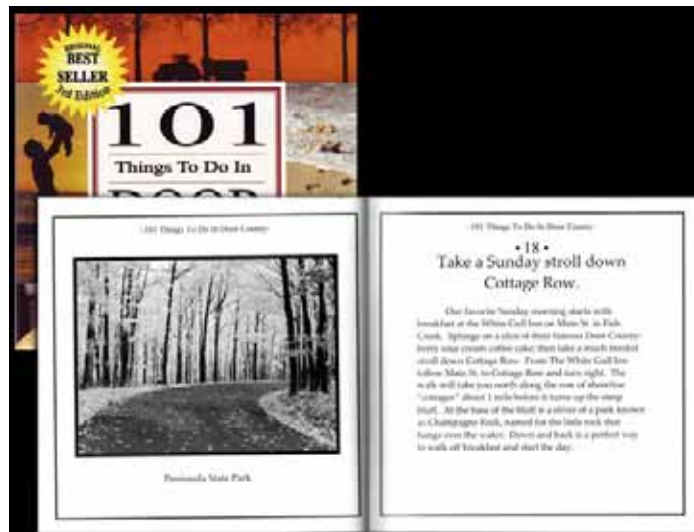
Overall, it's a beautiful area with some great potential and some real gems mixed in.



But when we got to the park, we were glad we made the effort. The park (top left) was very nice.

The Sunrise Trail along the Northumberland Shore has a lot of beauty and variety. It is a huge area, and has a lot of potential to become even more of a visitor draw, pulling visitors off the primary freeways to explore some of the province's best "hidden gems."

Consider creating a book of the "Hidden Gems of Nova Scotia's Sunrise Trail." Model it after "101 Things to do in Door County." This little privately developed book is filled with all types of things to do, places to see, and places to eat that only locals would really know about. It is a wonderful promotional piece. With the wealth of "hidden gems" throughout the Northumberland Shore, a small book like this would contain a large variety of places to visit and things to enjoy that would keep visitors coming back time and again.



In a nutshell: WHAT TO DO

- Develop “The Hidden Gems of Nova Scotia’s Sunrise Trail.”
- Promote “The Best of the Sunrise Trail.”
- Develop detailed itineraries - with specifics. Half day, full day, two day itineraries.
- Work on beautification and branding - what each town wants to be known for.
- Jettison the generic in your marketing efforts. Promote specifics - and provide details.
- Give the province something to sell other than a list of what you have. Visitors want activities - so promote the experience.

Remember this quote:

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” - Margaret Mead





The Northumberland Shore Marketing Assessments

Marketing Materials Review:

Northumberland Shore 2009 Guide

We had a hard time finding any maps in any publications that made it easy to find attractions, and the Northumberland Shore Guide was no exception. The one map of the region that is on page three is so small that it doesn't help locate anything, except general directions to cities and towns. Good maps are essential for travelers – visitors don't know where they're going, and need all the help they can get.

The basic information, such as "How to Get Here," the "Ferry Schedule," "Pictou High Tides," "C@P Site," etc. are good. And the descriptions and directions to the beaches are well done; however, it would be very helpful to include a map on a larger scale than the one on page three, to show people where they are – visuals help!

We suggest reorganizing the information in this piece to make it easier for visitors to use. Organize it by activities – not by locations. You've got part of it done that way already, with the beaches, trails, marinas, golf courses, history and heritage, arts & culture, land, sea & rural discovery, and shopping; although these sections do not give enough information. We suggest starting with seasons, and then by activities.

Each activity needs more information. For example, in the trails section, include highlights about what kind of experience the trail will offer – what will I see that's special? How difficult is the terrain? How

do I find the trailhead?

The Beaches section is good – good directions and descriptions of what is offered. The Shopping section is too brief and generic – highlight some of the best shops and what they offer that is really special.

Include more photos of the towns, and promote specific shops and restaurants, along with their specialties, such as "Be sure to try the brandied cherry scones fresh from the oven – they almost melt in your mouth."

Discover Cumberland County 2009 Visitors Guide

This newsprint booklet is specifically for Cumberland County, and divides its information into the different locations within the county. There is a lot of text – and much of it is likely more interesting to locals than to visitors, however, visitors can enjoy it too. It doesn't really provide a lot of the basic information needed by visitors, but does provide a lot of history and information about the area. To make it more useful for visitors, consider adding more specific details about lodging, restaurants, and amenities throughout the area.

Northumberland Shore Things to Do and Experience (fold out map/brochure)

This piece was as cumbersome to use as a road

map, but didn't provide enough information to be really useful. The map is too small to show any detail, and some of the lists of phone numbers are really not useful for visitors. It seems to be primarily an advertising piece.

Suggest using most of the space to make a large, really useful map of the area, showing details. The town descriptions could be cut in half, just highlighting the most important lures in each community (community playgrounds are not visitor attractions.)

Two Distinct Coasts / One Incredible Experience

Central Nova Scotia Visitors Guide 2006

This booklet packs a lot of information about a large area! I like the information about what you can expect during the four seasons – it's general information, but it does give a good feel for what to expect. The descriptions of different experiences are a good start, but don't give enough specifics to be useful; such as for Arts and Culture – "In nooks and crannies throughout the region many a brilliant artist can be found." Where? Along the highway with a sign? Give a few specific places where artists can be seen. Even where the text suggests the Anne Murray Centre, it doesn't say what town it's located in. Visitors need specifics, not generalities.

The section on Beaches is very good, and gives terrific information. Each section on the towns is a bit text-heavy. Consider cutting back some of the text and just leaving the important information about the best attractions in each town. What does

each town have that sets it apart?

Amherst Materials

Registered Heritage Properties (bifold)

This brochure is very nice – it provides good information about each house, includes great photos and a map. If possible, try to find some entertaining old stories about previous owners of the homes to include, which would bring the houses to life and make them more interesting. Most people like to hear stories about people more than just about architectural details.

Step Into Our Past – Historical Walking Tour Downtown Amherst

Another well-produced brochure. Again, if there are old stories about characters who used these buildings, it would be great to tell them here. Any notorious bank robbers? (The story of Esther Cox is excellent!)

Downtown Amherst Dining Guide (rack card)

This is a very good piece – you’ve got the hours, addresses, a map showing locations, and a brief description of the food and major lures.

Pugwash Materials

Pugwash Harbourfest

This is a rack card promoting the event held July 31, August 1 and 2, 2009. Nicely done piece, includes a schedule of events.

Pugwash Peace Exchange

This bifold isn’t really a promotional piece, but an information piece designed to encourage support and solicit memberships for the Peace Exchange effort. This effort is a wonderful reflection on the community.

Wallace and Tatamagouche Materials

Wallace (bifold)

Use larger photos and more of them to really showcase this lovely area. Cut down the cover text, and highlight your primary lures. Include brief descriptions of the shops and what they offer. Be sure to include the dates (at least the months) of your festivals and events.

Wallace & Area Museum

Nice, attractive rack card. It’s a good teaser – I like how you included the photos of some of the displays, and the photo of the children enjoying a demonstration.

Tatamagouche and Wallace Areas (bifold)

This brochure does a good job of promoting four primary attractions in the area. Good use of photography, and there’s not too much text. It does a good job of making me want to visit these attractions! And it’s a great strategy to promote them all in this one piece – the more you have to offer collectively, the farther people will drive to see you, and the longer they will stay.



The separate rack cards for these attractions are also well-done. (Sutherland Steam Mill and Balmoral Grist Mill)

Sara Bonnyman Pottery

Beautiful bifold brochure showing the pottery and hand-hooked rugs. What a great sales piece.

Jost Vineyards

Rack card – how can you go wrong with a photo of those luscious purple grapes, and the caption “Award Winning Taste”? This makes it obvious that a visit to Jost Vineyards is an absolute “must-do” for visitors to Nova Scotia.

Pictou County

Pictou County 2008 Visitors Guide

The first thing I noticed about this small booklet is the recipe for Atlantic Seafood Chowder on the back cover, and I thought, “I’ve got to hold on to this!” Good strategy!

This is nicely laid out and easy to follow. Suggest changing the font of the headings to one that is easier to read; the cursive font is difficult. Good use of photography throughout the brochure. This piece has a tremendous amount of information, including a lot of good specifics, and it does make me want to visit.

It would be good to add maps of each community with a key showing the locations of attractions and amenities.

The Museums of Pictou County

This fold-out brochure is a very good piece. Good photography, descriptions, and one of the better maps I’ve seen. It’s very useful and does a good job of selling the museums.

Tartan Coast Daytrip Planner

This brochure is a good concept, but it was very difficult to use. The directions were hard to figure out and use with the map. Each of the attractions is numbered in the text, but the numbers aren’t included on the map, so it’s hard to get a good reference point on the map for anything. Many of the descriptions of the attractions are good, though, and we used this piece for

The lists of accommodations and restaurants aren’t very useful, since they don’t provide descriptions. Are these lists composed of just members? Because there aren’t very many listed, it looks like the area doesn’t have much to offer. If you’re going to include listings of accommodations and restaurants, it’s best to include all that you have (or most – it’s also good to establish criteria so that you don’t promote anything that’s substandard.)

North Shore Trail Map

This trifold is great. Wonderful photo of the Cape George lighthouse on the cover; the map is detailed and easy to read; and the information inside is interesting. The only part that’s confusing is the notations on the map along the trails of A, A1, A2, B, C, D, etc. These notes are not explained in

the Legend, and I couldn’t figure out what they mean. I love how the trail distances and times are marked on the map, and it’s easy to see where the attractions are located. Overall, this is very good.

Northumberland Fisheries Museum

Attractive rack card that covers several locations in Pictou. It has good descriptions and provides enough information – it’s basically a teaser piece. It would be nice, if possible, to have the back photos in color.

Museum of Industry

This rack card has a very fun photo – the couple in the antique car. This museum is one of the best museums I have ever been through, and I think the descriptions on the back of the rack card could be even more powerful – they’re not bad, but could be better.

For example, instead of saying the usual “Explore” and “Discover,” you could say something like, “The fascinating lives of Nova Scotia’s industrial workers come to life in the powerful life size displays – see how people worked and lived throughout the years.” And maybe, “Experiment with the force of water as you’ve never done before. See how this power has been used throughout the ages and into today.”

McCulloch House Museum

This rack card is very good – it makes me want to visit the museum! Consider using a color besides

pink on the card, though. Although it looks nice, it tends to give an impression of femininity to the museum that you might not want.

Antigonish – The Highland Heart of Nova Scotia

Large fold-out brochure with maps of the County of Antigonish and the Town. The maps are good – large enough and detailed enough to be very useful. It was kind of awkward to use, though. The numbers on the town map correspond to ads throughout the brochure, and trying to flip the brochure around to find what goes where was very difficult. Also, it would be much more useful to have the locations on the map correspond to things a visitor would definitely want to find, rather than just those businesses that paid to advertise.

Festival Antigonish – Professional Live Theatre

Very effective brochure with all the information necessary. Consider adding a few photos of a performance in action – photos are the best selling tool you can use.

Ceilidh at Piper’s Pub

This is a very nice rack card, and is very effective – all the necessary information is provided on the front, and the back is a very well done piece about the Antigonish Ceilidh Association. Consider using a photo of a musician on the front, rather than just the fiddle – seeing a person playing a fiddle can be more appealing.



Distance Marketing Assessments:

The following few pages contain assessments by our secret shoppers, who researched the area from a distance, reviewing marketing materials to see if they could find the area, and if the materials were convincing enough to make them want to visit.

Distance Marketing Assessment #1

If I were traveling from Halifax toward Cape Breton Island via the North Shore of Nova Scotia, I think I'd make a two or three day trip out of it and do some exploring. I found a few places that looked like they'd make for a fun road trip.

I'd start in Halifax and travel toward Amherst, spending a little time in Amherst. I'd likely hit the visitor center there and spend some time in the downtown. Depending on time, I might spend the night in Amherst before heading out on the next part of my road trip.

From there, I'd take Route 6 along the shore and explore some of the towns along the way. I'd stop at a park or two and make my way to Pictou where I'd spend a night. From there I'd head to Antigonish, and if I had decided against staying in Pictou, I'd probably find lodging here. I'd spend a little time in Antigonish before continuing on to Cape Breton Island.

Most of my information for planning this little adventure came from Frommer's Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island guidebook. When looking into a region that has

a lot of smaller towns, I find it particularly helpful to consult a guidebook, rather than relying solely on websites, even though I typically would do the vast majority of my trip planning online (as a very large percentage of people do these days). The tough part for small towns along a scenic route, for example, is finding a voice that is loud enough to attract some attention.

For example, I consulted the Nova Scotia travel website www.novascotia.com, and if this was the only place I looked, I might have a difficult time finding any good information about the route between Halifax and Cape Breton Island. In fact, I probably would have been more likely, if planning such a trip, to take a route that took me along the eastern shore, rather than heading north. Although this website does divide Nova Scotia into travel regions, it focuses on specific attractions, as well as things like events and recreation opportunities, rather than keying in on any of the towns along the way. I did look at the information on the Sunrise Trail, but it was only contained in a PDF and I would have found it easier to read had it also been in regular HTML format.

I also visited a website for the Sunrise Trail, www.sunrisetrail.ca. This website is OK, but not stellar. It has a critical lack of good photography, and although the information isn't bad, it's not presented in an easy to follow way. There are too many lists buried within lists within lists. There should be more descriptions, even brief ones, to keep a user's interest. By the time someone clicks on two or three links, only to find yet another page

with very little other than another set of links, many will lose interest.

Overall, I think this is an area with promise, but there needs to be a stronger, unified voice drawing attention and providing information.

Distance Marketing Assessment #2

My first search for this market assessment was overall Nova Scotia to look at maps and get the lay of the land – I reviewed Nova Scotia's Official Tourism website. I first clicked on the Cities by the Sea link and went to Halifax. I was a little surprised by the opening video promoting the city nightlife, fine dining and entertainment. The video didn't mention anything about scenery, coastal beauty or proximity to the ocean. This might be a good place to somehow sneak in a mention of the coastal areas as a "getaway" from the city life. A second video on this page about Pier 21 left me with a completely different feeling about Halifax—one of nostalgia and heritage. This video spoke about the roots of Halifax and Nova Scotia when hundreds of thousands of war brides, children and immigrants came here during the war years. Here you could add something about the heritage and lead into some of the north shore heritage attractions.

I then went to the "Plan A Trip" link hoping to route out my trip to Cape Breton via the designated route, but couldn't locate Amherst on the map at www.noviascotia.com (it would be good to make sure Amherst is included on the map for the main tourism website for Nova Scotia). I then went to

Google and learned that Amherst is 197 km (about 2 hours drive) from Halifax. Zooming out on this map, the coastal highway follows Northumberland Strait so I searched for Northumberland and found this to be a popular “cruiser’s paradise” with milder climate, however minimal information was available here for land-based activities.

I checked out several towns and villages along the coast. I found some appealing, fun festivals at the town of Pugwash—58th Gathering of the Clans with heavyweight highland dancing, piping and drumming competitions, lobster dinners, midway, crafts, musical entertainment, street entertainment, parades and spectacular fireworks. And the Pugwash Harbourfest! The Parade of the Tall Ships looks like it would really be something to see, especially for land-locked folks like me... (interior states would be a good target market for promoting coastal areas like this). Upon further investigation I learned you can actually take a ride on one of these tall sailing ships for a very fair price—what an adventure (Tall Ships Nova Scotia)! This looks something I’ll add to my bucket list.

The Eaton-Webb Guest House Cottages at Pugwash is the place I would stay for taking in the local activities. And they even supply lobster pots for cooking lobster in your own kitchen. I also stumbled on the Jost Vineyards at Malagash (a link from Harbourfest)—vineyards and wine tasting are always an attraction, a fun way to spend some time. I could definitely hang out in this area for a while. Pugwash also has the Northumberland Links Golf Course right next to the sea, so the guys

would be well satisfied with this portion of the trip. This golf course offers some very reasonable accommodations package deals!

Wallace By The Sea looks like a very inviting place with “warm water beaches, nature trails, bird sanctuaries, bed and breakfasts, cottage rentals, museums,” however their website is very basic, photos are small and information is difficult to find with long paragraphs of text—more, larger photos with some larger text with highlights would improve this site a lot. I found photos of, and information on, several things that interested me, especially the Sand Castle Festival, Acadian Celebrations, Trans Canada Trail, Wallace River Bridge, Wallace Lighthouse, more information on the Wallace Wharf, canoeing and kayaking. Since little information was available on any of these I phoned the “Contact Us” number listed 902-257-2817. Wallace doesn’t have a visitor center, but the gentleman I spoke with was polite and tried to be as helpful as he could. He had to get back to me with the information I requested, and he did the next day.

Back to the Google map I noticed Fox Harbour north of Wallace. It didn’t look like there was even a town at Fox Harbour, but a search revealed quite a hidden secret in Fox Harb’r Resort—pristine golf course, spa, sport shooting, fitness/wellness center, private jetport, yacht marina. This is a very upscale resort, pricey—very nice, but not likely a place I could afford to visit (very professional website!) Fox Harbour would be an easy detour north over Ferry Rd but I couldn’t find other activities, amenities,

etc. besides the Resort. I’d like to know more about other places at Fox Harbour. If there are other things to see and do here, it might be good to subscribe to Canada Select. A search on this site for “What’s Nearby” revealed no finds within 25 km.

Tatamagouche attractions that look appealing to me include seal watching plus many species of whales and dolphins. A sea kayaking tour at Cape John and Pictou would be a great adventure too! I briefly checked out the Pictou Island—a very nice website—but it appears most of the island is privately owned.

When I zoomed in on the Google map further I learned that the coastal highway is called Sunrise Trail, so I searched and found the Sunrise Trail website and tourist map, both very useful tools. Why didn’t I find this website sooner? It would be good to subscribe to some search engines with key words. The Sunrise Trail site could use some improvements but was helpful in looking at lodging options, listed from west to east (smart!) rather than alphabetically like most websites. On this website I also learned about more events and festivals, but a number of the links to festivals I was interested in were not working—check links frequently to make sure they are live. Other suggestions to improve here—long paragraphs of text on linked sites, could be replaced with an inviting opening sentence about the facility followed by a bulleted list of amenities for each lodging site or attraction.

On the Sunrise Trail site, I was able to access the 146th Antigonish Highland Games, and River John

Festival Days, both looked like great fun and a place where you could experience local culture, history and customs. I was interested in the Pictou Lobster Carnival (one of the broken links) so I kept searching to learn it just happened July 10th and eventually found a working link with info at Pictou Lobster Carnival—another exciting festival with live music, lobster feeds, special events for three days. Pictou is also another one of the ports visited by the tall ships so this would be an additional chance to be part of these activities. Further east at New Glasgow, I discovered the New Glasgow Riverfront Jubilee (a 3-day music festival)—adding music to our vacation mix is always a plus!

The area around St. George's Bay has a wealth of places to explore, hike, maybe camp on the beach, explore the fossil beds and bird watch. And finally to the Cabot Trail which National Geographic describes as one of the "best drives of a lifetime." All of these would be something we would try to take in.

This investigation into the north shore of Nova Scotia has really piqued my interest in the area, and I'm adding it to one of the places I definitely want to visit someday before long. I can see spending a couple of weeks in the area, probably mid-summer when the weather (and water) is warm. It could be a couple's getaway, or a group of friends to focus on the number of festivals and events along the way, but definitely take some r & r time in between—golf courses, hiking, exploring, whale watching and some beach time without a doubt!

The cottages and cabins along this route are especially appealing, so I think I would use the Sunrise Trail Map to plan out the route and choose cabins/cottages where the festivals are (Pugwash, Malagash Pictou, Tatamagouche, Wallace), then do day trips from those locations. Most locations appear to have some cottages with reasonable rates, kitchens, and a couple of bedrooms.

The Sunrise Trail Map on Google is a very good way to plan an excursion along this targeted route, but it didn't become evident to me until about half way through my assessment. I went back to the Nova Scotia tourism website and searched for Sunrise Trail and did find a link to a map and more information on this route but didn't see any suggested routes from Halifax to Cape Breton—maybe Sunrise Trail and Northumberland Shore could be the first to promote in such a way—the festival route.

Distance Marketing Assessment #3

As I recall, Nova Scotia (NS) has one of the best websites for planning travel. Not really knowing where Northumberland NS is located I head to their main website (<http://novascotia.com>) and am quickly rewarded with the regions of NS. They offer eleven touring routes and it seems that if I want to take my time going to Cape Breton and take in Amherst I could take the Sunrise Trail along the NW coast. I download the pdf file (<http://novascotia.com/site-ns/media/novascotia/sunrise.pdf>) and

am blessed with great pictures and very descriptive tours. I love the first page with all the town's tourism numbers and more websites. I immediately want to go to Pugwash just because the name and then the description of the sandy beaches and warm waters.

I gave NS tourism a call (1-800-565-0000) and had a lovely chat with a young woman. She was very helpful giving me the names of inns and b and bs. She had not been to the area, but did say the warm waters and beaches were very pretty. She said the highway was faster, but when I explained I wanted to meander she told me to spend a night in Amherst, maybe Pugwash and Pictou. I will look into her suggestions.

The Victorian Motel in Amherst looks very tidy and is very reasonable at \$65/night. I decide that if I go to Amherst's website, maybe all the accommodations will be listed. I am rewarded with a hotels combined page, which shows pictures and rates. The Wandlyn Inn Amherst looks like the best option out of the three listed. The Amherst Shore Inn was suggested by the tourism office, and it wins with its lovely website and the "Overnight Gourmet Package"-guestroom, candlelight dinner and hearty breakfast for 179.00.

A quick check of the tourism part of Amherst's site and it appears to be a quaint town. My suggestion would be to have more descriptions and addresses i.e.: park and historical home addresses, directions to the beaches, bird sanctuary and a map of the recreational trail. They might want to list some local restaurants too. The pdf map is very informative, I

always like a map with parks, stadiums and lodgings listed.

Since I have the number for Amherst (902-667-8429) I ring them up for some advice. I told her I was coming from Halifax and she told me to stop at Truro and the Bay of Fundy, and maybe I would like Parrsboro. I told her I had to get to Auld's Cove and she suggested I take the scenic route along highway 6 where the "warmest waters north of the Carolinas" are and the beaches are sandy and "lovely." I said I liked small towns and she suggested Tatamagouche, Pictou and Pugwash. When I asked for specific accommodations she told me to go online when my Internet was working again to NovaScotia.com. She also said to stop in the Halifax airport at the info. centre and pick up the "Doers & Dreamers" guide and that would really help me make plans. I asked about accommodation availability in early Aug. and she said it wasn't too busy and not to worry. She was friendly, but I always love getting descriptions of lodgings. She did give me the NS tourism number and said they could make me reservations.

The Sunrise Trail page had listed Pictou County website as a resource, and what a resource it is! I download the 2009 Visitors Guide and I am easily turning pages and learning all sorts of things, such as: you can take a ferry from Bar Harbor or Portland Maine to Yarmouth. The picture of the suspension bridge on the Henry Ketchum Hiking Trail looks like fun, as does finding a great lobster spot. One ad catches my eye and it is for Fox Harb'r, which looks pretty nice, as does Stonehame Lodge and Chalets.

I love the picture of the Pictou Waterfront and I'm sure the Northumberland Fisheries Museum might be worth a visit. I read the pages about Westville and Stellarton and they seem interesting, maybe I would visit the Museum of Industry if it were a rainy day. These areas seem relatively small, but if you catch them during their festival weekends I'm sure they would be very fun. The East River Valley sounds very lovely and pastoral and might be a good place to just wander along and have a picnic somewhere. New Glasgow sounds picturesque when you read the description but the advertising makes it seem a little less quaint. The Melmerby Beach looks beautiful and boasts warm waters, I need to investigate the village of Lismore to see if they have any lodgings. Antigonish sounds like a great place to visit with its shipwrecks, marinas, great restaurants and awesome view from the Cape George Lighthouse. I'll have to check it out.

I give the Antigonish tourism bureau a call. I explain that I like to travel "off the beaten path" and he says the scenic route from Amherst to Antigonish is not too busy. Also going out to Cape George will only add about an hour and half and has fabulous views. He talks about the Gristmill museum and the Hector in Pictou. I explain I like local motel/hotels and he suggests going to Nova Scotia.com to find accommodations. He didn't really sell me on Antigonish. The Pictou Co. visitors guide was a better seller. I would have liked to hear more of a description of the area and a bit more personal experience or thoughts about the area. I decide to go the Northumberland Shore website, but

this just a gateway for Cumberland & Colchester counties, Pictou Co. and Antigonish Co. I click over to Antigonish (<http://www.rewardyoursenses.com/>) and find a very colorful website.

I like the sound of the "Day Trips" tab. The trips offered are more than just around Antigonish, they cover parts of the Eastern shore and all the way down to Halifax and Sherbrooke Village—very comprehensive. There are great listings for beaches and surfers and lots of hiking opportunities. I think I would like this area. There is an ad for Whidden Park Campground and Cottages that looks very tidy and reasonable, and you can walk to Antigonish!

I know Pictou is near Antigonish but I want to see what they have to say. I'm surprised again that with the mention of leaving Halifax that the woman suggests I stop at Five Islands as there is a new small resort there and also maybe visit Joggins which is a new World Heritage Site and has a fossil interpretive center. She said neither of these places is visited very much. She then went on to talk about Peggy's Cove and the coastline along there. I asked her about Pictou, and she described the waterfront and harbor, but was very general. I asked about lodgings and she doesn't like to recommend one over another but directed me to NS.com. She said that weekends were busy but that I could just find lodgings along the way. She actually sold me on Five Island and the drive up to Joggins more than the Pictou area.

I need to check out lodgings in Pictou and go back to the Pictou Co. website. A click on places

to stay and choosing lodges, cottages, I am given several options. The first is one I noticed in the Visitor's Guide: Stonehame Lodge & Chalets - it looks great and there is a news flash that the Tall Ships are coming to Pictou Harbor July 28, 2009 - now that would be a fun time to visit! I like the accommodations and the fact that cottages have kitchens and it is a pretty setting. The Pictou Lodge is very pretty and bit more modern but also more expensive. Finally, Caribou River Cottage Lodge has theme cottages that look cute, it is right on the beach, and reasonable prices too.

Two other towns need by attention: Lismore because it is small and might be picturesque and Tatamagouche as it looks like it is on the shore.

Googling Lismore the second listing is for the harbor there and that leads me to a Marinas.com site, which only shows a map and photos. It looks somewhat rural, surrounded by trees with a beachfront. I'll move onto Tatamagouche. I was expecting beach, but the photo on the home page is a cute riverside town with deciduous trees in fall. A quick view of attractions and there is no mention of the shore or beach, but they are at the mouth of two rivers. They could stand to jazz up the website and give direct links to the attractions. I visit the Galley and the photos are gorgeous. It is truly a small town, but has received some attention lately when it starred in a CBC reality series "The Week the Women Went." All 167 townswomen leave for a spa and the men have to take care of everything. Accommodations seem to be up, but they are hard to find on the website, buried in the Businesses

listings.

Flying to NS from Seattle, in summer, is running over a \$1,000 and takes awhile to get there. I don't think I would go from Seattle, but if I lived in the NE part of the US I might take a vacation to NS and the Northumberland Shore. It is certainly picturesque and size of it makes it manageable. Admittedly, I am a bit of a foodie and dining is part of the vacation experience. I didn't see a lot of dining listings or advertising but checking out e-dining (<http://ns.edining.ca/>) I was pleasantly surprised by the offerings in Amherst, Antigonish New Glasgow and Pictou. The other thing that impressed me was how reasonable I thought the lodgings were and finally who can resist warm ocean waters?

I would head up to Amherst and stay there a night at the Amherst Shore Country Inn, enjoy the beachfront property and maybe go on a hike along the Henry Ketchum recreational trail. I thought I might head out to Pugwash, but its website needs more pictures to lure me there. I certainly will go through it as I travel along highway 6. I think this trip would be one of those not too planned - just experience the vistas and small villages.

I would spend a night in Pictou because I know my sons would love to see the Hector and the waterfront looks very charming. I would stay in the Caribou Lodges or the Stonehame Lodge and Chalets. I might also go on a sea kayaking tour with Coastal Spirit Expeditions. I would probably do the half-day tour and ask the guide where we could have a yummy lobster dinner. The kayak website

has great links to lodgings. I would consider the Museum of Industry or the Fisheries Museum if it was poor weather, but the beaches and scenery are too pretty to miss.

Our final night would be around Antigonish. I liked the Whidden Park Cottages, but maybe there is someplace on the beach. The Coastal Breeze Chalets have a nice look about them and love the idea of being on the beach. We would explore all of Cape George, and the Chalets site lead me to Causeway Diving Supply, however it is in Auld's Cove which would make for a very hectic day. Perhaps if we were staying longer it would be worth the drive to rent equipment to explore the waters off Cape George.

I would take this trip anytime between June and late September. I would travel with my husband and two sons or just my husband. It could also be a good couples getaway if you lived nearby. It seems that all of Nova Scotia is on the coast and Pictou is one of the most picturesque of them all.

Distance Marketing Assessment #4

Because of my Scottish heritage and love of Celtic music, I have always wanted to visit Nova Scotia and Cape Breton Island. While researching the province, I reviewed travel information on its regions. Since I would be flying into Halifax and driving to Cape Breton, I decided to take a look what there might be to see and do along the way. For this assessment assignment, I was asked to research the coastal

area northeast of Halifax from Amherst south to the Canso Causeway. The Nova Scotia Tourism, Culture and Heritage Department calls this region Northumberland Shore.

From previous assignments, I had a copy of the Nova Scotia's "doers' & dreamers" guide. It helped guide my research initially. I reviewed the regional editorial on the Northumberland Shore, its special features, must-sees and top events. When comparing this area to the other Nova Scotia tourism regions, I didn't find the area to be as packed with attractions and activities. However, I did find enough reasons to spend a couple of days in the area. I could imagine this trip as a couple's weekend or girlfriends' getaway any time from May through October.

While Amherst is the northern point in this region, I'm not sure I would travel there to begin my journey. The "doers' & dreamers" guide didn't offer much information on the community, and the town's website didn't change my impression. Instead I'd head to Pictou, about 90 minutes from the Halifax International Airport. This town is the landing place of the first wave of Scottish immigrants, whose culture shapes much of Nova Scotia. The community has plenty of accommodations, shops, restaurants and historic sites to fill a day. It could also be a "hub and spoke" community for my trip as I would want to visit a few towns to the north, before heading southeast to Cape Breton Island. I enjoyed a glimpse of Pictou through the photo gallery on their website.

I might also plan my visit to coincide with an event being held at The Decoste Centre in Pictou. It's touted as one of the finest venues for the performing arts in Eastern Canada and presents a "who's who" of the entertainment world. With that said, I had a hard time finding information about the Centre on the Pictou County Tourist Association's website. It was not listed on their attraction's page. There was only just a mention of the Centre in the 2009 Northumberland Shore Visitors Guide as well. The Centre website provided me with the information I needed to add it to my list of must-sees. I might even consider a visit to Pictou during the Hector Festival—which is a celebration of the region's Celtic music and heritage and is named after the ship on which the first wave of a tide of Scottish settlers rowed ashore, "Hector."

I'd head north to visit the Jost Vineyards, <http://www.jostwine.com/>, in Malagash. This award-winning family-owned and operated winery is also Nova Scotia's largest. Located along the picturesque Northumberland Strait, Jost has received over 150 international awards and are known for their icewine; complimentary tastings and seasonal tours are offered.

Next, I would travel to Tatamagouche to shop at the Sunrise Merchantile. Owners Dave and Suzy Blet have made a vocation of their world travels to source the world's most enticing food offerings for their unique store-café-concert venue-studio. The shop combines gourmet foods, gifts, a fiber arts studio and tearoom with an expansive view overlooking the Tatamagouche Bay. It would be fun

to visit here during one of the Sunrise Mercantile Maritime Concert Series events.

To end my time in the Pictou area, I'd visit The Hector Heritage Quay (meaning waterfront landing) to learn about the way of life and experiences of the Scottish settlers who landed on the shores of Pictou in 1773. There is an authentic re-creation of the ship Hector plus colorful exhibits and demonstrations by the resident artist.

I'd top off my visit with a tasty lobster dinner since this shore is famous for its fresh lobster ... I wonder which wine I would choose to compliment the experience?

Distance Marketing Assessment #5

Nova Scotia.com was the sole source of information for my initial trip planning.

So, my family of four has flown into Halifax in July, and we'll spend the night there, and maybe take in a show at "Shakespeare by the Sea" mentioned in Summer Discoveries section of the "Vacation Ideas" page while we pick up our rented RV and provisions. If we can plan our return to Halifax to return the RV to coincide with the Halifax International Busker Festival, that's even better!

Another tidbit from the "Vacation Ideas" page is the Geocaching information. My husband and son are into this so I'm sure we'd add geocaches to our entire itinerary, and this would further influence

where we would stop to hike and explore. This is a good addition to the idea page since there are geocaching enthusiasts who are eager to add more “finds” to their list.

On the road to Amherst, we’d stop in Parrsboro to visit the Fundy Geological Museum and go on one of their geological beach tours. Fossils + 9 year old son = Happiness!. There’s also the Parrsboro Rock & Mineral Shop and Museum for our rock hound. We could partake of the Partridge Island Lookout and Hiking Trail picnic area. And the nearby Port Greville Age of Sail Heritage Centre could be interesting with its old church and blacksmith shop. Possible interest in Moose River Goldmines Museum lead me to the Musquodoboit Valley Tourism site, but I didn’t find much there so that is probably not going to make the itinerary.

At Amherst we might stretch our legs on the Amherst Point Bird Sanctuary bird watching trails and platforms. Another place to pull off the road and take in the natural beauty is in Tatamegouche at Nelson Memorial Park. The park is the kind of place where one usually finds geocaches.

Our destination for the first night is Pictou where there are camping options. (If not camping, then dinner and stay at Pictou Lodge Resort look good). We would hope to hear Summer Sounds of Nova Scotia (traditional music weekly) to further educate us on the culture of the area. The Jitney Walking Trail would be another way to get out into nature and see the views. Hector Heritage Quay Visitors Marina – the 6 visitors slips brings up the notion

that it would be a great place for a sailing vacation ... all that water ... rather than just driving.

The next morning we’d stop in New Glasgow to take Living History Tours’ “Ships and Spirits” as another was to better understand the history of the area. What kid doesn’t like a good ghost story?

It would be fun to plan our trip to begin in time to catch the Highland Games 3rd weekend of July in Antigonish. Love those bagpipes! The Fairmont Ridge Hiking Trail looks like another great place to exercise in the great outdoors. In Antigonish the lunch and dinner options look good, so we’d camp nearby.

The “Best of Northumberland Shore” page highlights some details I hadn’t seen elsewhere on the website. I like “photos stops” recommendations such as, Cape George Lighthouse and the reminder of Wild Blueberry Festival events all over the province first two weeks of August. My daughter eats her body weight in blueberries every summer, so this alone would make the vacation worthwhile for her.

An aside (since the assessment is to focus on the Amherst to Canso Causeway section) is a brief list of a few things we’d do in Cape Breton to round out our Nova Scotia experience:

Stay in or near Baddeck and rent kayaks to get out on the water.

Stay in waterfront RV park in Pleasant Bay and go on a whale watching tour.

Camp in Cape Breton Highlands National Park and play outdoors there.

And, if this family trip doesn’t materialize in the next decade, I can envision exploring this part of Nova Scotia with my husband as empty-nesters.



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