

THE FIVE STAGES OF TRAVEL

Your guide to how visitors plan and experience a trip,
and how to be there with them every step of the way



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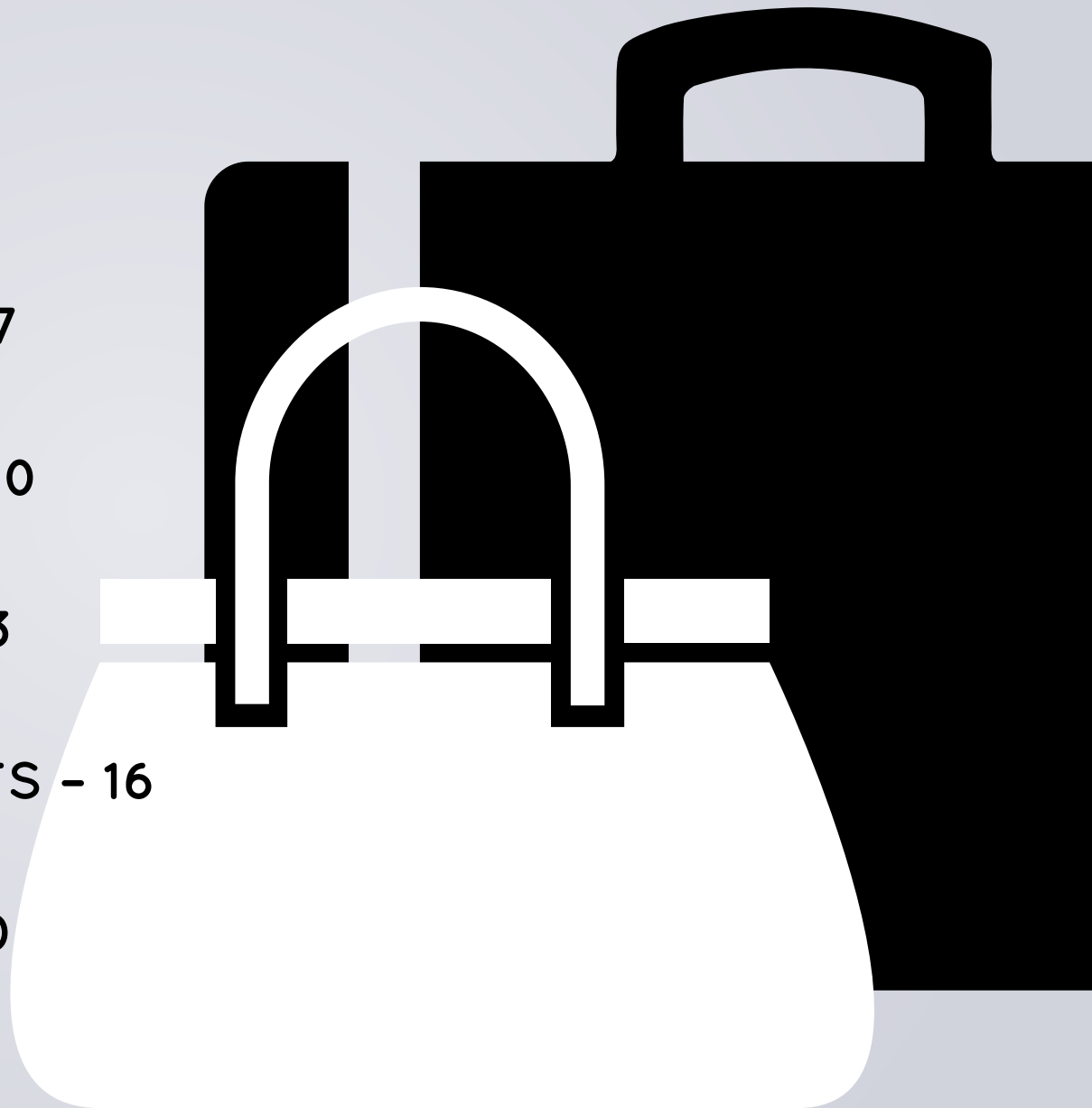
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INTRODUCTION

You're in the travel business. Congratulations for being a part of giving people something they love! In fact, **96% of American travelers are planning a domestic trip in 2016.**¹ Travel doesn't just broaden the mind, it refreshes, rejuvenates, and improves people's outlook on life. But today's travelers can be finicky—they're looking for one-of-a-kind experiences, and they've got a whole world of options.

Getting on their itinerary means understanding who your likely visitors are and the travel trends influencing their choices. Then it involves reaching out with creative content that touches and inspires them at every stage of the journey, from the initial dream to sharing their experiences when the trip's over.

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SOME TOP TRENDS INFLUENCING TRAVEL TODAY

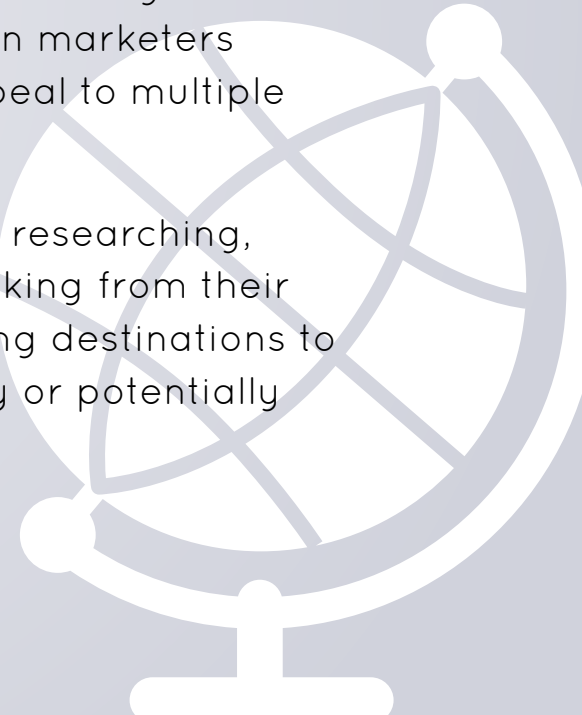
AUTHENTICITY “Playing the tourist” is out. Today, travelers want to know what it’s like to be members of the community, experiencing local culture, cuisine and adventures just as longtime residents do.

“BLEISURE” TRAVEL Like our ever-more-flexible workplaces, the business trip is getting a makeover. Travelers hunker down with clients, then unwind on hiking trails or in the local arts district.

SEAMLESS PLANNING You can find anything on the Web. Sometimes that’s the problem. Travelers long for human or digital experts who can help them package a trip from start to finish.

MULTIGEN TRAVEL Baby Boomers—hitting retirement age with money, time, and endless energy—are planning elaborate trips and inviting the kids and grandkids along. Savvy destination marketers are finding ways to appeal to multiple generations at once.

MOBILITY Travelers are researching, planning, and even booking from their smartphones, compelling destinations to become mobile friendly or potentially lose out.





“IF you want to attract more travelers, don’t give them more information. Give them inspiration. There’s plenty of information out there—too much to sort through. They’re looking for curators to help them pinpoint travel experiences that are right for them. Don’t just tell them what they’ll get while they’re there—tell them what they’ll take home at the end of the journey.”

—Daniel Levine, travel trends expert
and keynote speaker

THE FIVE STAGES OF TRAVEL

Each journey is really a series of essential moments when travelers are enticed, romanced by a place, and inspired to take the next step towards making the trip a reality. Connect with and encourage new visitors at every stage.


DREAMING MOMENTS

PLANNING MOMENTS

BOOKING MOMENTS

EXPERIENCING MOMENTS

SHARING MOMENTS



STAGE ONE: DREAMING MOMENTS

When it comes to brightening our daily lives, travel is the stuff that daydreams are made of. In fact, **37% of travelers in the United States think about planning a vacation at least once a month, and 17% do so each week.**² This is your opportunity to inspire them, focus those dreams squarely on you, and begin to guide them from “*what if...?*” to an actual trip.

That requires more than facts about room rates and amenities. You need to tell an inspiring, fully conceived story relating who you are and what makes your destination like no other.



CONTENT DEFINES THE DREAM

With unprecedented control of what, when, how and where they get information, travelers are less likely to respond to advertising than to content that entertains, informs, and surprises them.

- Create **videos** enabling viewers to experience a virtual vacation.
- Use a friendly, conversational **blog** to share insights on your region.
- Write **articles** that highlight authentic experiences and people in your area.
- Use **checklists** with helpful tips on local customs, what to bring, or what to expect.
- Distribute and repurpose content on Facebook, Twitter, and other social media sites, or as **sponsored content** on popular travel websites.
- Create an **e-newsletter** that you send to past visitors or prospects.
- Use Google Analytics, bit.ly and other **measurement tools** to learn what is and isn't connecting.

BRINGING THE DREAM TO LIFE: THE POWER OF VIDEO

Video captures the sights, sounds, and action of a potential trip all in one package—one reason why 64% of those travelers who viewed travel videos watched while thinking about taking a trip.³ **With views of branded videos up 394%, there is more opportunity to attract attention.**⁴ Make sure that yours:

- **...feel real.** Highlight authentic experiences that travelers won't find elsewhere.
- **...address the right market.** Feature the type of visitor you think is most likely to come.
- **...live where viewers will see them.** 106 million unique YouTube visitors travel.⁵



THE FIRST STEP TO GREAT CONTENT IS A COHERENT STRATEGY

As you consider what types and pieces of content will best promote your destination, think first about the big picture. **What's the story you're trying to tell? What overall themes should you emphasize?** This is no time for silos—include all vital constituents in developing the strategy, advises travel specialist Paul Cohen, vice president of PHG Consulting in Washington D.C.

When content fails it's often because different people or departments are creating different elements and haven't communicated. "The social media content looks nothing like the website, and when people look for more information they can't find it," says Cohen. He likens a travel destination to a grocery store full of specialties that need to be marketed in the right ways. **"Before you start running a campaign," he says, "make sure you have all the products on the shelf."**

STAGE TWO: PLANNING MOMENTS

You're on their radar. You've told a great story and moved them from dreaming of a trip *somewhere* to focusing on your destination. Now they consider logistics—when to travel, how long to spend, how to get there, and whether the experience will match or exceed expectations.

The key here is to understand who your potential visitors really are, and the types of experiences they seek.



KNOW YOUR MARKET

The cheapest gas in years is a great reason for a weekend getaway. Attract visitors from your own region with content highlighting things they love.

ALABAMA IS RICH IN HISTORY

Popular headline:

13 of Alabama's Oldest Homes⁶



FOUR WAYS TO TURBOCHARGE YOUR WEBSITE

- 1. LINK IN, LINK OUT.** Be sure content shared on popular travel sites or social media links to your site. From yours, link to prominent attractions.
- 2. BE THE JOURNEY.** Does your site tell a unified story? Greet viewers as you would visitors to your home, with a warm welcome and by thinking of their needs at every turn.
- 3. ENCOURAGE ACTION.** All content should encourage next steps, whether linking to related pieces or speaking with a representative.
- 4. HIGHLIGHT YOUR BEST.** Resist political pressures to feature all local attractions equally. Visitors want to know about your famous local cuisine—not the chain restaurants you have.

A group of four young adults, two women and two men, are smiling and posing outdoors. The woman on the far left has long brown hair and is wearing a plaid shirt. The woman next to her has dark curly hair and is wearing a white lace top. The man next to her has dark hair and a beard, wearing a red shirt. The woman on the far right has long blonde hair and is wearing a pink shirt. They are all smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with trees and sunlight.

TRAVELER PROFILE: MILLENNIALS

BIG, EDUCATED, EAGER TO TRAVEL They're the largest generation, and about 61% have attended college (versus 46% of Boomers). They're also the likeliest to cite "time for recreation" as a life priority.⁷

DRIVEN BY DIGITAL AND MOBILE Your best way to reach them is through their devices. Forty percent of leisure travelers who book online are Millennials.⁸

THEY'RE BEHIND THE BLEISURE BOOM In 2015, they supplanted Gen X as the largest generation of workers.⁹ They're looking to add fun to their business trips.

IMPRESS THEM AND THEY'LL SPREAD THE WORD More than 75% rely on recommendations from friends for ideas on where to go next.¹⁰

A silhouette of a person in a suit standing next to a rolling suitcase, viewed from behind. A large white mouse cursor icon is overlaid on the lower left. The background is a blurred airport terminal with a bright orange light source in the upper right.

STAGE THREE: BOOKING MOMENTS

Travelers at this stage of the journey are more than just interested and motivated—they're ready to make the leap. But you don't have them yet. They can still pull out or go with that other option they've been toying with.

The key at this point is to make transaction as smooth and seamless as possible. That means removing unnecessary hassles and obstacles, and adding any sweeteners that may help push them to action. Make sure your website offers clear information on pricing options and scheduling and does whatever possible to help them put together all elements of their journey. Offer season-specific content so they can look forward to special events taking place around the time they plan to visit.



MAKING THEIR DECISION PROCESS EASIER

When the spirit strikes, travelers want to make all their decisions to close the deal now—not when they get home. **Travel queries on Google from mobile devices rose 50% in the last year.**¹¹

BE FULLY MOBILE. Anything visitors can do from a laptop should work on mobile as well.

THINK MOBILE FIRST. Don't force laptop-friendly graphics onto mobile screens. Design everything as though site visitors will come through their smartphones first.

REMEMBER, IT'S A PHONE. Make sure visitors can get seamlessly to a live representative.



TRAVELER PROFILE: GENERATION X

A GENERATION IN THE MIDDLE Wedged between the more numerous Boomers and Millennials, they're enthusiastic travelers, but the most concerned over financial issues such as saving for kids' college and their own retirement.¹²

FAMILY FOCUSED In the sweet spot of parenting years, they're apt to bring the kids and plan around school vacations.¹³

BUDGET-CONSCIOUS EXPLORERS Nearly 70% say exploration is a key part of travel, though 72% are price sensitive—more than Boomers or Millennials.¹⁴

GRAVITATE TO THE ARTS More than 67% cite a destination's artistic offerings and cultural attractions as a draw.¹⁵

A person wearing a light-colored long-sleeved shirt, blue jeans, a straw hat, and a backpack is walking away from the camera on a wooden pier. The background is a warm, golden sunset over water, with the sun low on the horizon. The overall mood is peaceful and adventurous.

STAGE FOUR: EXPERIENCING MOMENTS

Your efforts have paid off. The traveler has considered hundreds or thousands of alternatives, chosen your destination and made the ultimate commitment by putting money down. Congratulations. Now's your opportunity to reward that faith.

The single most important part of the journey is, naturally, the journey itself. For one thing, it's what all the other stages of travel revolve around. It's the stage for which each traveler will forever judge you. **Their experience will determine whether they come again and encourage others to do so.**



“IT’S true that people want authentic experiences, and it even goes a step further. They want something where they can take pictures and videos and share them on social media and one-up their friends. They want to do something their friends haven’t done.”

—Paul Cohen, travel consultant



BEING AUTHENTIC MEANS FINDING THE BEST WAYS TO BE YOURSELF

DELIVER ON THE PROMISE. When the actual experience meets or exceeds the expectations you’ve raised through your great content—that’s when you build trust and create repeat visitors.

IT’S ABOUT THE PEOPLE. As much as they love the views, the weather, or the cuisine, a huge part of authenticity is the chance to make connections with people who are sincerely welcoming.

DON’T OVERSTEER. It’s impossible for you to create a unique experience for each and every visitor. Fortunately, they can. Give them room to seek and explore, meet people and make their own choices.

KEEP COMMUNICATING: TRAVELERS WILL MAKE KEY DECISIONS EVEN AFTER THEY'VE ARRIVED

“One major way that mobile technology is changing the travel world is shortening the time between booking and experiencing,” says Daniel Levine, a travel trends consultant and speaker, and director of the Avant-Guide Institute in New York. “People have their computers, in the form of smartphones, with them at all times.” In fact, **“Near me” Google searches are 34x what they were in 2011—and 80% are done by mobile.**¹⁶

If visitors planned an outdoor activity and it’s raining, they’ll be looking for new plans right away, Levine says. **Be sure that your key destinations are readily visible on location-aware apps** such as Google Maps and Yelp. Adds Levine, “At a time when travelers can do so much planning on the fly, marketers more than ever need to be in the right place at the right time.”

“Near me” Google
searches are **34x**
what they were in 2011



A photograph of three older adults, two men and one woman, smiling and laughing outdoors. The woman in the center has blonde hair and is wearing large hoop earrings. The man on the left has grey hair and is wearing a red shirt. The man on the right has dark skin and is wearing a patterned shirt. They appear to be enjoying a sunny day together.

TRAVELER SEGMENT PROFILE: BABY BOOMERS

THEY'RE DRIVING THE NEW LEISURE ECONOMY. Some 10,000 Baby Boomers turn 65 each day.¹⁷ By next year, they'll control about 70% of disposable income.¹⁸ And 99% plan to take a trip this year.¹⁹

MEANINGFUL EXPERIENCES WANTED Endlessly inquisitive, Boomers want to learn when they travel—whether trekking through caves or *finally* attending Space Camp.

THEY'RE READY FOR ADVENTURE More than 60% of Boomers say they feel younger than their numerical age.²⁰ Rocking chairs need not apply.

FOCUSED ON EXTENDED FAMILY Their top reason for travel is time with family and friends (54%).²¹ They're driving the trend of multigenerational travel.



STAGE FIVE: SHARING MOMENTS

Now that their trip is over, they're dying to tell the world what they did. Where once that meant showing photos or a carousel of slides to a small group in their living room, these days a photo or video can be shared around the world. **Treat them right and your visitors can become some of the best ambassadors your destination ever had.**

HERE ARE SOME TOP WAYS TRAVELERS ARE SHARING THEIR EXPERIENCES

- **Amateur video:** Vacationers who once shared slides with a few friends now share video moments with the whole world. Video posts on Facebook are up 75% year-over-year.²²
- **Vlogs:** A step up from amateur video, vlogs (video blogs) are a preferred means for amateur and professional travel journalists to build an audience.
- **Reviews:** More than half of Internet users worldwide have written reviews of destinations they've visited, on sites such as TripAdvisor, trivago, and Booking.com.²³

HOW SHOULD DESTINATIONS RESPOND TO ONLINE CRITICS?

STAY VIGILANT. While you don't need to answer every critic, responding to positive (and negative) reviews on sites such as TripAdvisor tells potential visitors that you care what customers think.

BE SINCERE, NOT DEFENSIVE. Apologize for a bad experience and, if appropriate, say how you've corrected the situation. And stay polite—engaging in arguments could make you look petty.

CORRECT WHERE NECESSARY. That said, you don't need to let grossly inaccurate statements slide. Politely but clearly set the record straight.

LEARN AND IMPROVE. Keep in mind that online critics offer the kind of market research that companies pay big bucks for. If past visitors are repeating the same complaints, it's a good sign to take action.

GET STARTED

Advance Travel and Tourism Southeast specializes in the development and delivery of highly effective digital marketing campaigns. Our digital marketing solutions, including digital static and rich media display, video, content marketing, social media marketing, search engine optimization, pay-per-click advertising, reputation management, and more, are all optimized to reach your best target customers.

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