

Making Your Website an Insider's Guide to Your Destination

And how 5 leading DMOs did it





 brian.zyzy

Hello!

When travelers are booking a trip, they have so many options for where to get inspiration, ideas, and tips. Social media networks, blogs, review sites, and DMO websites are all competing with each other for travelers' attention throughout the trip planning process.

As a DMO, you have a special advantage over these other resources; you live and breathe the destination every single day! You know what your destination has to offer different types of travelers, and you're well versed on the hidden gems, seasonal events, and where to go for brunch when the most popular spot has a line up out the door.

And even if you don't, your locals and Instagramming visitors certainly do.

In this eBook, we're going to talk about the challenges that many DMO websites are currently facing, and how they can be tackled by approaching your site's content creation with an insider's lens.

We've also put the spotlight on a few forward-thinking DMOs like Visit Singapore, San Francisco Travel, and Visit Arizona who have done a wonderful job of creating helpful website content that is targeted, friendly, and inspiring.

Enjoy!



Amrita Gurney
VP Marketing at CrowdRiff

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How the Modern Traveler Plans Trips



destination__everywhere

As a DMO, you'd hope that your website would be the go-to, one stop shop for travelers wanting to learn about your destination. But the reality is that there are so many other great online sources that people turn to when planning a trip.

On average, the **typical traveler visits 30-160 websites**¹ during their trip planning process. Because they have so much information available at their fingertips, travelers turn to a variety of sources to find out where to eat, stay, and visit.

Social networks like Instagram and YouTube help travelers who are visually drawn to a destination by beautiful landscapes or trendy, aesthetic spots. Travel blogs are useful for getting tips about specific destination nuances, while review sites like TripAdvisor are handy to quickly reference the must-see sites in a destination.

¹Source: <https://info.advertising.expedia.com/travel-consumers-path-to-purchase-research-for-marketers>

Trends in traveler behavior

In order to make your website appealing to the modern traveler, you have to first understand what makes them tick. These are four trends in consumer behavior that travel marketers should pay attention to.

1 Consumers expect personalization

74%² of consumers are frustrated that web content doesn't map to their interests. Having web pages, blog articles, or at the very least text that link to what browsers are searching for are must haves for a website hoping to become a trusted source.

2 Consumers trust peers > advertising

Word of mouth is still the most trusted source of information, with 92%³ of consumers trusting friends and family over advertising. With so many ads everywhere they turn, consumers are tuning them out and turning to more authentic sources that they already trust.



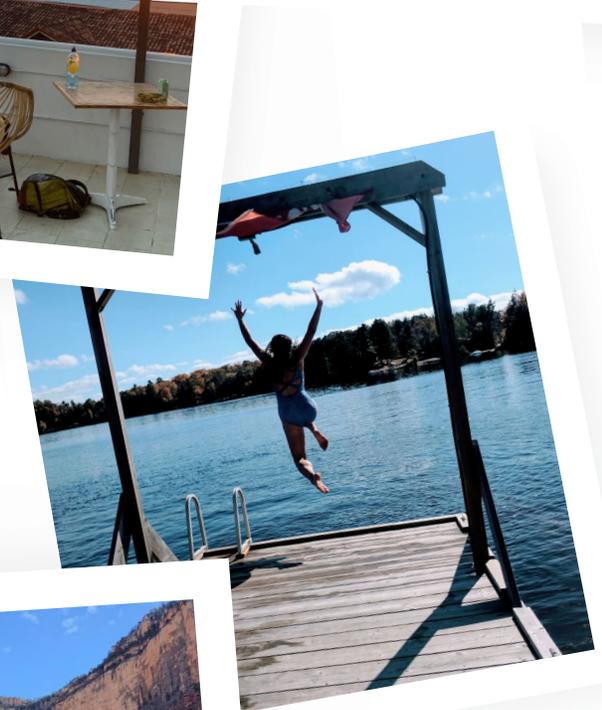
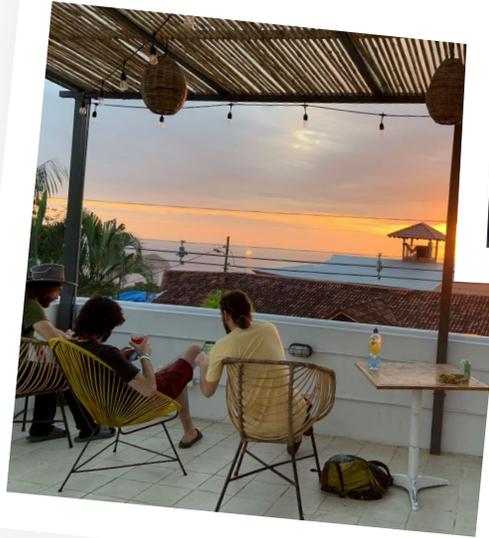
 crazy.uni.girls

²Source: <https://www.bound360.com/why-personalize/>

³Source: <https://www.nielsen.com/eu/en/press-room/2015/recommendations-from-friends-remain-most-credible-form-of-advertising.html>

3 Consumers are sharing travel experiences on social media

76%⁴ of travelers post vacation photos to social media. When they visit a new destination, stay at a new resort, or experience a new attraction, travelers take photos to preserve their memories. They then want to share those experiences with friends and families through the visuals they captured.



4 Consumers are visual decision makers

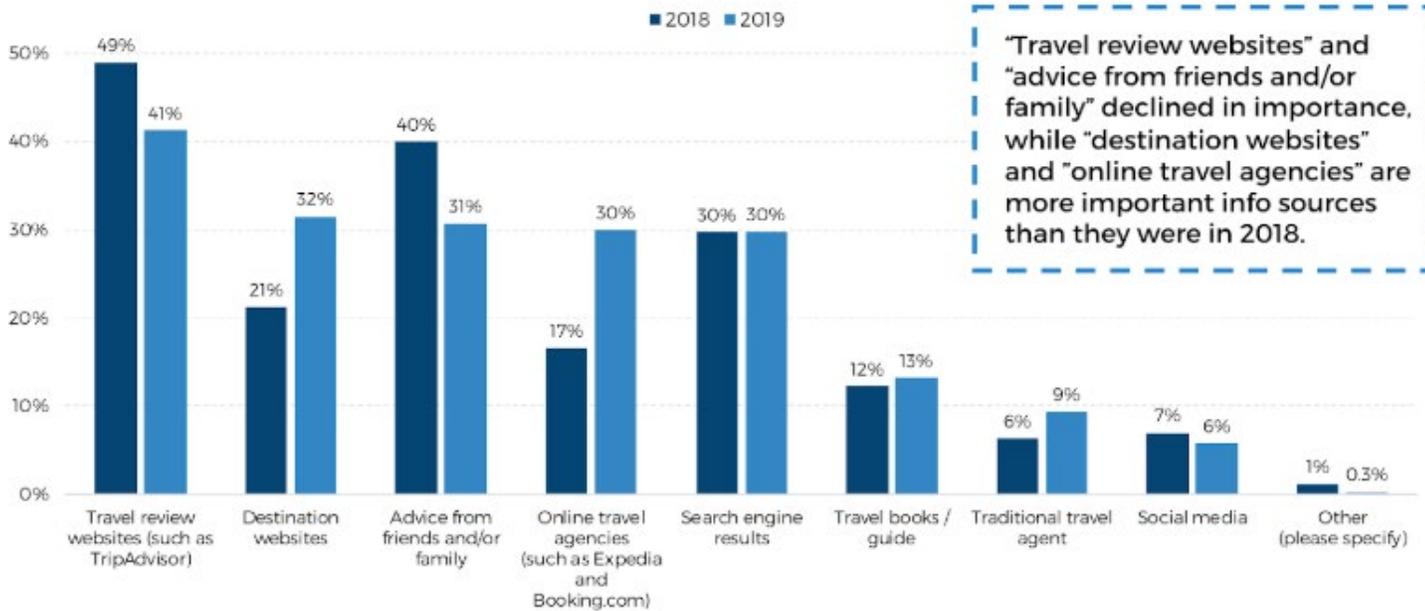
Those photos and videos that travelers are sharing on social media - they're extremely influential in their friends', families', and followers' future travel planning. People are increasingly turning to photos and videos to decide what to do, where to go, and what to buy.



⁴Source: <https://www.adweek.com/digital/social-media-and-travel-go-hand-in-hand-infographic/>

Planning & Booking

Which do you consider the most important sources of information during travel planning? Please select up to 2 answers.



According to research done by Skift, people rated travel review sites and advice from family and friends as less important than the year before. On the other hand, they rated destination websites and online tour operators as more important than the previous year by as much as 13%.

While this is a positive sign for DMOs, this doesn't mean that your website will automatically spike in traffic and popularity. If you aren't providing your site visitors with the depth of information they're seeking in a positive user experience, then you will lose them to another website.

The Top Challenges DMOs Face with Their Websites

We now know that destination websites are increasing in importance. But where are they currently falling short on delivering the information and experience that visitors are looking for?

Let's explore the 5 biggest challenges that DMO websites are facing, and the contributing causes.





things to do in la



THE 15 BEST Things to Do in Los Angeles 2019 - Must See ...

https://www.tripadvisor.ca/Attractions-g32655-Activities-Los_Angeles_California.html ▼

Travel feed: **Los Angeles**. ... Full-Day Iconic Sights of **LA**, Hollywood, Beverly Hills, the beaches and more! ... Universal Studios Hollywood General Admission Ticket.

Things to do near Hotel Bel-Air · Tours · Shopping · Parks

37 Best Things to Do in Los Angeles Right Now - Time Out

<https://www.timeout.com/los-angeles/things-to-do/best-things-to-do-in-los-angeles> ▼

Feb 14, 2019 - Looking for the best **things to do in Los Angeles**? We have you covered with the very best that L.A. has to offer. Whether you're a culture vulture, ...

29 Los Angeles Attractions for ... · The Broad · OUE Skyspace LA · Venice Canals

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Sure, Los Angeles might be one of the priciest cities in the country but fear not! Head to **Santa Monica** for a fun filled day at the **beach** in the California sun! 3) Walk the **Hollywood Walk of Fame** and See the TCL Chinese Theatre (kid-friendly) 4) Catch a Sunset at **Griffith Observatory** (kid-friendly)

Actually Cool Things to Do in LA Right Now When Someone Visits ...

<https://www.thrillist.com/entertainment/los-angeles/things-to-do-in-la> ▼

Here's our comprehensive guide to the best **things to do in LA** for tourists and locals alike, including underrated gems and obvious (but w...

30 Ultimate Things to Do in Los Angeles – Fodors Travel Guide

<https://www.fodors.com/world/.../los-angeles/.../20-ultimate-things-to-do-in-los-angele...> ▼

Jul 13, 2018 - **LA** is a city of juxtaposition—sprawling cityscape and walkable neighborhoods, frenetic tourist attractions and chill beaches—where there are ...

1 People can't find your website

A big part of gaining travelers' attention is visibility. Search engine rankings, having a social presence, and online advertising all help your website garner more eyeballs, and in turn, better business outcomes.

According to PhocusWire⁵, brands are spending as much as 61% of their marketing budgets on online channels. That number is even higher for online travel brands, like OTAs, who spend 73% of their budget on digital. The sheer amount of spend allocated to digital underscores the importance of having a presence that is optimized for both your social media channels and your website.

⁵Source: <https://www.phocuswire.com/Bing-Phocuswright-digital-travel-marketing-study>

2 Your website's user experience isn't optimized

If your website isn't mobile friendly, that is the modern kiss of death—booking.com found that 80%⁶ of travel consumers prefer using mobile to get the information that they need. Additionally, if your website looks out of date and its design doesn't inspire, your visitors are more likely to bounce quickly.

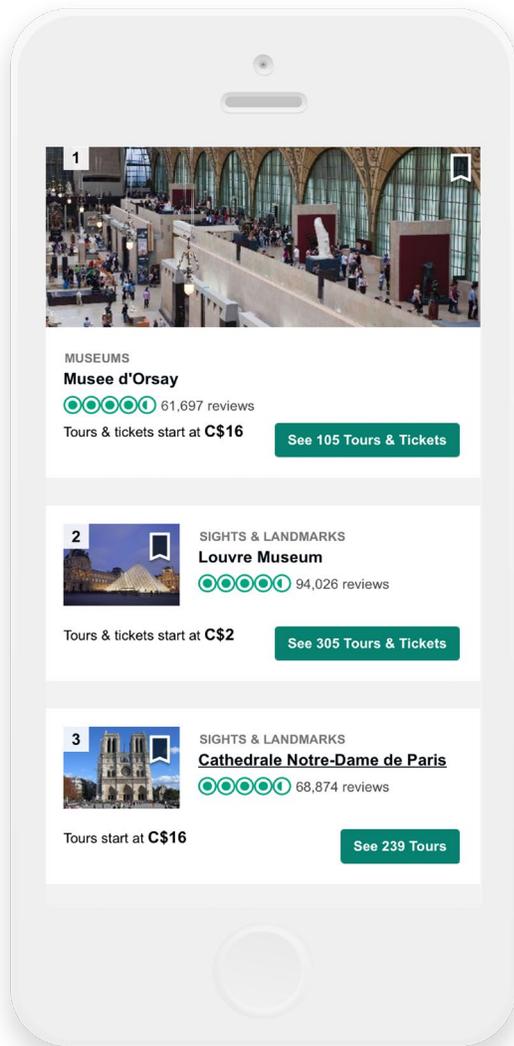
Additionally, a visitor might be turned away if they can't find the information they're looking for once they arrive at your website. If there's no clear navigation to guide them to where they need to go, they won't want to click through the site to search for it.

The same thing applies when aiming to inspire people with

your visuals. If you have a beautiful hero image of a local resort, you should also have a caption or CTA on the image for those interested in learning more about the property. This will ensure that you're getting as much value as possible out of your images, and will also make it easier to measure what is inspiring visitor inquiries and bookings.



⁶Source: <https://www.techradar.com/news/how-ai-is-changing-how-we-travel>



3 Your site only shows top tourist spots

Google and TripAdvisor are sharing details on the top things to do in your destination, making it easier for people to choose them over your site. What can people learn from your website that they can't elsewhere?

Travelers crave unique experiences, and are always looking for spots off the beaten path. Finding and surfacing this information should be a priority for you, to help provide visitors with the experiences they want to discover.

“There’s so much going on here, you find little nuggets of things that are happening in town, new public art, new murals, new stuff happening... you [need to] have your finger on the pulse of what’s going on.”

Wes Rhea
CEO, Visit Stockton

4 Your visuals look staged or unrelatable

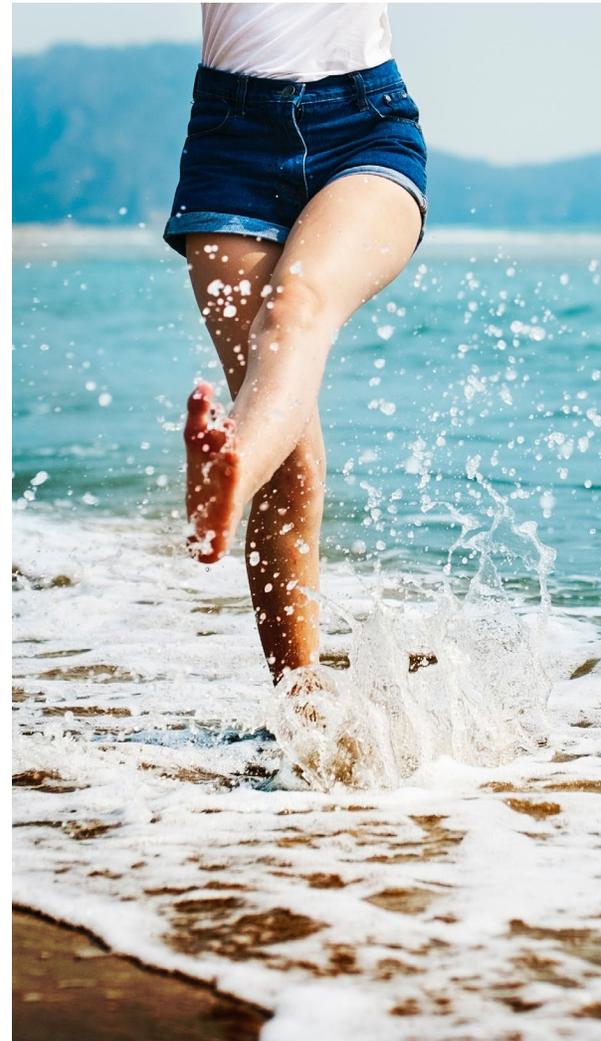
If your website is full of stock photos, visitors aren't likely to think that your website is credible because it's not believable. Is this really what your destination looks like? Does this photo reflect the types of visitors you are trying to attract? If you can't answer 'yes' to these when looking at your site's visuals, a makeover may be in order.

Sometimes even if the visuals being used aren't stock photos, rather professional photos from your brand, visitors will still be weary. In fact, 85% of consumers⁷ find visual UGC more influential than brand photos or videos. This is especially true for millennials, who say that information received through UGC is trusted 50% more⁸ than information from other media sources, including TV, newspapers and magazines.

“Millennials tend to want to judge things on their own. They don't want to be fed a TV commercial or a print ad that tells them something is the greatest; they want to see it in their authentic and natural form so they can judge for themselves.”

Shaun Young

Senior Interactive Art Director for H&L Partners,
creative agency partner of Explore St. Louis



⁷Source: <http://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20160503005382/en/Offerpop-Survey-Identifies-Gaps-Consumers-Marketers-User-Generated>

⁸Source: <http://www.smartbrief.com/original/2014/04/5-surprising-stats-about-user-generated-content>



- AWARD-WINNING CHEFS
- BREWRIES, WINERIES AND DISTILLERIES
- CATERERS AND DISTRIBUTORS
- LOBSTER
- LOCAL MAINE FOOD
- MAINE SEAFOOD
- NIGHT CLUBS
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Spezwirtschaft Haidhausen - Hip Hop with "Rahmfleckerl"





Foto: Spezwirtschaft

Industry chic meets hip hop meets restaurant. It is really comfortable sitting on the blue, well-worn wooden stools, particularly by the floor-to-ceiling windows. First get an "Isarwasser" – wheat beer with Bols Blue and apple juice – and cheers! Add to that a "Rahmfleckerl", the classic dish from the "Spezi" cuisine made from flatbread with sour cream and bacon. Whether you have the roast beef from Hereford cattle with spinach and pesto or the vegan kohlrabi schnitzel, at [Spezwirtschaft Haidhausen](#), everything is regional, high-quality and homemade. Tip: Pop by on a Sunday evening for a pulled pork burger.

Maria Passagne - Sushi in a dim sitting room-style Atmosphere



5 Your site feels like a directory

If your site is just a list of links out to different local partners, what are you telling your site visitors that they couldn't just find in Google Maps? Your site should help travelers navigate and filter the choices available to them, according to their interests.

Looking at these two examples, the one on the right does a better job at helping the site visitor decide where to look for the information they need. They've clearly arranged the listings in a blog format with pleasing accompanying images, for one. They've also provided a quick breakdown of what a visitor can expect if they go there, and specific tips on what to order. Immediately, the site feels more friendly and helpful.



How to Make Your Website into an Insider's Guide

With Examples from Leading DMOs

To make your site more engaging, you need to think critically about your content. The tone you write in, the type of information you feature, and the format in which you share it is what makes your website a great resource for travelers. The best way to do this is to approach the structure of your website as an insider's guide.

In this section, we will cover five steps to turn your website into a resource that looks and reads like an insider's guide. These tips are supported by examples of DMOs who we think have done an incredible job of creating beautiful, informative websites.

1 Put yourself in the traveler's shoes

To turn your website into a comprehensive resource for travelers, you first need to understand who your current site visitors are, and what they're looking for. Next, you'll need to dream big and imagine what your site would need to include to appeal to your different traveler personas.

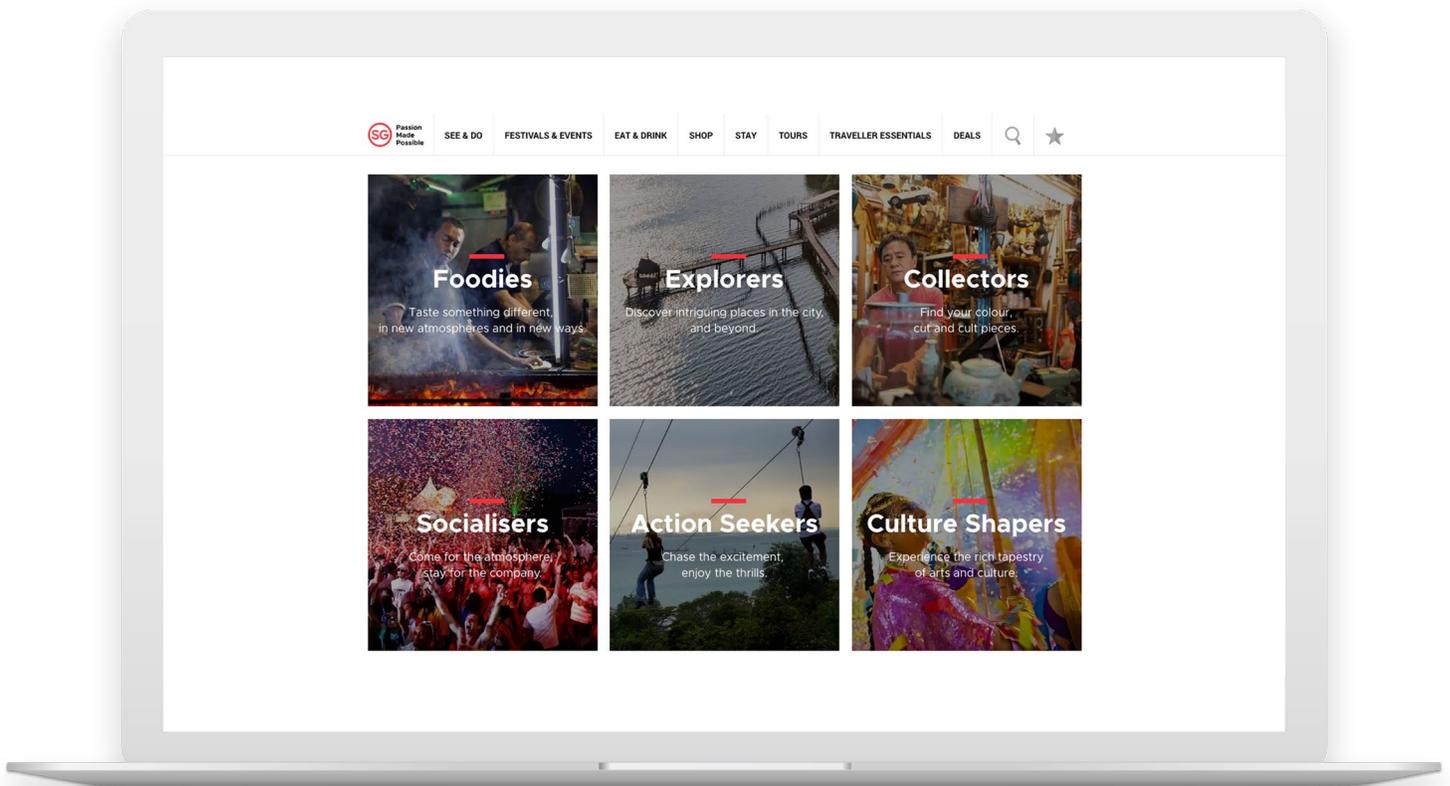
Start by tapping into a website analytics platform like Google Analytics to understand key metrics such as traffic sources, bounce rate and time on page. Then, use a tool like Full Story, Pendo, or Crazyegg to watch how real people are interacting with your site.



You can uncover a wealth of knowledge by tapping into this valuable resource. For example, you can:

- **Discover search intent and navigation issues.** What content are visitors trying to find? How quickly are they able to find it? What's blocking them from getting there?
- **Watch what impacts your website metrics.** What's common amongst the pages that visitors commonly bounce from? What is it about certain pages that increases the time spent on them (engaging visuals, specific content topics, copy etc.)?
- **Understand the impact of your visuals.** Which photos or videos are people engaging with the most? Is there a certain topic or style that visitors seem to be most attracted to?





In order to appeal to each type of traveler that you're trying to attract, imagine different traveler scenarios that you would need to reflect on your site. For example, maybe your downtown neighbourhood is known to attract shoppers, music enthusiasts, and foodies, while the harbourfront is typically a hot spot for beaching families, fishers, and couples looking for a romantic getaway.

Once you've done your brainstorming for the type of people that might be interested in visiting your destination, dig a little further and ask yourself what they specifically would want to do or know, and what their search language and queries might be. Now that you have this list, you can easily create content and web pages that reflect what people are searching for.

DMO spotlight: Visit Singapore

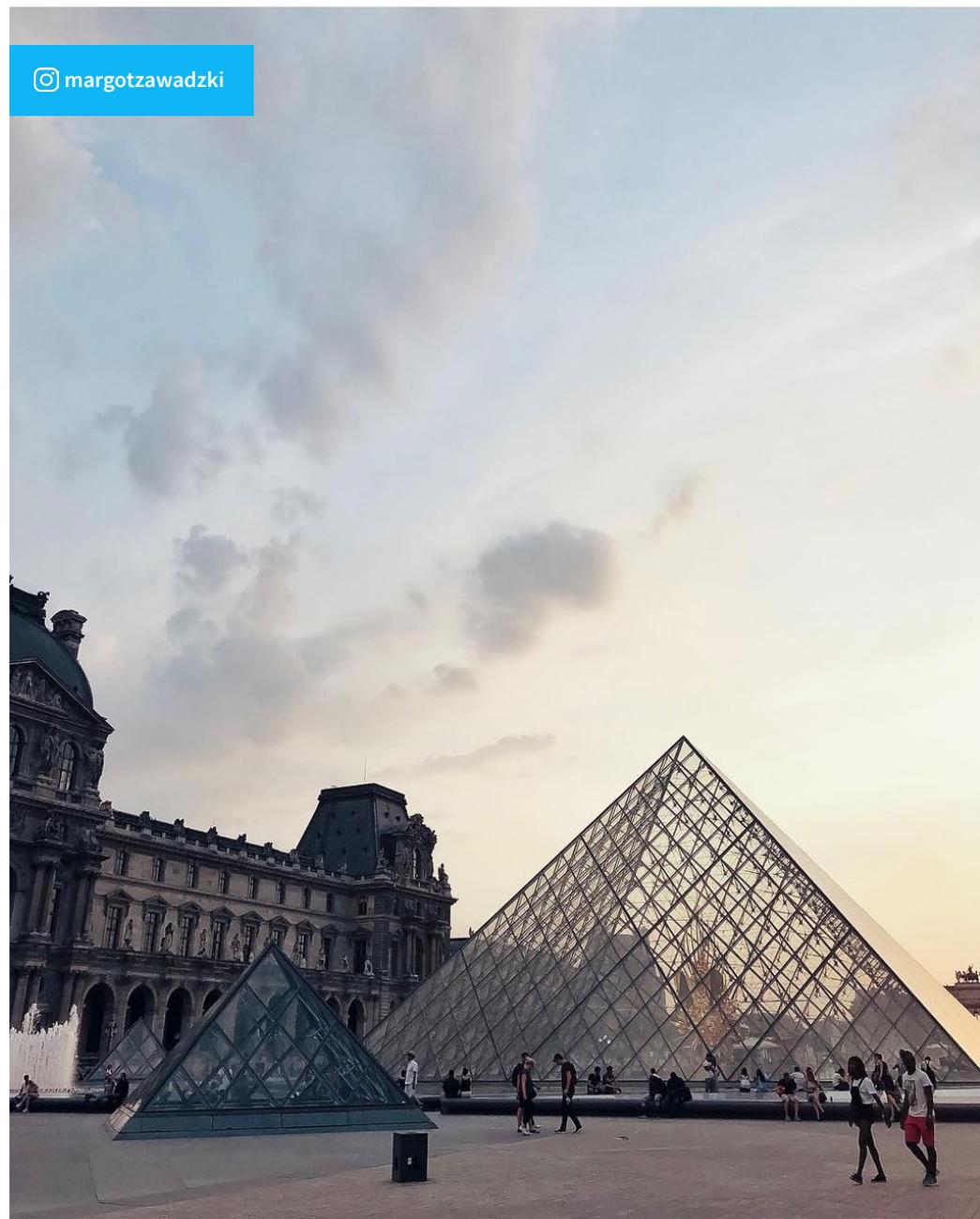
Right on the homepage of the website, there is a visual grid listing all the types of travelers: foodies, explorers, socialisers etc. Each of these images links into a variety of pages and blog articles with relevant information, listings, and suggestions. This streamlined user experience ensures that there is content on the site that is useful to anyone wanting to plan a visit to Singapore.

2 Share information people can't get anywhere else

Of course, people want to see major landmarks and attractions when they visit a destination. For example, when in Paris, travelers will want to see the Eiffel Tower and The Louvre, but there is information on these hot spots all over the internet. That means visitors can choose to get their information from any number of sources outside of the Paris Convention and Visitors Bureau's website.

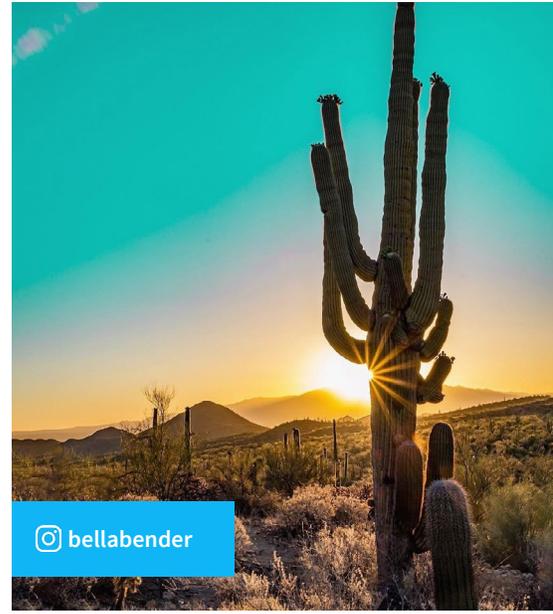
Instead, put a bigger focus on offering information on more niche or less known activities, attractions, or partners in your destination. See what Google and Trip Advisor say about your destination, and offer something different. This is also a popular way to combat overtourism, since you can help spread tourists out to different areas of your destination.

It's also important to regularly update your website to reflect seasonal or time-specific events or attractions. Make sure this hyper-current information on festivals, shows or activities is easily discoverable on your site.





Instagram: bri_fay



Instagram: bellabender

DMO spotlight: Visit Arizona

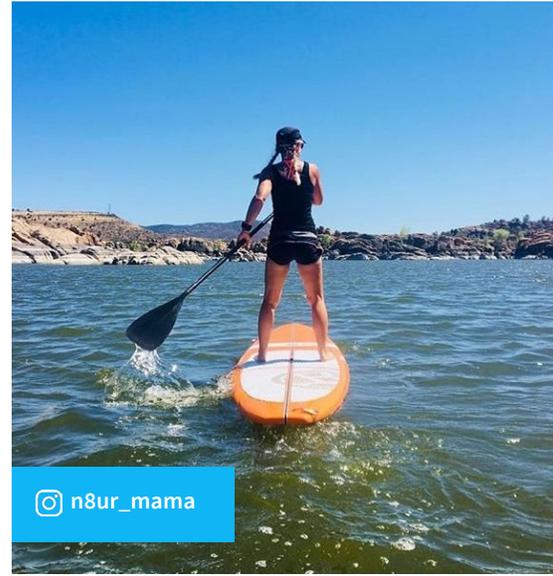
Visit Arizona does a great job of listing alternate places to visit, local shopping spots, and unique communities, with a focus on lesser known activities in a state where there are a few main attractions that everyone already knows about.

Their blog offers customized content that is segmented for different audiences, and puts emphasis on moving people away from crowded locations by making suggestions on alternatives for the main hot spots in the state's national parks. To help with this, they showcase really beautiful photos of these niche, quieter spots. The DMO leverages user-generated content to do this.

“User-generated visuals are an important part of the marketing toolkit for tourism organizations—especially when the destination you’re promoting is as ridiculously photogenic as Arizona.”

Scott Dunn

PIO and Senior Director of Communications at the Arizona Office of Tourism



Instagram: n8ur_mama



Instagram: abby_sackett

3 Tap into your locals

Featuring suggestions and input from locals is arguably the best way to make your website feel like an insider's guide, because these people truly are insiders! Putting locals at the centre of your content will make it feel so much more authentic and trustworthy. Plus, these people may have secret spots or suggestions that your DMO staff hasn't yet uncovered.



There are a number of ways that DMOs can tap into their locals to up their website content.

Invite locals to be content producers on your blog.

You'd be surprised how excited locals would be to share what it is about their city or town that keeps them excited to live there. You could have individually contributed pieces, or make a call for input for a roundup post of the best coffee or craft beer spots in town. This is content that should perform well, as 70%⁹ of consumers place peer recommendations above professionally written copy.

⁹Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/small-business-network/2015/sep/17/reviews-tweets-instagram-customers-marketers>

“ I have lived in Töölö for more than three decades. I love the area's functionalist architecture and the continuous presence of art, literature, and music. Taka-Töölö starts at the Hesperianpuisto park in close proximity to the museums and services of the inner downtown area, yet hides inside it a world of its own. Many artists and authors from Tove Jansson to Mika Waltari have inspired this area, and been inspired by it. One secret I can reveal is the Kirpilä Art Collection housed in a Töölö apartment, as well as several top-quality Japanese restaurants. I even refer to Taka-Töölö as Helsinki's Little Tokyo.



Maija Tanninen-Mattila
Director, HAM Helsinki Art Museum

‘Day in the life’ videos are also a popular format, where you feature a local in a casual Instagram Story style video. Film snippets of the local touring you around town and talking about their favorite spots. These can be posted on social media, as well as stitched together to live on your website or blog.

At the very least, **featuring photos from locals’ social media** is an easy way to visually showcase your destination from an insider’s point of view. Having a special hashtag dedicated to your locals’ visuals is an easy way to filter and collect this type of content.



DMO spotlight: Visit Helsinki

Just like the people who live there, Visit Helsinki’s approach to destination marketing is really unique and thoughtful—the DMO’s content is exclusively written by locals. Their neighbourhood guides each start off with a quote from a local talking about the area, and why it’s special to them. There’s also a carousel on each page with recommendations for food, attractions and activities. These suggestions feel authentic and trustworthy because of the emphasis on local input across the entire site.



📷 bakariyoga

4 Provide personalized experiences

We live in an age where consumers are so accustomed to the personalized services offered to them by companies like Spotify, Amazon, and Netflix that they expect personalization from every product they use, and website they visit.

58%¹⁰ of consumers say that they want a more personalized experience from brands. It probably won't surprise you to hear that this is especially true for Millennials; a whopping 83%¹¹ of Millennials said they would let travel brands track their digital patterns if this would provide them with a more personalized experience.

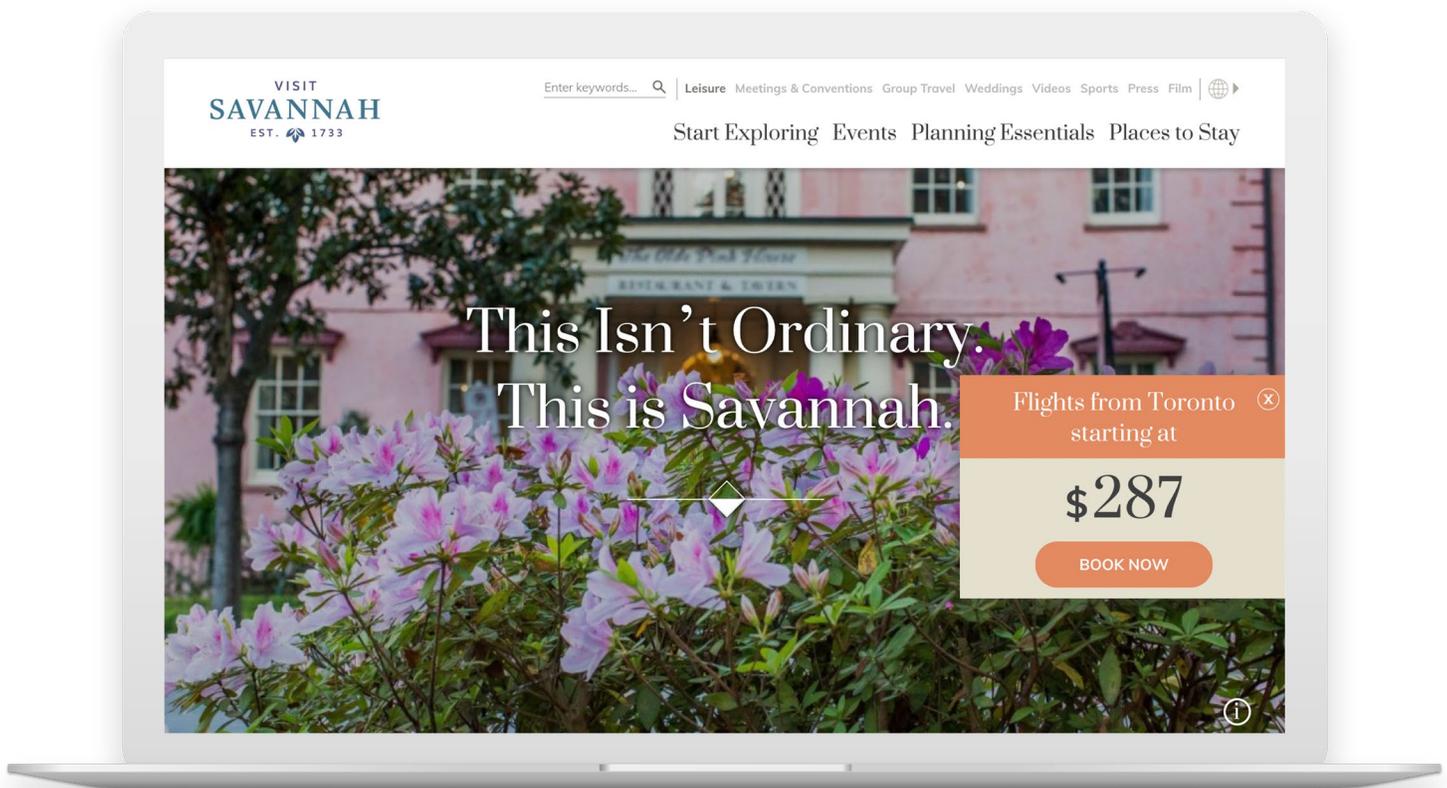
While it's certainly unrealistic for DMOs to aim for the level of sophistication that the tech giants have achieved, it's important to think about how you can personalize your website's experience for visitors.

¹⁰Source: <https://revelsystems.com/blog/2018/06/06/proof-personalization-stats-roundup/>

¹¹Source: <https://www.cmo.com/features/articles/2017/5/5/15-mind-blowing-stats-about-digital-trends-in-travel-hospitality-tlp-ddm.html>

So, what does personalization actually look like on a DMO website?

- **Critically cater to your personas when you create content.** A one size fits all approach won't work, or inspire. We mentioned this earlier, but it just can't be stressed enough!
- **Use the right visuals.** It's not just your copy that needs to be personalized; pay close attention to the visuals you are choosing. Visuals are what site visitors tend to notice first, and they are what will make your site memorable. Make sure the images not only reflect what topic you're talking about (ie. a golf experience), but make sure that visitors see themselves reflected in the visuals. If you're talking about an experience that is intended for millennials, make sure they are well represented in the supporting images.
- **Give your visitors alternative ways to interact with you,** and get the information they're looking for. Live chat is a great way to quickly help visitors in a friendly, human fashion. Modern tools make it easy for DMO staff to monitor the chat for speedy response, even from their smartphones.



DMO spotlight: Visit Savannah

Visit Savannah has really nailed personalization on their website. They also offer sample itineraries that are created for different personas, interests and tastes.

As a bonus, when landing on their homepage, a pop up advertising flight deals from Toronto proves that they're paying attention to where their visitors are coming from, and serving relevant information.

5 Take inspiration from bloggers, influencers and publishers

Travel blogs are so helpful simply because they're written by someone who has experienced the destination first hand, and genuinely wants to offer helpful information for future travelers through tips, best practices, and recommendations.

Mirror this by producing great content that is both helpful and friendly. Write with an insider's voice, and establish a distinct brand voice and personality that reflects your destination's spirit and mission.

Additionally, make sure you use highly engaging and authentic visuals; we already discussed how stock photography makes your website feel unreliable and untrustworthy. Try featuring user-generated content (UGC) from real visitors to showcase what your destination is actually like, through the lens of real visitors.

itsmrsmel



annesou.roussel





DMO spotlight: San Francisco Travel

Example: San Francisco Travel has amazing blog content on their website. Their “where to eat” article series features recommendations on restaurants and specific dishes in each neighbourhood, and includes supporting UGC from Instagram.

Last year they launched “I am San Francisco,” an online series that profiles city natives, as well as a few people who came to visit and ended up staying. The profiles cover a diverse human landscape of race, gender, age, economics and orientation, including a Muslim tech worker, a female entrepreneur, business execs, artists, and a transgender person.¹² Each story is told through photos, video, text and audio, and ends with the interviewee telling the viewer, “I am San Francisco and you are always welcome.” This is smart branding for a such a large, busy destination, which appears to be cozy and welcoming thanks to this initiative.

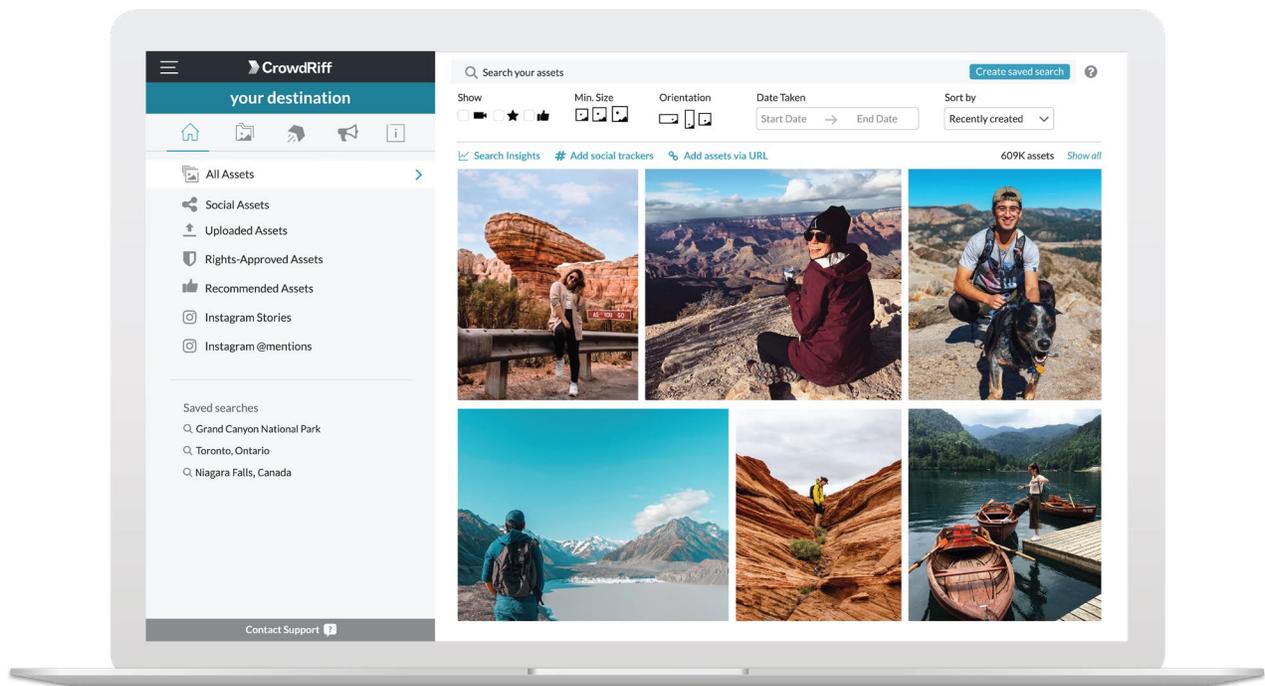
¹²Source: <https://www.sfttravel.com/article/san-francisco-travel-launches-i-am-san-francisco-and-you-are-always-welcome-initiative>

Discover Why 500 of the World's Top Travel and Tourism Brands Use CrowdRiff

Visuals are the language of the digital era. They play such an important role in inspiring travel, and showcasing what makes a destination unique.

CrowdRiff removes the guesswork of deploying the right visuals by using artificial intelligence to source, manage and deliver the visual content that gets people clicking.

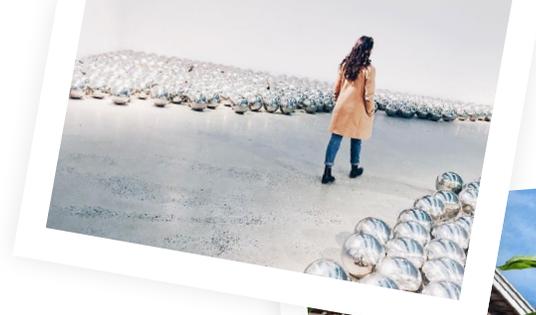
- Source and deliver authentic visuals from visitors and locals in your marketing
- Smart curation to surface the best photos
- Self-optimizing website galleries
- Galleries with CTAs to inspire direct bookings and visits to partner sites



“User-generated content gives a much better feeling for a place than a professional photographer can. You’re getting it from people who have been there, and are seeing it through their eyes. It’s not a hard sell when you get nice imagery and show people who we truly are.”

Jessica Willi

Executive Director, Block Island Tourism Council



Discover The Most Engaging Social Media Photos From Your Destination

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