Keeping Travel Websites Relevant in 2020:

Dos, Don'ts, and Creative Inspiration





Hello!

For every Expedia or Booking.com, there are thousands of local travel and tourism brands that know their destinations like their own backyard. These organizations are more like personal tour guides, rather than just ticket sellers, often with invaluable resources from local travel experts for people who crave authentic experiences.

The problem is that some travelers don't know these websites exist. At CrowdRiff, we're in a unique position. If you've been reading our content for a while, you know we've covered this topic in the past. Though, as you know, traveler behavior is always in flux, and so are the trends.

This year, having worked with over 800 tourism brands, we're even better equipped to gather insights that few other organizations have access to. With the help of these insights, third-party research, and smart marketers in our community, we've curated the top 5 reasons travelers may be ignoring your site and what you can do about it. Plus, we share tips, tricks, and trends from the tourism sites that get it spot-on.

We hope you enjoy the read, and find the information we share useful!



Julia Manoukian Senior Content Marketing Manager CrowdRiff



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Trends in Traveler Behavior

The travel marketing industry is experiencing a revolution, and we've got the facts to back this up. In 2020, the average traveler:

- Trusts customer reviews more than traditional advertising
- Loves visuals
- Is really impatient

Let us explain why...

Research shows that travelers trust peers over conventional ads. Customers trust reviews 12 times more than marketing that comes directly from brands¹.

Long gone are the days when travelers would book a vacation after watching an American Airlines commercial on the television showing how glamorous cabin crew members fly to exotic destinations. TV ads with long, sweeping shots of cityscapes and sandy beaches just won't resonate with the travelers of today. They are far more skeptical.

Visuals still matter, of course, but not in the conventional sense. Fifty-five percent of people between the ages 18 to 65 book trips solely based on the images that they see on Instagram². Today, the best-performing images aren't always the professional stock photos on the glossy pages of a travel brochure, but often real pictures from real travelers online. And, it's not just photos. Travelers also love videos and Instagram Stories — short clips that showcase the things you just won't see in a travel brochure, like a just-opened pop-up store in a European capital or a farmer's market that's off the tourist track. Travelers spend, on average, 88 percent more time on a travel website when there's a video³.

Oh, and travelers are impatient — really impatient. They have little tolerance for poor travel experiences, and 35 percent of consumers are frustrated by slow-loading websites⁴.





The Role Your Website Plays

You may be wondering what role does your website play in the traveler's booking journey? The short answer is, well, a huge one!

Research has shown that travelers visit on average 38 websites 45 days prior to booking.⁵ Other sources say that a person's travel journey can have anywhere between 70-800 touchpoints over 1-7 months.⁶ While no two travel journeys are alike, when it comes to dreaming, planning and booking travel, people still rely on your website.

Though, overall, the process is disjointed. Your website can help set you apart, provide reliable information, inspire people, and guide them to book and visit your destination.

So, how do you stand out? Let's first look at some reasons why people might be ignoring your website.

⁵Expedia ⁰Sojern



5 Reasons Travelers Overlook Tourism Websites

We know that travelers distrust conventional ads, love visuals, and are impatient. Keeping this in mind when designing and updating your site will get you noticed by the modern traveler.

How did we choose these trends?

We spoke with several smart designers, did our own third-party research, and carried out qualitative research from our base of more than 800 customers.

Your Website Looks and Sounds Like Everyone Else's

Imagine that you were to remove your company logo from your website. Would people still be able to tell that it was your site based on your brand identity, messaging, and visuals?

Now, think about this: are your visuals setting you apart from your rivals? Based on our research, over 90 percent of travel brands use stock or professional images in their header.⁷ While these images offer a high degree of control when it comes to your brand, what would happen if you showed a more authentic picture of what it was actually like at your destination? When it comes to the homepage's header format, 35 percent of destination marketing organizations (DMOs), 48 percent of tour operators, and 47 percent of resorts and hotels rely on single images, and all three use a significant number of single videos. We're not necessarily saying that you have to change the format or style of image, but it might just be worth it to take a closer look at how you set your brand apart.

In the homepage header, what visual format are travel brands using?



Your Website Has Major Content Gaps

We've noticed that some DMOs only share wellknown tourist spots and not the off-the-beaten-track experiences that travelers are looking for. If travelers want information on the Eiffel Tower, they can find it on TripAdvisor. What they maybe can't find is information from locals on an obscure church in Lyon, or a fishing village in Normandy.

This is just one type of content gap. Other gaps can be desirable content (like the above), useful content (practical information), or inspirational content (like videos and photos of people enjoying the experience). The gaps can appear anywhere on your site: your blog, web pages, visitor guides, emails, social media channels and so on.

"Content gaps are one of the biggest reasons we see travelers overlook or miss out on destination websites as a resource," Britt Brouse, Director of Strategy from the marketing agency Tempest Interactive, told us.

"Destination organizations are in the best position in their communities to share helpful and inspiring content with visitors and locals. A robust content and SEO strategy, paired with a marketing and distribution plan, will eliminate major content gaps and help to keep destination websites in the minds of travelers."



For example, if you're a highly visited place like Pacific Park (that gets over 10 million visitors a year), people want to know how to get there, what they can actually do and, let's face it, how much it costs.

If you don't know where to start, consider this as a four-step plan:

- Talk to people who are on the "front lines" with travelers, like the friendly staff at your visitor center, and learn what questions often come up.
- Look at what you've learned from your audience research and map your content to travelers' needs at different stages of the booking process. Here's a real-world example: The Museum of Natural History learned that parents want to know if kids are allowed at their

exhibits. So, they dedicated an entire website section to this topic.

- If you don't have the budget to do in-depth research, consider some inexpensive web surveys for site visitors. You can also do keyword research and create content based on the results.
- Finally, pick three of your strongest competitors and check out their websites. Learn what they're doing — and what they're not.



Santa Monica Pier and Downtown Santa Monica Parking Options

Pacific Park $^{\otimes}$ is located in Santa Monica, California on the World Famous Santa Monica Pier!

380 Santa Monica Pier • Santa Monica, CA 90401-3128 • Phone: 310-260-8744

Directions to Beach Level Parking

- 1. From I-10 Freeway heading west, exit 4th Street.
- 2. Turn left onto Colorado Avenue.
- 3. Do not drive onto the Pier turn left at Ocean Avenue
- 4. Turn right onto Seaside Terrace.
- Turn right at the first stop sign, onto Appian Way.
 Follow road under the Pier bridge and to the left, into the parking lot.
- Follow road under the Pier bridge and to the left, into the parking lot.
 Once parked, there are stairs located at the southwest corner of the parking lot by Bubba Gump Shrimp Co. that will lead you onto the Pier.

Directions to Pier Level Parking

- 1. From I-10 Freeway heading west, exit 4th Street.
- 2. Turn left onto Colorado Avenue.



English -



Web accessibility — the practice of ensuring that websites and web applications are usable by everyone, regardless of their abilities — has long been a vital part of the web design/development process in successful organizations.

You can see examples of this on the sites of government institutions, where compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) has long been a legal requirement.

With high-profile cases, such as the Dominoes lawsuit last year when a blind man sued the company over the site's accessibility⁸ — some experts are predicting that all websites will need to comply with the ADA in the future.

Designers

Make sure there is enough contrast between text and its background color

According to the WCAG, the contrast ratio between text and the text's background should be at least 4.5 to 1. If your font is at least 24 px or 19 px bold, the minimum drops to 3 to 1 (though, worth noting that this is a little fuzzy because numbered sizes aren't always reflective of the visual size type). Be especially careful of text over images.

Source: Salesforce UX

Don't indicate important information using color alone

There should be another indicator (such as icons to accompany color coding, or an underline on linked text) so that people who cannot easily distinguish colors will be able to understand and use your content.

Source: UCLA

- Pair values of colors together (not only hues) to increase contrast When you strip out the color information from two hues and compare the values, there may not be much difference. Pairing different values creates contrast. Source: UCLA
- Don't rely on sensory characteristics as the sole indicator for understanding and operating content

Twenty-six percent of Americans experience some form of disability, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).⁹ Disability can be permanent, temporary, or situational, but it doesn't matter. Making your site accessible means that you care about being inclusive, both at your destination and online, and this is only good practice. Also, from a numbers perspective, it means you could attract more travelers, since everyone can find the information they need. For a checklist on how to make your site more accessible, have a look at the accessibility guidelines on Vox's website.¹⁰ It includes best practices like adding alt text to images, adjusting the contrast between your text and background color, and applying consistency with regards to layout and copy.



Your Site Isn't Mobile or Voice-search-Friendly

More than half of all web traffic comes from mobile devices, and most experts agree that responsive design is a winner when it comes to mobile optimization.¹¹

Responsive design means:

- Simplified menus
- A better reading experience
- The right typography and removing large blocks of text
- Page widths that adjust based on percentages
- AMP pages (these load really fast for mobile users)

Today, tourism websites don't just need to be mobilefriendly but also fully responsive across all devices. Different phone models have different screen sizes. Different browsers have different setups. You should take all of this into consideration when designing your pages and optimizing readers' experiences.

Voice search, in particular, is one of the most effective website strategies for better engagement with travelers. Seventy-two percent of people who own a voiceactivated speaker now use them as part of their daily routine.¹²

Want to show up in voice search? Your site needs to load quickly, be user-friendly, contain relevant local information (great for SEO), and produce the right answers in response to voice queries.

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There's No Incentive

Travelers often look for cheaper rates from an OTA or another provider. So, giving people a reason to book direct proves lucrative. Incentives might include 20 percent off a spa trip, loyalty points, or money-off deals at local restaurants.

Last-minute deals, discounts, even freebies — all of these give guests an incentive to book directly. Even better, these incentives should be exclusive and not available on sites like Booking.com. Something as simple as a room upgrade can work (48 percent of travelers say that this would convince them to book directly).¹³ This upgrade could be as simple as a better view, or a room with a balcony. When it comes to the ultimate incentive, 55 percent of travelers say that they would love free food and drinks at the hotel.

Of course, offering incentives like the ones above might not be financially viable, but you'll be surprised at what people will do for a freebie, even if it's just a free bottle of cheap wine in their room.



🖸 mahdee.sun

10 Tips to Make Your Website More Relevant in 2020

It takes just one tenth of a second to form a first impression of a person, but it takes even less to form an impression of a website (one twentieth of a second, in fact).¹⁴ We said before that travelers are impatient, but they're also judgmental. Here's what you can do to make your website more appealing to them.

Use Emotion to Humanize Your Brand

People want to engage with companies and organizations that are as unique as a real person. Ask yourself the following: Does your website's look and feel reflect your unique product offering or destination? Is your brand authentic and relatable? Now think about your visuals. What emotions do they elicit?

If you're not sure about which visuals to use, talk to your product team (or other members in the company) and find out which ones generate the most engagement.

Think about your messaging — the second person (in other words, using the word "you") tends to be more engaging as it speaks directly to the audience. One of the best ways to grab travelers' attention is with an emotional call to action — a final thought that will encourage readers to do something. Here are examples of some changes that you can make:

- "Learn more" to "explore"
- "Contact us" to "let's talk"
- "Become a member" to "join our community"





"While there are seemingly endless places to find travel information, DMOs are best suited to tell their destination's story and to define and differentiate themselves from others. However, many DMOs focus on "what" they are marketing (the place) when they should be focusing on the "why" (the motivation of the traveler) in order to market their destinations effectively," says Robert Patterson, VP of Marketing at MMGY Global.



Draw on the experiences of the people around you. For example, your brother who camped in Yosemite last summer. What did he think? What does he recommend? Ask him if you can post his vacation photos. Or, what about your staff? Someone in your sales department might have just returned from London with a great travel hack for cheap flights.

Nothing elicits real emotion better than user-generated content (UGC). The tourism team at Bothell, WA, showcases their local community with the help of UGC galleries. These are full of real photos from travelers who have visited this picturesque patch of the Pacific Northwest.¹⁵ Readers can click on each photo to read info about a must-see landmark or place to eat. It's like an interactive, digital scrapbook.



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Don't Focus on Only the Homepage

Sure, it's usually the first thing travelers see, and you want to create a good impression. However, it's important not to focus just on your homepage. Pick other key pages to refresh on a regular basis. Just think about which pages receive the most traffic and engagement.

It doesn't have to be a huge makeover. You can use tools like CrowdRiff's web galleries to update the visuals on your pages in just a few minutes, and it will feel like your site has had a spring clean.

"We see website engagement trends pick up when destinations are regularly updating not just their homepage, but other key activity and event pages with fresh photography, UGC, and links to the latest seasonal content, events, and blogs," adds Britt Brouse of Tempest. "The most successful destinations have an editorial calendar paired with a marketing plan and the resources to stick with that plan throughout the year."

The website of Haka Tours, a New Zealand tour operator, looks very different from just a few years ago. In the past, users had limited navigation options and a few photos. Now, UGC galleries brighten up the page, and it's not just the homepage. They keep things fresh with galleries that update automatically across their site. This helps potential visitors see what the experience is actually like for every tour they offer.¹⁶

Before





Upgrade Your Typography

Make sure your type is large, legible and accessible. Font size, placement, contrast, and color have a huge impact on the legibility of your content. This is particularly important for older generations and people with disabilities.

When it comes to fonts, use a common one (e.g. Arial, Times New Roman, or Georgia) and stick with it. Don't use too many fonts across your site. It looks messy and inconsistent.17

An example? VisitMusicCity.com, the tourism authority for Nashville, TN, uses the same font for headers, footers, menus, and other textual elements.18

You might want to consider developing your site using a fluidtype system, where you set your type at a certain percentage of the screen size (instead of a set pixel size) in order to provide a seamless experience across all devices. This feeds back into mobile optimization, which we discussed earlier.

Oh, and don't be afraid to get creative with your typography. Fonts can have a significant impact on the design of a modern website. So, consider it a structural element around which the rest of your site's composition flows.

A great example of creative typography is Inside Asia Tours, where chunky white text merges into images, creating a dream-like, floaty effect.¹⁹

Drive Home Your Personality with Micro-interactions

Micro-interactions are small UI animations, a relatively new phenomenon in design that makes the experience more fun, casual, and approachable. Today people want to have an interesting experience on the web, and microinteractions inject some fun into planning your trip and booking your accommodation.

Here are some examples:

- When you upload a file, hit the Submit button, and see an upload status bar go from 0 percent to 100 percent.
- When you hover over a subtle call to action, and the color saturates and the button gets bigger.
- Facebook's 'Like' functionality

"At a surface level, these additions don't seem all that significant. But across whole websites, they really add up to immersive, engaging experiences, turning mundane, generic functions into something really memorable and contributing greatly to the overall user experience," says Hendrik Köhler, Co-founder & CMO at the web design platform Sitejet.io.²⁰



Explore Deeper Forms of Personalization & Segmentation

While basic personalization and segmentation, such as targeting someone using their geography or previous interests, is still relevant, some travel companies are taking it a step further. New advanced segmentation techniques anticipate what travelers want before they even find it. It can anticipate what trips they might want to go on, the times of the year they want to travel, their airline seat placement, you name it.

"One of the biggest struggles we see is that DMOs are trying to be both a source of inspiration and a travel planning resource for travelers within the same experience," says Patterson.

"This is ineffective as we need to do a better job to understand the website visitors' intent and then serve them the content that best nurtures them in their travel planning process. This is why traveler segmentation and personalization are crucial to effective web experiences in 2020 and beyond."



You can also delve deeper into personalization by customizing your visuals, as well as your messaging. Website personalization platforms like Bound360 can help you serve up different visuals on different pages, based on a traveler's behavior, likes, and travel aspirations.

Nobu Hotels remembers a guest's preferences so when they come back to the site, their experience will be completely personalized. They will land on the spa page, for example, if they've already booked that service in the past.²¹ Another great example of customization is Greater Miami CVB, which personalizes web experiences by displaying different itineraries for different customer personas.²² This is a great idea if you don't have the resources to invest in deeper machine-learning platforms.

Triple Down on Video Content

Fifty percent of shoppers say that online video has helped them decide which specific brand or product to buy.²³ Moreover, the story format where you weave emotional video narratives into your content — is dominating engagement, according to experts.²⁴

Do-it-yourself live video content and user-generated video are easy to produce, and it's also really good for engagement. Millennials and Gen Z travelers, in particular, love it because it gives them an immersive experience of what it's like to be at your destination. You can tell stories in a nonlinear format — tales of wanderlust and adventure that keep people on your site for longer.

Visit Winona's award-winning Facebook Live series does exactly that. Each week, followers chose where the organization should travel, such as a farm or new ice park. The campaign generated 182,000 views, 48,200 engagements, and 330 impressions in one year without virtually any cost.²⁵



click to watch



²³Think with Google ²⁴Buffer ²⁵CrowdRiff



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Clearly Communicate the Benefits of Booking Direct

If you have a specific product to sell, communicate the benefits of booking direct. In an age where OTAs take up more online space — Expedia is now the world's most popular travel company, with 2017 sales of \$88 billion²⁶ — hospitality brands and operators need to do more to incentivize travelers to book direct. How do you do this?

- Make your booking panel or the "Check Availability" or "Book Now" links — visible at all times.
- Communicate the benefits of direct reservations with messages like "best rate guaranteed" or "free Wi-Fi," which could boost conversions.
- Advertise incentives, such as loyalty points, free food, and other goodies.

Marriott's Look No Further Best Rate Guarantee is one of the best. If you make a reservation through the Marriott website, or by calling the front desk, you can submit a claim if you find a lower rate for the same hotel. Marriott will then match that rate and give you an extra 25 percent discount or 5,000 reward points.²⁷

Want to get our best available rate? With our Best Rate Guarantee, you always will. And it's easy:

- Book your stay direct with us through one of our official online reservation channels, by calling our reservations line, or by visiting one of our hotels.
- If you find a lower rate for the same hotel, room type and dates within 24 hours of making your reservation, submit a Best Rate Guarantee claim form. We'll
 review the claim, and if approved, we'll match the rate and give you an additional 25% discount on the room or 5,000 Marriott Bonvoy[™] Points...it's up to you.





Urgency and scarcity are two keywords that matter when it comes to tourism marketing. Asking prospects to act quickly in order to receive an incentive creates a sense of urgency. This can boost bookings as the deal is too good to pass up on. Scarcity, on the other hand, creates a sense of exclusivity — the deal is for a limited time. "Last few tickets at a discounted price", "book now to get a free upgrade", and "book in the next hour and get free wine on arrival" are just three examples. DMOs can work together with their hotel and resort partners to create urgency and scarcity and, ultimately, increase conversions. San Francisco Travel does this really well, with exclusive hotel discounts and money-off trip deals.²⁸

Remember, urgency and scarcity help create interest in already valuable experiences. The core of the travel experience is not where you are going, but what you are doing when you travel.

Recommend Sustainable Options

Forty-two percent of US travelers would be willing to prioritize sustainable travel in the future, according to National Geographic. That number is even higher for millennial travelers.²⁹ Moreover, 60 percent of global travelers would be keen to have access to an app or website that recommends destinations where an increase in tourism will have a positive impact on the local community.³⁰

Sustainable travel, it seems, is big business, and incorporating this into your travel marketing philosophy will help you to reach a growing number of eco-friendly travelers who favor local, authentic experiences that don't impact the environment. Prove your commitment to the local community and environment with a sustainability pledge that shows travelers you care. Visit Jordan has done just that, with a meaningful travel map of the country which highlights 12 social enterprises, such as ecolodges and local village tour operators.³¹



²⁹National Geographic ³⁰My Jordan Journey ³¹Booking.com

Boost Search Traffic by Optimizing Visuals for SEO

So much work goes into optimizing text for SEO that it's easy to forget that you need to optimize visuals too. Image traffic is becoming increasingly valuable. According to Google usage statistics, at least 50 percent of all searches will be voice and image-based by the end of 2020.³² Here's how to optimize visuals for SEO:

- Optimize alt text
- Tap into topics being found in image form
- Brand your images
- Use structured data markups to get in featured snippets

Tourism Vancouver Island optimizes visuals, and the website's images appear on results pages for lucrative search terms like "the best route to Vancouver Island".³³





How Leading Tourism Brands Integrate CrowdRiff Into Their Websites

We hope these tips will help you to transform your tourism website. Sure, the whole process can be overwhelming, but start with small changes that provide you with the most value, and work your way up from there.

Photo Upload and Auto-Tagging AI

- CrowdRiff is the only travel-focused platform that brings user-generated content, as well as professional and stock photography, into your digital asset manager. This means you'll always have a fresh source of content for your website. Everything is stored in one place and easily accessible.
- CrowdRiff's AI-powered image recognition automatically tags your photos with relevant and descriptive keywords, for easy categorization and discoverability.





Lightning-fast Image Search

- CrowdRiff's intelligent search recognizes word stems (hike = hiking, hiked, hikes) and multiple languages, so you can always find the content you're looking for, even if it's not exactly what you typed.
- You also have the option to add additional keywords, license expiry dates, and captions to organize your assets, making your search even easier.

Smart Self-optimizing Galleries

- Easily pull in your top-performing photos and videos to keep your website fresh. Theme galleries around destinations, seasons, activities and more.
- If you want to make sure your galleries are always optimized, Smart Galleries works in the background to make sure your best-performing visuals are shown more often.



CTAs

- Use multiple CTAs to take visitors from inspiration to action.
- Customize your buttons so visitors can navigate through your website based on the content that resonates with them.
- Use Gallery insights to understand your viewers, and repurpose imagery in targeted content campaigns.

CrowdRiff Insights

Conversion Rate 2.6300

With CrowdRiff

2.240/0

- CrowdRiff Insights lets you track, measure and report on the ROI of your website visuals, all via a simple, easy-to-use analytics dashboard.
- With insight on how your visuals impact conversions, revenue and overall website performance, you can make more confident, datadriven decisions to drive your content strategy.
- See how every visual in your library is performing, from views to engagement to conversions.

5150K

With CrowdRiff 172K

Organizations use CrowdRiff's visual content marketing platform to keep their websites engaging, useful, and relevant to the modern traveler.

CrowdRiff enables travel brands to discover and deliver top-performing visuals to any marketing channel - from websites to ads, social media and beyond.

We'd love to help bring your website to life. Get a personalized walk-through today, and see why CrowdRiff is a must-have tool for tourism brands of all sizes.

Discover and deliver the visuals that influence today's travelers.





About CrowdRiff

CrowdRiff is a AI-powered visual content marketing platform that enables marketers to discover, deliver, and organize top-performing visuals across every channel, including website, social media, print materials and digital ads.

We help travel brands at every step of the campaign process:

- **User-generated Content:** Use CrowdRiff to source, track, and get the rights to earned visuals
- **Digital Asset Manager:** Store your earned and owned visuals together where you can easily organize, sort, and search them
- **Publish Your Campaign Visuals:** Put them to use on your website, implement trackable CTAs, and access analytics for your visual content



Watch A Demo



