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Destinations

25 Best Tourism Board Websites in the World in 2017

Dan Peltier, Skift - Aug 08, 2017 2:30 am



Skift Take

The best tourism websites in the business in 2017 are emphasizing user-generated content from platforms like Instagram and doubling down on video to make destinations seem more real rather than a part of a traveler's imagination.

— Dan Peltier

Travelers have an unlimited number of online resources they can use to plan and book their trips. Tourism board websites remain relevant for many travelers who have always used them, discover them through a booking site, or because they might rank high in Google search results, for example.

But probably more travelers consider platforms such as Instagram; Facebook with its new City Guides product,



It's our fifth birthday this week. Click on the logo for more big stories.

recommendations from family and friends; YouTube; TripAdvisor; or Google as

their top sources of travel inspiration.

Why then should tourism boards invest in a website that travelers likely aren't as familiar with compared to other channels in 2017?

That's a point that Tourism New Zealand is considering as it continues to invest in its site while cutting out content that travelers aren't interested in, said Stephen England-Hall, CEO of Tourism New Zealand. "Our site gives us an idea of what travelers are interested in. It's less about an individual traveler's interest and more about the blob of individuals that visit our site and what they're like."

Skift tracked the world's 25 best tourism board websites in 2013 and 2016, and below is our 2017 list.

The selections are getting increasingly tough. As we reported last year, many tourism boards are simplifying their websites on the front end. The best sites are adopting a similar full-width modular design, flat architecture and streamlined navigation due to the demand for speed and efficiency on mobile.

Many tourism board websites have been redesigned during the past few years to help make their destinations appear more exciting and welcoming.

In many cases, these facelifts and new features have improved the user experience while other sites look great but they probably aren't the most helpful resource for someone trying to research or book a trip. Other sites, of course, can be unattractive, clunky and of little use to would-be vacationers.

This year, we're seeing much more Instagram and other user-generated content integration into websites and more video, including 360-degree videos, such as with Visit Idaho, Visit The Faroe Islands, and Cape Town Tourism.

Many of these sites are also prominently featuring events and these are often the modules that a traveler's eyes are drawn to first. Tourism boards promoting events is nothing novel, of course; they are one of the reasons the board were originally founded. But the fact that they maintain prime real estate on many of these sites signifies their continued importance to tourism boards' bottom lines.

But much of the real change and innovation is also happening on the back end. Mining data from site visitors is a practice that many tourism boards are still working on – and others haven't started.

Customer relationship management (CRM) platforms have evolved and many are capable of generating endless amounts of data analytics for tourism boards to use to target travelers with relevant content, learn which partners provide the best return on investment, and leverage the site as a testbed for larger marketing initiatives.

Destination Canada, which took a spot on our 2017 list, is working with Google

on its paid and organic search to learn more about how travelers are finding its website and what kind of travelers find the board through Google.

“It’s not about driving traffic to our website, it’s about driving content to our partners’ websites,” said Jon Mamela, chief marketing officer of Destination Canada.

SHIFT TO HIGHLIGHTING USER-GENERATED CONTENT

Destination Canada’s articles, such as one featuring Instagram photos of Algonquin Provincial Park, help create a sense of realism about the country, said Mamela, that only user-generated content can do.

“User-generated content might even be a bit surprising and we can break those stereotypes both from Canadians and those who have visited Canada in the past,” said Mamela.

Visit Greenland and Discover The Palm Beaches – both on our 2017 list – emphasize travelers’ photos on their sites and in Greenland’s case, its entire site is essentially a dashboard of social media posts and photos featuring the destination.

But we also chose destinations that have retained their voices on their site through content that they produce and control. User-generated content is about striking the right balance with the stories a destination wants to tell and too much user-generated content can muddle those stories.

There’s also been a shift in the last two years from static billboard tourism websites – promoting tourism and hospitality partners with lots of banner ads and generic descriptions – to more story-driven portals that feature original content that the tourism boards produced.

Visit California’s website, for example, remains one of the benchmarks for building a quality tourism website with a user-friendly experience.

The launch of Visit California’s platform in January 2015 set the standard for the long-scrolling, photo-driven, content-first, mobile-first tourism website. In October 2013, visitcalifornia.com had 150,000 views for the month. In June 2017, the site’s U.S. domain had more than two million views on desktop and mobile, according to SimilarWeb.

THE 2017 LIST

We considered dozens of sites from around the world and decided to cap this list at 25.

Like our 2016 list, our 2017 list also prioritizes websites with the best user

experience overall, especially on mobile; the most modern modular layout, seamless navigation and impactful visuals, and the most nuanced multi-format storytelling.

A fourth, more subjective criteria, involved how all of the above work together to make you want to go visit the destination, and more importantly, actually use the website to research the entire travel experience.

We only considered U.S. versions of these websites and only the consumer-facing sites versus industry or travel trade sites.

This isn't an exhaustive list of all of the world's tourism sites with fantastic user experiences, design or customer relationship management platforms. But after analyzing scores of websites from around the world, we feel we have a list that's representative of best in breed tourism board sites.

We also wanted to represent every region and include a mix of city, regional and national tourism boards. We didn't consider any tourism boards that made last year's list, with one exception (**read why below**).

We list the sites by region and they aren't ranked in any particular order.

NORTH AMERICA

Visit Detroit: Everyone likes a comeback story and that's exactly what Visit Detroit's website is selling. The tourism board greets visitors with a message of "America's Great Comeback City" on the homepage. The homepage images portray the city as an exciting place to visit that has a little something for everyone. The site seems very user-friendly. It's all a bit refreshing for a city that has endured years of setbacks and negative perceptions.

Visit Idaho: This site pushes family travel and offers parents plenty of reasons to plan a family vacation to the state. The navigation bar at the top of the homepage also lets travelers click through to watch 360-degree videos of various places around the state. The imagery throughout the site drives home the point that this is a state that keeps family travel at the heart of its tourism marketing.

Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority: An overall clean design that gives many travelers exactly what they're looking for when researching a trip to Vegas. The site gets to the heart of why most travelers likely want to visit the city rather than push an alternative itinerary or agenda, for example.

Visit New Hampshire: New Hampshire is all about its mountains and lakes, and some of those are on display in a compelling video that plays when travelers first enter the site. Travelers can also take a three-question survey that curates recommendations based on what kind of vacation they want to have. There's

also a nice carousel of travelers' Instagram photos that helps travelers imagine themselves visiting these places.

Discover The Palm Beaches: Many travel brands are still working on personalizing their products and Discover The Palm Beaches in Florida does something simple yet powerful in this vein right off the bat: greeting travelers with the name of their city based on their Internet IP address. The site has plenty of original content that highlights all the neighborhoods and destinations in the Palm Beaches, which is a challenge for any regional tourism board.

Visit Florida: The Florida Legislature spared the state tourism board a dramatic funding cut earlier this year but that's not why we're highlighting the website of the most-visited U.S. state. We really like that Visit Florida showcases services and attractions for what are often underserved corners of the population, such as disabled travelers. The tourism board produced content for disabled travelers and is currently spotlighting it. Another standout feature is the Florida Beach Finder, which matches travelers with the best beaches for them based on their preferences.

Bermuda Tourism Authority: This site is rich with inspiring content and for a small island nation in the middle of the Atlantic the site demonstrates that there's no shortage of things to do or people to meet.

Destination Canada: Canada's national tourism website made our 2016 list and it's the only one we also chose in 2017. It's not easy to market a country as large as Canada; Destination Canada uses a lot of Instagram integration and other user-generated content to help it cover the marketing holes the site couldn't otherwise fill. The board also gets creative with comparing how Canada and the U.S. – its largest visitor market – are both different and alike.

Destination Canada keeps maps at the heart of its site to help travelers get a lay of the land. But we also like how a primary focus seems to be pushing various kinds of experiences in Canada and then showing travelers where they can have those experiences. As a result, planning a trip to Canada – the world's second largest country by land area – seems less daunting.

Like our next choice, Canada is also celebrating a big birthday this year.

Tourisme Montreal: First, we'll say happy 375th birthday to Montreal. Then, we'll add that Tourisme Montreal's site helps portray the city as a youthful and exciting place to visit despite its advanced age. We also like how it's easy for travelers to save their favorite things to do and see by simply clicking a heart icon and then retrieving those saved experiences by clicking on that icon at the top of the homepage.

Visit Greenland: This site's sweet spot is user-generated content that

demonstrates the importance of platforms such as Instagram in destination marketing in 2017. For a country with fewer than 60,000 residents, Greenland is trying to capture both U.S. and European travelers interested in off-the-beaten-path kind of adventure.

LATIN AMERICA

Ecuador Travel: While Ecuador is probably universally known for its Galapagos Islands, which sit more than 500 miles off-shore, Ecuador's national tourism site features beautiful creative of top points of interest to help it market the rest of the country. It also has a convenient and cheeky widget that calculates the distance a traveler's home country is from Ecuador.

Visit Panama: Panama knows it has a lot of competition in Central and Latin America from destinations with similar offerings, climates and beautiful beaches. But its central marketing message that the country is "not for tourists," which is featured prominently on the homepage, is definitely a departure from many other campaigns that travelers see.

Puerto Rico Tourism Company: This site has the most TripAdvisor integration of any tourism board site we've seen. Many travelers turn to TripAdvisor reviews for advice, which in turn, helps bolster the Puerto Rico tourism website's credibility. There's also a lot of useful information succinctly packed into the homepage.

EUROPE

Visit The Faroe Islands: We'll point out that the Faroe Islands uses "Sheepview" to show travelers' 360-degree views of the country. But there are also a lot of other cool features and design elements going on that showcase the country as a very inspiring place to visit.

Geneva Tourism: With an emphasis on its arts scene and museums, Geneva also conveniently lays out different tabs, such as "budget," "luxury" or "off the beaten track." for travelers to click on to help them plan their trip.

Visit Limerick: We like how Limerick, Ireland draws attention to the different reasons why people travel to Limerick whether it's for school, leisure or business. It also gives you a sense of what it's like to live in the city and has helpful resources for locals to understand why they should be involved in the city's tourism industry.

Vienna Tourist Board: Events are a hook for why many travelers plan a vacation, and Vienna highlights all the important lineups this year. It's also nice to see Vienna prominently featuring its Vienna City Card (a pass that gets travelers discounts at attractions and free travel on public transportation) which is the

kind of offering that many travelers are interested in. Other cities have similar tourist cards and passes but don't make as big of a play for them on their sites.

ASIA-PACIFIC

Tourism Fiji: Anyone looking for a quintessential island vacation will probably find what they're looking for on Fiji's tourism site. They also have a nifty currency calculator tool that helps travelers determine how much their money will be worth on a Fiji vacation.

Visit Korea: The tourism board portrays South Korea as a progressive and lively place to visit and this is one of most visually appealing and helpful tourism websites in Asia that we've seen.

Tourism New Zealand: Whether it's from the "Lord of the Rings" or other movies, New Zealand has been basking in the film tourism industry for many years. With its new Bryce Dallas Howard-led campaign, it's telling a new story to a new generation.

Tourism Western Australia: Australia's national tourism website has done some innovative things in recent years but we wanted to highlight an Australian regional tourism website that also deserves recognition. The tourism board introduces this beautiful part of the country using stories from people who live there.

MIDDLE EAST

Visit Abu Dhabi: Located at the crossroads of east and west, Abu Dhabi is trying to reach a new kind of luxury customer with its website. Abu Dhabi's "Your Extraordinary Story" campaign shows travelers that while the emirate has an array of experiences that are likely too expensive for budget travelers it also has affordable activities and attractions for families, friends and couples that still elicit the feeling of exclusivity.

Oman Tourism: Lots of interactive content here and one of the most well-designed tourism websites in the Middle East. There's also a ton of useful information that helps reassure travelers that Oman is a safe and inviting place to visit despite violent stereotypes associated with other parts of the Middle East.

AFRICA

Cape Town Tourism: Many tourism boards are keen on showing travelers how

they can live like locals during their visit, and the “Langa” video is a great example of how to show a destination for what it is rather than portraying it as something it’s not. From articles about how to be a responsible tourist to activities for disabled travelers, you really get a sense of what it’s like to live and be a visitor in this South African city.

Tanzania Tourism: Tanzania is known for its safari offerings but it does well at showcasing other activities throughout the country. Many African countries don’t have a tourism website or their websites aren’t comprehensive enough to be useful. Tanzania stands out as a country that wants to engage with its visitors and have a dialogue about what they want from a visit to the country.

Tags: marketing, skift 5, tourism, websites

Photo Credit: Visit NH, like others on Skift's 2017 list of best tourism board websites, features an abundance of user-generated content meant to help travelers see a destination through a less filtered lens. Visit New Hampshire