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Destinations

## 4 Tourism Website Trends Highlighting User Experience and Design



Dan Peltier, Skift

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**T**ourism board websites in 2017 exist in an increasingly diverse world of platforms that have also been readily adopted by travelers as trip-planning resources. Here are some trends we noticed from our review of the world's best tourism websites this year.

— *Dan Peltier*

For years, the only online presence many tourism boards had was a website – at best – with no way of knowing how effective those sites were at getting travelers to visit their destinations.

Fast forward to 2017 and tourism board websites are typically just one of many channels in which destination marketers engage with travelers. Will the tourism board website endure?

websites in the world and were impressed with what some destinations are doing with video, navigation, modular layout, and social media to make their sites more impactful. We looked for websites that would help make a traveler's trip-planning process easier and that would continue to fuel the inspiration they already have for visiting the destination.

Tourism board websites have in many cases become testing grounds for destinations to help them understand how travelers respond to certain messaging, services, or technology. And with many destinations the world over increasingly being scrutinized for how they operate and their return on investment, better testing and understanding of exactly what travelers are looking for has never been more important on websites and other channels.

Here are four trends from our list of top tourism websites that you need to know.

## **1. NORTH AMERICA IS STILL DOMINATING WEBSITE USER EXPERIENCE AND DESIGN**

Visit California set the bar more than two years ago when it relaunched its website and it is still one of the industry standards for tourism websites. The U.S. and Canada have some of the most visually appealing tourism websites with the best user experiences, and much of that has to do with funding and the long-established tourism industry in North America.

Look no further than Visit Detroit, Visit New Hampshire, or Destination Canada's websites to see what we're talking about. Compelling creative and stories are presented that clearly and efficiently outline what you can find in those destinations. It's not easy to breathe new life into destinations when stereotypes persist. How many people still think of Detroit as a post-recession ghost town, for example? But Detroit is finding the right balance of looking back and moving forward, and the same is true for many North American destinations.

## **2. VIDEOS AREN'T ONLY IN 2D - THEY'RE ALSO INTERACTIVE**

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Tourism boards use their websites as booking portals and promotional channels for their partners and they need to pique travelers' interests long enough to help them make decisions and get inspired. Visit Idaho uses 360-degree video to show travelers what it's like to zip line through forests or kayak through rapids, while Cape Town Tourism uses more traditional video to tell stories of what life is like in off-the-beaten path neighborhoods.

But more destination marketers realize that while they can use video to be storytellers, they must also use it to let travelers make their own discoveries with tools such as 360-degree video or virtual reality. We're also seeing more bite-size videos on these sites that can easily be adapted for multiple channels for travelers to quickly consume if time is limited.

### **3. INSTAGRAM IS THE DARLING OF PLATFORMS**

While many destinations aren't beholden to user-generated content, many are using technology to comb Instagram, for example, for what's essentially become part of any savvy (read: millennial) traveler's vocabulary: Insta-worthy photos.

Visit Greenland's website consists almost entirely of Instagram and other user-generated content and other sites like Discover The Palm Beaches and Visit Panama curate a selection of Instagram posts to highlight different themes. Destinations would be at a disadvantage if they did not study Instagram and observe what attractions and locations most resonate with travelers. But many tourism boards also know that platforms can be hot one day and cool the next, and are careful to not invest too heavily in any one channel.

### **4. SMART DESTINATIONS ARE OWNING WHO THEY ARE**

Many destinations are trying to push the envelope and promote neighborhoods or regions where tourism hasn't always been common or accepted. And while we see some of that in our list of tourism websites, we also see destinations that are owning up to what they are and not trying to be everything to everyone.

homepage that their country “is not for tourists” and is instead for a certain kind of person who isn’t looking for a Disneyland-like experience. Tourism New Zealand also clearly features its cycling and walking and hiking trails because it knows many travelers dream of New Zealand’s natural beauty and scenery. Rather than trying to tell a hodgepodge of stories that probably aren’t all authentic to the place, many destinations on our list are focusing on promoting what they’re historically known for while often showing a different side of their bread-and-butter attractions.

Tags: marketing, tourism, websites

Photo Credit: Cape Town Tourism’s site, pictured here, features compelling images and videos to show travelers what they can expect in the destination. Cape Town Tourism