

***The Geotourism Handbook:
A Reference and Guide for Montana Businesses***



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About the Authors



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About the Handbook

In recent years, efforts have been made to classify Montana as a geotourism destination. By 2008, the National Geographic Center for Sustainable Destinations identified the “Crown of the Continent” region, which includes northwest Montana, as a geotourism area through the introduction of a fusion map and guidebook which highlights historic and cultural sites, recreational activities, and accommodations unique to the area. Following this designation, the state of Montana has taken steps to manage and market its statewide tourism industry under the principles of geotourism by signing a geotourism management charter as well as identifying geotravelers as the primary target market as part of the tourism branding initiative and 2008-2012 Montana Tourism and Recreation Strategic Plan.

Research on geotourism has been conducted in the Crown of the Continent region as well as at the statewide level. Both studies have found that visitors to the state are in agreement with the principles of geotourism and thus can be considered geotravelers.

Unfortunately, many within the travel and tourism industry in Montana are unfamiliar with the concept of geotourism. Education on the concept, and business engagement of the concept, is vital to the long term success of Montana as a travel destination. This geotourism handbook offers a starting point for those in the travel and tourism industry and related businesses.

The handbook includes a basic background on geotourism, why it is beneficial to local residents and businesses, and what geotravelers are looking for when visiting the state. In this way, employees and business owners can grasp the concept and take steps to become part of the comprehensive geo-management and marketing strategy which has been facilitated by the Montana Office of Tourism.

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What is geotourism?

The first step to becoming a geotouristic business is to understand and embrace the concept of geotourism. In 1997, Jonathan Tourtellot of The National Geographic Society defined geotourism as tourism that provides an authentic travel experience while at the same time sustaining and even enhancing the geographical character of the destination. Within the definition, Tourtellot revealed five aspects of a travel destination which must be supported and conserved in order for this type of travel experience to be sustained over time: the local environment, heritage, aesthetics, culture, and well-being of its residents.

Geotourism focuses upon and highlights these unique qualities associated with a particular destination to the visitors, local residents, and the destination's tourism industry. In this way, all stakeholder groups can understand the value of these qualities in sustaining the livelihood of local residents while also providing an authentic travel experience for visitors over an extended period of time.

Although geotourism is still a relatively new concept, the state of Montana has embraced the principles of geotourism by creating the [Montana Tourism and Recreation Charter](#), which is based upon the "geotourism charter" provided by The National Geographic Center for Sustainable Destinations. The goal of this charter is to set forth guiding principles based upon geotourism for maintaining the uniqueness of Montana.

National Geographic has also recognized Montana as a geotourism destination by publishing "geotourism mapguides" for the [Crown of the Continent](#) region of northwest Montana including Glacier National Park, as well as for the [Greater Yellowstone area](#). These mapguides, which are a mix of a traditional map and a guide book, highlight a region's unique character through attractions and local businesses which adhere to the principles of geotourism. The websites are consistently updated and highlight additional attractions and local businesses within the regions that do not appear on the printed mapguides.

Although the Montana Office of Tourism has chosen to use the principles of geotourism as an all encompassing travel and tourism strategy, it is truly up to local residents and businesses to adopt geotourism as a way to celebrate and sustain the Montana way of life.

Why is geotourism beneficial to local residents and businesses?

In Montana, we are fortunate to have unparalleled natural beauty. This includes our abundant wildlife, pristine rivers and mountains, seemingly endless recreation opportunities, scenic vistas and wide open spaces. These are our greatest assets and are the reasons travelers continue to visit Montana. These are also the reasons we take pride in our state which helps shape the identity of Montana. Our equally distinctive communities located throughout the state also play a significant role in shaping this identity. Visitors not only come for our landscape but to experience our culture as well.

However, our strong sense of place as Montanans comes from each and every one of us and it is up to us to protect what we value most. Luckily, we are not alone in this endeavor. Visitors to our state share our desire to maintain our unique character (for research showing that visitors to Montana have geotraveler characteristics, view the following reports: [Geotourism in the Crown of the Continent](#) and [Statewide Vacationers to Montana: Are They Geotravelers?](#)). Geotourism provides the catalyst for both local residents and visitors alike to work together to achieve this common goal.

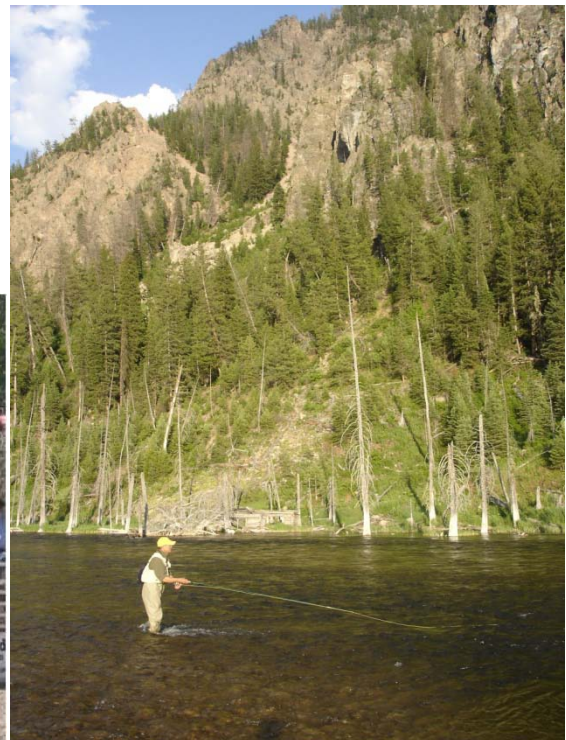
As many other travel destinations throughout the Rocky Mountain West have lost their sense of place due to overdevelopment, Montana is in a unique position to make a lasting commitment to community-based economic development, promotion, and conservation of our most cherished asset; the Montana way of life. By anticipating development pressures and applying management techniques such as geotourism, we have the ability to sustain our natural resources, scenic appeal, traditional use of the land, and our local quality of life.

By choosing to commit to geotourism, we not only continue to differentiate ourselves as a travel destination and remain economically viable in that industry but will continue to support other industries including farming and ranching. As a result, we will not be reliant on one industry for an entire state's economic well-being.

What are geotravellers looking for?

Visitors to the state of Montana are looking for authentic experiences they cannot get from any other destination. This means fishing on the Madison River, going to the Augusta Rodeo, and drinking a huckleberry milkshake in Ravalli. We have exactly what visitors want. We just need to tell and show visitors that we provide these types of experiences. Local residents and businesses have the ability to facilitate this exchange of information while building relationships with potential and returning geotravellers.

By being an ambassador for Montana and showcasing our unique qualities, you foster visitor's connection to our state. This type of connection not only creates repeat visitors, but can influence their decision making while traveling in Montana, which helps to sustain the unique character of place and keeps money that is spent in the state. The following section provides examples for cultivating this connection.



Steps to becoming a geotouristic business

The following steps are based upon the ideals of geotourism (environmental, aesthetic, culture & heritage, and well-being of local people) and are principles that have been adopted in the [Montana Tourism and Recreation Charter](#). These are ways to make your business more geotouristic and a viable option for current and future travelers. It is not about the size of your business. Big or small, you can help to differentiate your business through geo-marketing and geo-management. Switching to a geo-management philosophy is simply re-training how you think. This includes rethinking where you buy your supplies to addressing sustainable energy when any building or remodeling is in your future. For example, rather than going to any contractor, now you search out the sustainable building contractor. Geo-management leads to geo-marketing. It is very important to show your customers the steps you have taken to become a geotouristic business. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways from information on your website to in-accommodation or in-business literature. But first, you must actually change or enhance your management strategies to follow the principles of geotourism.

Maintain the integrity of place and destination appeal

The goal of geotourism in Montana is to sustain and enhance the Montana way of life while continuing to provide an authentic travel experience for visitors. The following examples provide ways in which businesses can help to celebrate and maintain the overall character of Montana.

1. Use decorations and furnishings that reflect the uniqueness of Montana's culture and heritage

When undertaking developments or improvements to your business, use styles that are distinctly related to your location, consistent with local tradition and is reflective of the natural and cultural heritage of the community.

- The [Made in Montana Products Directory](#) provides links to many local product categories which are useful in this process. Some examples are listed below. This is a way to support other local businesses while ensuring authenticity in your work.
 - [Furniture](#)
 - [Decor](#)
 - [Wood Products](#)
 - [Garden/Landscaping](#)
 - [Construction Materials](#)

2. Strive to use the local workforce, products, supplies, and services

This directly benefits the local economy and keeps a multitude of Montana's industries viable. This is where the concept of geotourism bridges the gap between industries in order to enhance and sustain the economic success of Montana in the long-term. The following are ways to get involved.

- Create and foster relationships between your business and locally grown agricultural products:
 - [A Guide to Montana Farmer's Markets](#)
 - [Abundant Montana- Directory to Sustainably Grown Montana Food](#)
 - [Western Montana Growers Cooperation](#)
 - [Farm-To-Market Pork](#)
 - [Farm-To-Restaurant Connection \(Western Sustainability Exchange\)](#)
- Create and foster relationships between your business and locally made products including Native American products and Montana artists and authors:
 - [Made in Montana Products Directory](#)



3. Participate in and help lead community stewardship partnerships

The success of geotourism relies upon building partnerships between local businesses and civic groups. These partnerships can take on many forms. They can provide education and training for local businesses to become more sustainable such as the [Missoula Sustainable Business Council](#). Others like the [Yellowstone Business Partnership](#) serve as a regional center for resolving both socioeconomic and natural resources challenges. Still other partnerships, like the [Buy Fresh, Buy Local](#) campaign and [Grow Montana](#), are intended to create linkages between businesses and communities in order to facilitate the

exchange of local goods and services. [Travelers for Open Land](#) is another type of partnership which is focused upon land preservation and is based upon donations from visitors who stay, shop, or eat at your business. By signing up for this voluntary partnership and simply asking your visitors if they would like to donate a \$1, you are helping to set aside lands for conservation easements, purchase lands for preservation, or help current landowners restore natural habitats. [Headwaters Cooperative Recycling](#) is another type of partnership which makes recycling economically viable for remote communities.

All of these partnerships create a unified goal of enhancing stewardship of Montana's natural and community resources. Focusing upon community resources helps to provide and promote an authentic visitor experience which is consistent with the values of the community and emphasizes long-term economic and social benefits to communities.



Promote sustainable resource conservation

Geotourists place importance upon the environmental practices of businesses that minimize resource consumption including water usage, energy consumption, waste, pollution, landscaping chemicals, and unnecessary lighting. Embracing these practices not only gives your business the ability to contribute to the sustainability of Montana's resources, it saves you money and provides a service which your customers desire. Promoting your sustainable practices will help to retain current customers and bring in new customers as well. Here are some information sources you can use to begin to minimize your environmental impact.

The EPA's Energy Star program contains tools and resources for businesses to create a successful energy management strategy. The [Guidelines for Energy Management](#) includes a step by step process to create performance goals, establish and implement action plans, assess progress and performance, and recognize the achievements made by the business. The overall goal is to increase the financial performance of the business while at the same time helping your business to gain recognition as an environmental leader.

[Energize Montana](#), a website maintained by The Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), is a great resource for businesses regarding energy and resource efficiency. It contains publications on energy efficiency as well as contacts to Montana utility companies and links to Energy-Star approved appliances. It is very important to note that small businesses are eligible for a multitude of [Energy Conservation Tax Incentives](#) at both the state and federal level.



1. Recycling and Waste Reduction

Although recycling can be a challenge in Montana due to our lack of proximity to processing plant, businesses do have many opportunities to recycle. The Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) provides a comprehensive source on recycling for businesses including [tax incentives](#) for recycling equipment, buying recycled materials, and buying Montana compost.

- [What can be recycled in Montana](#)
- [Statewide locations for recycling centers](#)
- [Composting](#)
- [DEQ Rural Recycling Workshop Presentations](#)

Waste reduction is another way to conserve resources while at the same time saving your business money and possibly receiving tax deductions. Waste reduction can take the form of purchasing and using recycled material, composting organic material or utilizing energy-efficient appliances, electronic devices, lighting, fans, plumbing, building products and heating and cooling equipment in your business to reduce energy consumption. The following links provide information on each of these examples of waste reduction.

- [Montana Guide for Buying Recycled Products](#)
- [Composting in Montana](#)
- [Energy-Star guide for purchasing energy efficient business products](#)

For a limited time, the state of Montana is offering [rebates](#) on Energy Star appliances.



Steps to marketing your geotourism business

Now that you have taken steps to manage your business in a geotouristic manner, your customers need to know about it. Marketing your geotourism business serves three purposes: to reach, educate, and recruit customers. Acknowledging and celebrating your accomplishments will reaffirm to your existing customers and show potential customers your commitment to sustaining and enhancing the character of Montana. It also serves to educate both new and repeat customers on ways they can continue to support the Montana way of life while also having a unique travel experience.

There are many ways to market these accomplishments, both internally and externally. Boast about your responsible business practices on your website and with literature, placards, and posters inside your business for customers to see. Also highlight your involvement with community stewardship partnerships such as [Travelers for Open Land](#) in a similar fashion. In addition, there are multiple sources of information that geotourists, both resident and non-resident, use while traveling in Montana. These sources provide exposure for your business and highlight your responsible practices for travelers to see.

1. Montana Sustainable Business Awards

- [Montana Pollution Prevention Eco-Star Award Program](#)
 - Small businesses or organizations are eligible to receive public recognition by demonstrating environmentally responsible steps they have taken in the past year (award is renewable each year) to maximize the performance of their business.
 - Recipients are honored by the Governor and are featured in statewide publications
- [Green Directory Montana](#)
 - The Green Directory is an online and print publication which brings customers and businesses together to create purchasing experiences which directly benefit Montana communities.
 - In order for a business, organization, or individual to be included in the Green Directory, they must meet a minimum of five sustainability requirements.

2. Montana Geotourism Websites

- [Crown of the Continent: Glacier National Park and Waterton National Park Travel Planning](#)
 - This is the extension for the National Geographic Geotourism MapGuide for the Crown of the Continent
 - This interactive website allows visitors to search out businesses and activities within the region which adhere to the principles of geotourism
 - Local business may submit their businesses for inclusion on the Interactive MapGuide
- [Greater Yellowstone: Yellowstone National Park and Area Travel Planning Information](#)
 - This is the extension for the National Geographic Geotourism MapGuide for the Greater Yellowstone region
 - This interactive website allows visitors to search out businesses and activities within the region which adhere to the principles of geotourism
 - Local business may submit their businesses for inclusion on the Interactive MapGuide.

3. Employee Marketing

Lastly, your marketing techniques also serve as an educational tool for your workers. It is imperative for employees to practice the same principles they advocate to customers. [10 Easy Ways to Lead-By-Example](#) is a simple evaluation to get employees thinking sustainably. In addition, educating your employees and providing information on events, attractions, and other local businesses in your area is very important to ensure your customers have the desired authentic experience while traveling in Montana. Instilling an appreciation and respect for Montana's natural and cultural resources in your employees is a vibrant signal to your customers that your business is committed to the Montana way of life. Satisfied geotravelers consciously spend money within local communities and are likely to return to the state for future trips if their expectations are met. This is a win-win situation for local businesses, residents, and visitors alike.



Summary

The [Montana Tourism and Recreation Charter](#) includes provisions directed specifically at local residents and businesses. Without the support of local communities, geotourism will not work because Montanans are relied upon to build local business partnerships and support those in the community who actively help to maintain the Montana way of life.

Those residents who are not directly involved in Montana's travel and tourism industry still play a major role in the state's geotourism strategy of maintaining the unique character of Montana by helping to preserve and protect the working landscape of Montana. Geotourism is not a singular economic strategy solely based upon tourism. It is essential to the economic viability of the state as well as the livelihoods of local residents to keep Montana's working landscape intact. Visitors also highly value this working landscape and consider it a significant part of Montana's uniqueness as a travel destination. Therefore, in order to sustain the economic success of multiple industries in Montana as well as the well-being of present and future Montanans, supporting geotourism is imperative for local residents and businesses.

Visitors to the state are loud and clear about what makes Montana unique as a travel destination: clean water and air, wide open spaces, abundant wildlife, the opportunity to view the night sky, easy access to public lands and waterways and the unspoiled nature of each of these attributes (for research showing that visitors to Montana find these attributes to be important to them, view the following reports: [Geotourism in the Crown of the Continent](#) and [Statewide Vacationers to Montana: Are They Geotravelers?](#)). In order to maintain this destination image in the mind of visitors, local residents and businesses must continue to protect our natural and cultural resources. These resources, in turn, bring in more dollars to the state when preserved, since travelers associate these highly valued resources with the state as a travel destination. As soon as visitors become aware of serious degradation to the travel attributes which make Montana unique, the state will begin to lose its competitive advantage as a destination, thus losing a substantial amount of money for the local economy.

Continuing to implement and reinforce different types of geotouristic experiences provides a profitable differentiation strategy for Montana and will only make the state more desirable as a travel destination for new and repeat visitors alike

This handbook was intended to show how geotourism seeks to incorporate the needs and wants of visitors and locals alike, while sustaining the local economy and strong sense of place associated with Montana. In this way, it is hoped that more people and businesses around the state will agree that geotourism makes good economic and environmental sense for the future of Montana.

