

Describe Your Destination

Describe your destination (who you are, who you wish to attract and why they would come) addressing your strengths, opportunities, and potential challenges.

Southwest Montana, the cradle of Montana history, features copper barons, feisty outlaws, gold miners, Lewis and Clark explorers, hardworking cowboys, adventurous frontiersmen, and a Nez Perce Battlefield all set in the backdrop of 21 wildlife-filled mountain ranges, blue ribbon streams, 3.3 million acres of forest land, natural hot springs, a stalactite filled cavern, sapphire mines, 316 species of birds, and a dozen mining ghost towns and ghosts offering a lifetime of adventure.

Southwest Montana attracts an active mature/boomer audience with a focus on soft adventure. The region is a big draw for heritage and culture enthusiasts. We have a large nationally recognized heritage corridor running from Butte to Anaconda. Our 2022 visitors were mostly repeat visitors with 81% of groups being repeat visitors to the state and 83% plan to return within two years. First time visitors made up 13% of our groups. **75% of our nonresident visitors travel alone or are in a group of two.**

Mission: Create collaborative marketing and development strategies to connect visitors to the richness of Southwest Montana's natural beauty, recreational opportunities, culture, and historical attractions.

Strengths – Beauty, History, Culture, Natural Resources

- **Location** – centrally located between Glacier and Yellowstone national parks.
- **Along the Continental Divide** – including four gateway communities and many trailheads
- **Beauty and scenic drives** – including mountain ranges, streams, lakes, rivers, stars and the night sky, national forests and public lands, Continental Divide, wildlife, filming and photograph
- **Historical opportunities** - including ghost towns and ghosts, historic sites, location between the national parks, Lewis & Clark sites and museums;
- **Cultural opportunities and events**- mining history and ghost towns, western heritage, Native American history, live theatre, concerts, rodeos, fairs, local celebrations, cattle drives, working ranch experiences, historical & cultural tours, trolley tours, pow-wows, farmers' markets, ghosts and more
- **Natural resources** – in additions to mountains and rivers and streams; hot springs, radon health mines, rockhounding for gems, Lewis & Clark Caverns, fly-fishing, rafting, blue ribbon rivers and streams, hiking, biking, outdoor trails, downhill skiing, and ski joring.
- **Outdoor adventure** – hiking, biking, fly-fishing, ziplining, off-road trails, skiing, snowmobiling, floating, ski joring, photography
- **State Parks** – 11 including Lewis and Clark Caverns, Bannack, Spring Meadow
- **Not as crowded** and still have amenities

Opportunities –

- Develop niche markets of history, ghosts, outdoor activities including multiple trail opportunities, and scenic drives throughout the region
- Partnerships with our communities, CVB's, and other regions
- Attract filming and photography opportunities
- Look at bringing a younger audience
- Educate our businesses on the importance of marketing and customer service
- Work with state to make it easy to find data and keep it updated
- Strategic Planning and potentially using resiliency planning information as we get results

Challenges –

- Transportation concerns
- Employee shortage
- High gas prices and the unknown fluctuation
- Fluctuating hours, days, weeks, and seasons of attractions and off-season closures of attractions
- Limited cell phone coverage
- Poor economic factors
- Potential environmental situations such as fires, smoke, flooding, viruses, and potential influence of world conflicts
- Need for touring companies as many travelers prefer someone to take them to the attractions and take the guesswork out of their planning
- Shortage of meetings & convention facilities limits the ability to draw on these groups for potential revenue throughout the year and particularly in the off-season.
- Shortage of labor resources is taxing many small tourism businesses.
- Getting businesses and attractions to update their information on the state website
- Engaging board members to in-person meetings; since Covid this has been more of a challenge.
- Education – most small businesses and attractions can't afford a marketing person and people making the local marketing decisions are often untrained in the field. Marketing is frequently the first line item that is cut and this can create a problem of diminishing returns. The people who make decisions are often unaware of the consequences and so many are volunteers and don't realize the importance of getting informed on this crucial issue to their businesses. Even when opportunities are offered at free or extremely low cost; the people who would benefit often are unable to attend because they are occupied in the job or otherwise; and because of an underestimation of the importance applies to their businesses.
- Customer Service – This is another issue that many companies don't realize the need for employees and sometimes even management level. When Superhost was active it did very well for those who came. As time went it became a problem getting people to participate– shortage of employees, employers not wanting to pay employees to get this training and not feeling it is necessary.

2. Align with Montana Brand

Briefly describe how your destination aligns with the Montana Brand.

More spectacular unspoiled nature than anywhere else in the lower 48.

Southwest Montana has 21 mountain ranges, 3.3 million acres of forest land, 6 million acres of public lands, numerous blue ribbon rivers, lakes, streams, and hot springs. The region also has over 3000 miles of motorized and non-motorized trails on public lands and over 4000 miles of trails on the Continental Divide. In addition, visitors can go to a variety of 19 Wildlife Management Areas. Lewis & Clark Caverns, sapphire mining, rockhounding and geology are also offered in abundance in the region.

Vibrant and charming small towns that serve as gateways to our natural wonders.

Southwest Montana provides a direct route between Glacier and Yellowstone National parks and has many vibrant and charming small towns. Visitors can explore the fishing mecca of Ennis (also known for its great art scene) or take a trip to the Sweet Palace located in Philipsburg (noted as being one of the "Prettiest Painted Places in America"). Distilleries and craft breweries are found throughout the region. From the sophistication of the capital city, Helena, to historic Butte, America, and everything in between, the region offers visitors a variety of options when it comes to small town charm.

Breathtaking experiences by day, and relaxing hospitality at night

World class fishing, varieties of wildlife, twenty-two mountain ranges, outfitters and guides for all types of activities, loads of history, ghost towns and ghosts, hiking, biking, zip lining, photography, old west history, Native American history including the Nez Perce Battlefield, Lewis and Clark history, Gates of the Mountains tour, lots of art and culture, festivals, farmers markets, lots of scenic drives and Scenic Byways are all great experiences for our visitors.

Friendly local accommodations as well as breweries, distilleries, cookouts, live music and varieties of food and cuisine are available throughout the region.

Brand Vision: Enchant the visitor with adventures filled with scenic beauty, history, nature, excitement, indelible personalities and stimulate a desire to return.

Some of our taglines are:

“Ghost towns, Road Trips and Hiking Trails. The Rest is History.”

“Landscapes, Legends, and Lore. The Rest is History.

Mountains, Rivers, and Rodeos. The Rest is History.

3. What is the strategic role of your DMO?

Select all that apply:

Destination Marketing – This is the great majority of what we do and we incorporate multiple strategies to implement marketing.

Destination Management – We plan to work with the gateway communities for map building or signage on the trailheads for the Continental Divide Trail. This category would also include potential signage for other trails or signage if we deem it beneficial.

Destination Stewardship – We will determine what our priority will be as we hear back from Resiliency Plan. We will also be working on our own strategic plan as well as we intend to get some professional direction in moving forward as a region.

Destination Development – This category would also be a potential part of our work with the Continental Divide Trail and keep us open to other potential. We are creating a printable map for daytime hikers along with community events and offerings. We will have stories, photos, and more details on our website.

Based on the strategic role you serve, provide the following information.

3a. Define your audience(s) (demographic, geographic, and psycho-graphic).

Demographics

- Active mature/boomer audience with a focus on soft adventure.
- Travelers with time and interests in culture and heritage.
- Anyone interested in history including mining, cowboy and cattle, Nez Perce, trails, and art.
- Adventure visitors wanting to hike and bike trails such as Continental Divide. Affluent visitors willing to fly and seek out activities and attractions.

Geographic

- Visitors going to Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks

- Montanans
- Regional travelers and visitors from Washington, Idaho, Utah, Colorado, Texas
- Canadians – focus on Calgary

Psycho-graphic

- History, heritage and culture enthusiasts.
- Hikers, bikers, wildlife enthusiasts, photographers.
- People interested in exploring ghosts in the region.
- Visitors without deadlines and willing to spend time exploring.
- Ghost enthusiasts.

3b. What research supports your DMO strategy?

ITRR, Call Center Destination Analysts, Website Statistics

ITRR- 2022 Nonresident Visitors to Southwest Montana

- 26% Visit Yellowstone National Park
- 26% Visit Glacier National Park
- 13% Virginia City / Nevada City
- 12 % Ghost Towns
- 81% of all groups are all repeat visitors
- 83% plan to return within 2 years.
- 42% visitors are 65-74 years old; 39% are 45- 54 years old; an additional 14% being over 75 years old.
- 22% travel by themselves
- 53% are 2 travelers

Destination Analysis-April 2023 Report

- 70.6% of people will take a leisure trip in the next 3 months
- 19.3% will travel over 30 days in the next 12 months
- 39% of boomers or older have over 30 days available for leisure travel
- 41.1% of boomers use websites via search engines for information sources for travel
- 38.1% of boomers use email for information sources for travel
- 22.3% of boomers and 38.8% of Gen Z's use online content for travel information
- 15.8% of boomers use visitor guides for travel information

Expedia Media -2022; Inclusive Travel Understanding Traveler Values & Opportunities for Marketers

- 43% of travelers want Information on how to best engage with local cultures and communities at or near a destination when planning a trip
- 74% of consumers would choose a travel option that support local cultures and communities, even if it was more expensive.

AAA – 2023 Documentary; Travelers want Maps in their hands to view as opposed to using maps on the I-phone

MMGY - Boomers plan to spend the most of any generation: at least \$4,000 on travel in the next 12 months

Solo Traveler- On average, excluding airfare, 30% travelers aged 55-64 spend \$1500-\$2500 on a one-week trip

Governor's Conference on Tourism – Helena; 2023 Allison Whitmore; Yellowstone 1923 dropped \$22 million directly into Butte

3c. What are your emerging markets?

- The newest emerging market is “Ghosts.” We have had paranormal film crews in the region and the response we are getting is quite astounding. We are creating a printable ghost map with paranormal narrative and tours and we are adding more information to our website as we accumulate stories and photos. The variety of ghost tours offered in Butte, Deer Lodge, Helena are usually sold out very quickly and they cost a premium to attend. We also have many ghost tours in our area around the region including Dillon, Bannack, Virginia City, as well as a few others. We have had several influencers on the tours and have partnered with the state on a couple as well. Our website statistics have skyrocketed in this area since we started this as an emerging market. Our goal is to provide extra information to keep our paranormal seekers interested and continue to offer more information as it is accumulated. We also have many haunted houses during October which add to the allure of the ghost seekers. We will continue to monitor this through our website and social media statistics.
- We are also adding the Continental Divide Trail as we have four Gateway Communities in Southwest Montana. This has been quite a bit of effort in seeing how to fit with what is already out on the trail. We will have a printable map with community information and trail head information. We will beef up our website to include more details as well. We also have increased our photos, stories, and essays regarding the trail and communities.
- We are adding a partnership with Glacier Country and Yellowstone Country on the Glaciers to Geysers program. We will feature motorcycling, snowmobiling and museums. This has already proven effective for the other two regions and we are now looking at filling the gap in the middle with information on Southwest Montana.
- We are considering working with more tour buses. We will research how, where, and when to work this market and if it is a go. If we invest in this segment, it will be an ongoing market. It usually takes a minimum of three years to start seeing the effects of working with the bus tour groups. It usually takes this long for the tour operators to build trust with a company and for them to offer new routes. The bus tour groups tend to be popular with the older age group which is what the majority of our visitors are. We think there is potential in this and will look further into the viability of it.
- We are trying out a Chocolate Lovers Trail. Summer of 2023 is a test market for this project that was brought forward by a couple of members. The board was willing to give this a try and our goal is to get visitors moving around the region and give them another reason to take their time and visit many communities. We will get feedback from our participants on how things worked for them and on how it worked for the visitors. We will evaluate if it is a worthwhile project based on the feedback and the number of passports turned in to Southwest Montana. At that point we will decide if we continue with the project, if it needs adjustments, or if we drop it altogether.

Based on the strategic role you serve, provide the following information.

4. Define and describe the overall goals.

A goal is an idea of the future or desired result that a person or group of people envisions, plans and commits to achieve.

Destination Marketing

1. Increase visitors to the region.
2. Provide information to assist locals, travelers, and aspiring travelers to the region.
3. Offer our rural and regional partners cooperative marketing and connecting/ collaborating opportunities.
4. Increase our film, video, and photography inventory.

Destination Management, Destination Stewardship, and Destination Development are listed as placeholders for potential opportunities that are not presently available.

4a. Describe proposed tactics and projects as related to overall goals and controlled by the organization in its financial statements.

1. Increase travelers to the region.
 - a. Produce and distribute Southwest Montana Travel Guide around the state, and to Spokane, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho Falls, and Salt Lake City.
 - b. Use multi-media marketing including print, online, and digital.
 - c. Use social media including our blogging to entice the potential traveler.
2. Increase information to assist and inspire locals, travelers, and aspiring travelers to the region.
 - a. Along with the travel guide, produce and print easy tear-off maps with scenic drives and attractions around the region.
 - b. Produce and print birding brochure, ghost map, Continental Divide Trail information.
 - c. Keep website updated with information, maps and events.
 - d. Use Butte Chamber as call center.
 - e. Use Certified Folder to distribute travel guides and birding brochures.
 - f. Do cooperative marketing with our rural and regional partners.
 - g. Add photos, videos to increase appeal and allure to our potential visitors.
 - h. Partner with University of Missoula graduate students to gather photos and write essays and stories on the communities, rivers, mountains and ecology of Southwest Montana.
 - i. Begin looking at bringing in buses to the region.
 - j. Have one - twos fam tour of frontline workers and members to inform them of the attractions in Southwest Montana.
 - k. Push out our attractions to get written in publications.
3. Offer our rural and regional partners, connecting / collaborating opportunities, and cooperative marketing.
 - a. Have meetings to share information.
 - b. Bring in speakers.
 - c. Gather content for our website and social media channels.
 - d. Marketing opportunities through our cooperative marketing funds.
 - e. Work with Strategic Planner to help determine what is best for the region.
 - f. See how the Resiliency Plan will benefit the region and how to incorporate where beneficial.

