



Top 10 Tourism Trends for 2016-2017

One thing I love about the tourism industry is that it is always changing. What used to bring customers through the doors ten years ago is not what is working today. Every year I take some time to think about what trends I see for the tourism industry. I read a lot, and spend time thinking how trends in other industries might affect tourism. I distilled my thoughts down to the following 10 terms that I believe define the trends for this year and next. Let me know what terms you would add to the list.

1. **Disrupt.** Many of the traditional ways of doing business in the tourism industry have faced huge shifts in the last few years. Airbnb, mobile booking and Trip Advisor are a few examples. Who would have ever thought that average people renting out space in their homes would appeal to a traveler? As an attraction, all these disruptive business models give you another outlet for selling tickets and making money. Airbnb hosts can become big ambassadors for you – perhaps they will stock your brochure and mention your attraction when accepting bookings. I know that some wineries even offer discount tasting coupons to some vacation rental hosts to distribute. Trip Advisor has become a behemoth of tourism marketing over the past few years. Their acquisition of Viator means that customers can now purchase tickets directly from the TripAdvisor review site. That ability for a seamless transaction helps attractions to increase pre-purchases.
2. **Data.** It has never been easier to learn about your visitors. Google analytics can tell you who has visited your website. Getting guests to sign up for future emails based on their interests helps you segment your customers and learn more about what they like. Survey monkey is an easy and free tool to help gather data as well. Do your frontline staff capture zip codes as guests check in? That is important and collecting it

consistently will help you spot trends. I still believe in walking around your attraction each day, speaking to guests and asking where they are from. Quantitative information is key, and when you can sprinkle some comments from real guests along with that, your data will provide a holistic picture of who your guests are and where they are from.

3. **Education** is an important trend because staying ahead of the competition requires knowing what the future holds. Some of the best places to get information are:
 1. skift.com. A global overview, but still lots of good information for attractions
 2. LinkedIn groups- there are many tourism related groups where you can view content or post questions
 3. Google alerts – I set up daily google alerts for topics like ‘New York State Tourism’ and ‘Chinese tourism in the U.S.’ Then I get links for articles that contain those terms.
 4. U.S. Travel – This organization has free information available on its [research page](#)
 5. [Groupstoday.com](#) is a great place to look for information on the group industry, as well as some great educational blog posts.

4. **Benchmark.** It is important to have peers in the industry who you can call and ask for their advice and opinions. I have a group of attraction friends in the Northeast and beyond who I email periodically. I ask how their business is and I give them information on how I am doing. If your business is flat, but everyone else is down, then you can report that to your supervisor. STAR reports share information between hotels, but since there is not a formal program like that for attractions, work on setting up your own.

5. **Social.** This would not be much of a ‘trend’ article if it didn’t mention social media. The good thing about the tourism industry and attractions in particular is that we are visually interesting and that lends itself to sharing on various social media sites. The bad news is that there is only 24 hours in a day so you have to be strategic with the social media you use. That’s where your data collection will come in handy. If you find the majority of your guests use Instagram and Pinterest, don’t waste your time posting on Twitter.

6. **TripAdvisor.** If you are in the tourism industry, you have to be aware of your TripAdvisor listing. This company has done more to enable peer to peer sharing of information than any other tool. I hope you have claimed your listing and that someone in your organization monitors all the reviews. TA has many free tools available to maximize the impact of your listing. New in the last eighteen months is their purchase of Viator, an attraction ticketing software. People can now buy tickets to your attraction right after they read the reviews. Seamless- and brilliant. You now have an additional ticket booth.

7. **Mobile.** I'm not talking about having responsive design in your website- that's for the techy folks to deal with. I am talking about how you make sure your potential guests can find what they need to purchase tickets from you when they are on a mobile device. Most attraction tickets are purchased once a guest is at a destination so that means they are not on a desktop or laptop. Your web team does not know your customers as well as you do so help them to make it easy as possible. Once they have arrived, is there free Wi-Fi? That is becoming a need of guests, not just a want. And when you provide Wi-Fi, it makes it easier for them to share images on social media websites – free advertising for you.

8. **Local.** This has become a buzzword over the last few years, but I see that 2016 is when local experiences and foods becomes a decision maker in the vacation process. Airbnb and their new tagline- don't visit there, live there- is the best example. Hotels realize that the local stay experience is a real threat. How can attractions benefit from this? Can you serve local foods in your food court and promote those businesses? Can you partner with a small, locally known spot for group tours? I often speak to group tour operators who ask for unique restaurants because that becomes part of the day's experience. Make sure your frontline staff can answer questions on other things to do in the area. Frontline FAMs are a great way to accomplish this.

9. **Collaborate** I am convinced the tourism industry is one of the only industries where you need to work closely and in a collegiate manner, with your competition. Only Disney and Universal are popular enough to drive a vacation decision. The rest of us need to work collectively with our destination, and other attractions to drive visitation. That process has coined the term 'Coopetition'. I often develop multi day itineraries

for group tour operators and include attractions that are my direct competition. Why? Because my goal is to get guests through my door, and if creating a sellable program enables that, then I am ok. And besides, the other attraction or destination often repays the favor. The other phrase defining this trend “A rising tide lifts all boats.”

10. **Fun!** Even though we all know how much work is involved in getting visitors through the doors, it is important to remember that we work in a wonderful industry. We get paid to travel, get to meet people from all around the world as they visit our attraction, and get to interact with tourism professionals who become friends. It’s the only industry for me!

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