Positioning Michigan as a Maritime Heritage Destination

Presented by
Dr. William M. Anderson
Director, Michigan Department of History, Arts and Libraries
Sandra Clark
Director/State Historian, Michigan Historical Center

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Michigan’s Rich and Unique Cultural and Natural Resources

Michigan is rich in maritime history. With our unique physical location in the heart of the Great Lakes we have an amazing array of cultural, natural and historical resources.

You can discover Michigan’s maritime heritage in more than 120 lighthouses, ore docks, piers, breakwaters, sailing clubs, communities and industries built on the water. There are hotels and resort towns, more than a dozen maritime-related National Landmarks, two National Lakeshores and two National Parks, dozens of state parks and National Register-listed sites. Michigan has 11 underwater preserves, the nation’s only fresh water National Marine Sanctuary, and of course, the lakes themselves and their stories of lighthouse keepers, Native Americans, fur traders, missionaries, settlers, iron and copper miners, lumberjacks, sailors and travelers.

The Vision

It is time for Michigan to capitalize on these exceptional resources and stake its claim to being the center of Great Lakes maritime heritage. As documented by the Travel Industry Association of America, cultural tourists want experiences that have historical significance. When travelers think of the American Revolution, they think of Boston. If we do our job well, when they think of great ships loaded with lumber that built the Midwest, or the iron and copper that helped win the Civil War and built the auto industry, they will think of Michigan. When they think of courageous sailors or selfless rescues at sea, they will see Michigan beaches, lighthouses and coastal towns.

To seize this opportunity we are creating a Michigan Maritime Heritage Destination that pulls together our top attractions and stories. Through collaboration we will generate the critical mass necessary to create a maritime heritage destination. By working in partnership we will gain access to the marketing resources of Travel Michigan. Through alliance and cooperation we will gain a commitment to and the benefit of cross selling our combined maritime heritage product and create win-win relationships. The Michigan Maritime Heritage Destination will encourage prospecting customers to customize their travel plans by selecting what they want to experience and making Michigan their destination.
An Economic Development Strategy

Cultural tourism is one of the fastest growing aspects of tourism. In July 2003, the Travel Industry Association of America reported a continued and growing desire among travelers to experience cultural, arts, historic and heritage activities. According to the study, 81 percent of the adults who traveled in 2002 “are considered historic/cultural travelers.” Most travelers within the U.S. want to enrich their lives with new travel experiences. In part, the study reads, “Most [travelers] agree that trips where they can learn something new are more memorable to them.”

More important to the bottom line, however, is the fact that (according to this same study) the cultural tourist spends more money than the average U.S. tourist (an average of $623 per trip vs. $457, excluding cost of transportation). Because many of these travelers choose their destinations based on a specific historic or cultural event or activity, it only makes sense to embrace our position as a state loaded with maritime and historical assets.

By pooling resources for marketing and publicity and creating regional clusters that cater to the specific tastes and desires of today’s tourist, the communities and businesses that become part of the Michigan Maritime Heritage Destination will gain in stature, revenue and reputation.

How the Destination Will be Created and Supported

1. People will visit the Travel Michigan web site and explore the Michigan Maritime Heritage Destination. Through that major promotional presence they can search our statewide maritime heritage attractions and customize their desired cultural tourism experience. This web-based visit will also introduce them to regional driving tour destinations.

2. The Department of History, Arts and Libraries is encouraging the development of regional destination clusters that have organized enough compelling maritime heritage product to entice a family or visitors to stay in an area for at least two nights.
   - We expect communities and maritime heritage sites and facilities to form alliances with others who have similar cultural resources and interest. It seems natural to anticipate that destination marketing organizations would take the lead in bringing stakeholders together to seriously consider this opportunity.
   - The Department of History, Arts and Libraries has prepared a series of resources and guides to assist in the organization of regional destinations. Both the Director of the Department and the Director of the Michigan Historical Center are committed to help facilitate the organization of regional clusters.
   - Each regional cluster will complete an assessment of its maritime heritage products and its capacity to collaborate.
   - Each cluster will organize a driving tour of the region linking its maritime heritage visitor experience.
• Given our wealth of maritime stories, we will seek to discover those that are most compelling and employ them to drive our public relations marketing program.

If We Do This Right

A well-defined and marketed Michigan Maritime Heritage Destination plan will result in many positives: a national identity, more visitors, greater revenues, more word-of-mouth business that spreads further each year, and a broader recognition of Michigan’s wealth of maritime attributes.

Our visitors will wrap up their vacation or trip knowing they’ve enjoyed something unique; and the maritime heritage venues, businesses and communities will have worked together to ensure a well-rounded fuller experience. Our collaborative effort will pay off by producing longer stays and return visits.

When we succeed, visitors will plan vacations or trips to or within Michigan because they are drawn to a compelling maritime heritage destination instead of passing through our communities and occasionally discovering a few of our unique attractions.