



Down East & Acadia Regional Tourism



Strategic Marketing Plan December 30, 2005

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DownEast & Acadia Regional Tourism Strategic Marketing Plan

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Background

The DownEast & Acadia Region is one of eight tourism regions in Maine, and is the second main destination in the state for overnight trips (according to the 2004 Maine Visitor Study, by Longwoods International). Comprised of Hancock and Washington Counties, the region spans 4,156 square miles, has a year-round population of 85,909 (2001 U.S. Census estimate) and is a mix of rugged and highly scenic coastal peninsulas and islands, as well as forested hills and mountains surrounding hundreds of lakes, ponds and streams. A unique feature of the region are the expansive wild blueberry fields, called “barrens.” The communities in the region, among others, include:

Bar Harbor	Deer Isle	Lubec	Stonington
Blue Hill	East Machias	Machias	Trenton
Bucksport	Eastport	Milbridge	Winter Harbor
Calais	Ellsworth	Northeast Harbor	Woodland
Castine	Jonesport	Southwest Harbor	

As a tourism destination, the region offers many attractions, starting with the abundant natural beauty of the landscape. Additionally, the region’s attractions include charming towns and villages, museums, shops, restaurants, galleries and a wide range of activities. Fairs, festivals and special events attract thousands of attendees, and there are many different types of opportunities to learn about the agricultural, industrial, maritime and historical heritage of the area. Outdoor recreational opportunities abound across all seasons, as the region’s natural beauty and pristine settings offer an ideal destination for hiking, camping, boating, birding, photography, fishing, hunting, all terrain vehicle riding, snowmobiling, cross country skiing and virtually any other type of outdoor activity.

The region’s best-known and most visited attractions include:

- Acadia National Park
- Roosevelt Campobello International Park
- Moosehorn National Wildlife Refuge
- Quoddy Head State Park

A new attraction opened in 2004 – the Downeast Heritage Museum in Calais.

According to the Maine Office of Tourism Strategic Five Year Plan issued in June of 2002, the role of tourism regions within Maine is to facilitate and perform direct marketing of the specific amenities and attractions of the region through the collective and cooperative efforts of tourism and business entities. The regional approach can be effective because of the synergy created by the “convenient availability of nearby clusters of visitor amenities and natural or man made attractions that offer incentives for travelers to come and visit.”

The authors of the Maine Office of Tourism Strategic Five Year Plan go on to say: “In concert with the Maine Office of Tourism, the regions should fulfill the following tasks:

- Work in partnership with the state to encourage the development of quality sustainable travel products to support tourism marketing efforts from the region and the Maine Office of Tourism
- Serve as the principal in-region informational conduit for the tourism industry and its business communities
- Foster and promote a collective spirit of cooperation among businesses in the region
- Develop promotional programming to support regional tourism interests

The DownEast & Acadia Regional Tourism Committee has stated that its mission is “to conduct tourism marketing in such a way as to maintain the historic and cultural integrity of the region with sensitivity to our natural resources.”

And, the organization’s goals have been identified as:

- Support and market regional tourism, including distribution of visitors to all areas seeking increased visitation within the region
- Develop and support sustainable tourism
- Work in partnership with the Maine Office of Tourism
- Effectively position and communicate the region’s unique character and attractions
- Serve as a leading voice and advocate for tourism

The DownEast & Acadia Regional Tourism Committee has organized and supported numerous marketing, publicity and promotional efforts including limited print advertising activity, the development and distribution of collateral material, the planning and execution of travel writer familiarization trips, and the development and maintenance of a comprehensive web site (www.downeastacadia.com).

The development of this Strategic Marketing Plan was initiated as part of an overall program of work commissioned by DART from Swardlick Marketing Group in order to define the strategies and tactics needed to allow the organization to meet its goals and objectives.

Situation Analysis

The situation analysis is presented in three parts:

Part 1: The DownEast & Acadia Region

Part 2: The DownEast & Acadia Regional Tourism Committee

Part 3: Summary

Part 1: The DownEast & Acadia Region

The DownEast & Acadia Region continues to be a popular destination area within Maine. With Maine attracting a total of 9 million overnight trips in 2003, the DownEast & Acadia Region captured a 13% share of total marketable overnight trips to the state. In scope, this represents approximately 1.2 million overnight trips. This volume is approximately 100,000 less than the volume reported in 1997.

The region attracts 3 million day trips from visitors who do not stay overnight but who select the region as a day trip destination. Additionally, and estimated 600,000 visitors pass through the region on their way to other destinations.

Of the 1.2 million overnight trips, 75% are pleasure trips, 24% are trips taken to visit friends or relatives, and 0.1% are business trips. The most common types of pleasure trips taken by visitors to the region are: a) touring vacations during which the visitor is principally interested in sightseeing, learning and experiencing local culture and generally enjoying the local attractions; and b) outdoor vacations during which the visitor seeks to experience the natural environment and engages in a variety of outdoor activities.

The following statements are based on key statistics from the Longwoods International DownEast and Acadia Travel report from the 2003 travel year:

- Overnight visitors to the DownEast & Acadia Region visit a national park at a rate 4 times that of the norm for Maine overnight visitors, and visit historic areas at a rate 3 times that of the Maine norm
- Compared to the Maine norm for overnight visitors, those coming to the DownEast & Acadia Region index 200% or greater in visiting wilderness areas, ocean beaches, scenic byways and rural farms; viewing wildlife, exploring the natural environment; eating a lobster, tasting unique local foods and taking short guided tours
- Visitors to the DownEast & Acadia Region are more satisfied with their experience than the U.S. travel norm, especially in the aspects of their visit being worry free, having an adult atmosphere, and in sports/recreation.

- Visitors to the region are significantly less satisfied than the U.S. travel norm in the area of entertainment, and slightly less satisfied in the aspects of climate, luxury, and popularity
- While overnight visitors to the region use the same sources of information as other overnight visitors to Maine at approximately the same incident levels, they rely more heavily on books, magazines, an auto club, the internet, a toll-free number, visitors bureau and travel agents

To the degree that the tourism trends in the regions of Maine follow the trend for the state overall, there is reason for concern. As stated in the Longwoods International 2004 Visitor Study, “Maine’s share of regional trips to anywhere softened for the third consecutive year – from 3.8% in 2001 to 3.5% in 2002, 3.3% in 2003, and 3.2% in 2004.” Meanwhile, overnight trip volume in the U.S. grew 2% in 2004. In fact, Maine was one of only 13 states in the U.S. to experience a decline or no growth in 2004.

Setting aside visiting friends and relatives, the top types of marketable trips in the U.S. travel market are touring vacations, followed by special event trips, outdoor sports and recreation trips, casino/gaming trips, and trips to a beach area. Over the past 10 years, the trip segments exhibiting significant growth include cruise (+128%), casino (+121%), city (+69%), beach (+49%), special event (+41%) and theme park (+39%). The touring segment has grown 33% and the outdoor segment has grown 14% in the past 10 years.

Maine attracts significantly more touring and outdoor vacationers than other states, slightly more beach vacationers (but many states do not have ocean beaches) and the same or less of virtually all other types of vacationers, especially fewer special event visitors.

The principal source of overnight visitors to Maine is the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic, including Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Connecticut, New York, Rhode Island, New Jersey, Vermont, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware and Washington D.C.

Maine enjoys a massive volume of day trip visits, nearly 35 million in 2004. But similar to overnight trips, the day trip segment is has remained relatively flat since 2000. Of this 2004 volume, approximately 21 million day trips or 60% are marketable pleasure trips, meaning other than for the purpose of visiting friends and relatives or business. The largest segments of marketable pleasure day trips in order of magnitude are shopping, touring, outdoors, beach, city, and special event trips.

In 2004, 8.4 million or 40% of marketable day trips were Maine residents traveling within the state. The DownEast & Acadia region enjoyed 3 million day trips, representing a 14% share of total Maine marketable day trips. Although the data is

not available to confirm, if a similar percentage of day trips to the region were taken by Maine residents as experienced statewide, then 40% or 1.2 million day trips would be attributable to Mainers traveling in-state.

In terms of economic impact, Maine's visitors on marketable overnight trips spent a total of \$1.6 billion in 2004, or \$178 per trip (trip = 1 visitor, 1 night) based on 9 million marketable overnight trips. If this average expenditure holds true for visitors to the DownEast & Acadia Region, then the region's 1.2 million overnight visitors in 2003 would have contributed \$213.6 million to the region's economy. At an average length of stay of 3.6 nights in the region, the average, per-person spending is \$640.

For the region, those involved in the DART organization have identified the following as key challenges for the region:

- Lack of distinct identity as a destination
- Lack of awareness / publicity / exposure / share of voice
- Heavy seasonality
- Distance from origin markets
- Competitive offerings closer to origin markets

The dominance of Bar Harbor / Acadia National Park as the key attraction for the region is both a blessing and a curse. It is a blessing because it is the 6th most visited destination in the state (behind Portland, Kittery, Freeport, Kennebunkport, Ogunquit) and the only destination in the region to be among the top 10 destinations in Maine. In fact, the region's next most visited Maine destinations are Machias at 16th, Calais at 22nd, Eastport/Quoddy at 28th. It is a curse because the rest of the region's towns and attractions lack the awareness enjoyed by Bar Harbor/Acadia and struggle to compete effectively for a fair share of visits to the region.

Part 2: The DownEast & Acadia Regional Tourism Committee

The principal challenges identified by those involved in the DownEast & Acadia Regional Tourism Committee in fulfilling their role as the marketing organization for the region are:

- Funding, both in terms of availability and reliability
- Lack of unity among the business and tourism people and entities in the region

- Lack of understanding of the region's opportunities, challenges and the efforts being made, or the strategies employed
- Fear of loss of control
- Fear of loss of or change to way of life
- Organizational structure
- Complacency/Lack of action/Inertia

Opportunities and possibilities are identified as the following:

- Synergies with other Maine regions and organizations
- Funding partnerships
- Improved marketing efforts
- Formation of intra-region partnerships/packaging
- Media relations
- Creation of strategic alliances
- Market strengths/special interest trails

Part 3: Summary

As a region within Maine, the DownEast & Acadia Region continues to be among the top visited areas in the state, despite the disadvantages of distance, seasonality, and low awareness of the region's full array of attractions. The region would benefit by increases to total visitation to Maine, but in the absence of such growth the region needs to stimulate growth even when total Maine trips remain flat or decrease. Funding challenges, a lack of unity and understanding among the region's business and tourism leaders combine to impede the region's ability to gain share of voice, and its ability to undertake more ambitious, continuing actions. Still, opportunities are present in many areas, especially through synergies with other regions, new partnerships and alliances that can be formed.

Competitive Analysis

Although as a tourism region, it can be said that the DownEast & Acadia Region competes for visitors with virtually any other destination offering similar vacation experience, for the purposes of this Five-Year Strategic Marketing Plan, the principal competitive set is defined as:

- Southern Maine Coast
- Greater Portland/Casco Bay
- Mid Coast
- Maine Lakes and Mountains
- Maine Highlands

According to the Longwoods International 2004 Visitor Study, the following are the percent of total marketable overnight trips by region visited (The total equals more than 100% because of multiple destination/multi-region trips):

Southern Maine Coast	45%
Greater Portland/Casco Bay	40%
Mid-Coast	25%
DownEast & Acadia	24%
Maine Lakes and Mountains	16%
Maine Highlands	11%
Kennebec/Moose River Valleys	10%
Aroostook County	5%

And here are the percent of main destination percentages by region (this deletes the multi-destination/multi-region overlap):

Southern Maine Coast	29%
DownEast & Acadia	18%
Greater Portland/Casco Bay	17%
Mid-Coast	11%
Maine Lakes and Mountains	10%
Maine Highlands	7%
Kennebec/Moose River Valleys	6%
Aroostook County	3%

A significant competitive factor favoring the Southern Maine Coast and Greater Portland/Casco Bay regions is proximity to the top origin markets for Maine. Both of these regions are less than 3 hours drive from most of the greater Boston market.

Another factor favorable to the two southernmost regions is the availability of shopping attractions and opportunities. In fact, visitors to these regions identify shopping equally to going to an ocean beach and visiting small towns and villages as something experienced during vacations to these regions -- exceeding the norm for

Maine as a whole by 13 percentage points. Similarly, shopping is a top activity for those visiting the DownEast & Acadia Region, exceeding the Maine norm by 8 percentage points.

In satisfaction, the two southernmost regions track consistently with DownEast & Acadia, except for entertainment. While the entertainment satisfaction ratings for DownEast & Acadia are significantly below the U.S. norm, ratings for the Southern Maine Coast and Greater Portland/Casco Bay regions is equal to the U.S. norm. Even the Mid-Coast region's ranking of satisfaction with entertainment is just 9 percentage points below the U.S. norm, opposed to DownEast & Acadia's 25 point gap. Maine Lakes and Mountains' gap is 20 points, while the Maine Highlands' is equal to the U.S. norm.

The DownEast & Acadia Region is competitive with respect to seasonality, average number of nights spent in the region, perception as a safe, worry-free destination, and other factors. Notable differences, however, include:

- The average age of visitors to the DownEast & Acadia Region in the segment of 55+ exceeds the Maine norm by 10 percentage points
- A significant percent of marketable overnight trips to the DownEast & Acadia Region are booked further in advance (6 months or more) than trips to other regions in Maine – nearly double the Maine norm
- The DownEast & Acadia Region enjoys a premium of trips from consumers with income of \$75 thousand or more, above the Maine norm

Those involved in DART identify the following as competitive advantages:

- Something for everyone
- Complete package of things to do, beautiful scenery, cultural and historical offerings
- Range of environments from towns and cities to remote wilderness
- Acadia National Park
- Roosevelt Campobello International Park
- Ferry Service to Nova Scotia (The CAT)
- Maritime heritage
- Wildlife
- Natural Beauty / Scenic
- Fairs and festivals
- Unique way of life
- Character of the region
- Downeast Heritage Center

Market Analysis

Overnight Trip Market:

Currently, the makeup of the overnight trip market for the DownEast & Acadia Region is:

- 50% = Touring (Travelers interested in sightseeing, learning and experiencing local culture and generally enjoying the local attractions)
- 25% = Outdoor (Travelers seeking to experience the natural environment and engage in outdoor activities)
- 14% = Cruise (Travelers participating in an extended boat trip)
- 5% = Special Event (Travelers who have come to attend a particular event)
- 1% = Beach (Travelers whose principal aim is to spend time at the beach/ocean)

While the large majority of overnight trips are independent travelers, there are significant numbers of visitors coming as part of a group tour.

Special interests can be used to further segment the overnight trip market, although data is not available to quantify these sub-segments, they include:

- Antique enthusiasts
- Artists
- ATV Riders
- Bicycle riders
- Bird watchers
- Blueberry enthusiasts
- Boaters/Kayakers
- Campers/RVers
- Ecotourists
- Fishers
- Hikers
- History buffs
- Hunters
- Motorcycle enthusiasts
- Photographers
- Second Home / Summer Cottage owners
- Shoppers
- Snowmobile riders
- Wildlife watchers

Once in the region, overnight visitors stay in a variety of accommodations:

- 33% = Hotel/Motel/Inn/Lodge
- 20% = Rented house/cottage
- 20% = House or cottage of friend or relative
- 12% = Campground
- 10% = Cruise Ship
- 2% = B&B

The majority of overnight visitors are arriving by individual vehicle (70%), with the next largest segment arriving by ferry/Cruise ship/boat (18%), and finally other public transportation (12%).

Origins of overnight visitors are outside of New England (66%), Massachusetts (15%), other New England (13%) and Maine (6%).

(Note: 1 in 5 out-of-state visitors arrive by boat, so the impact of the large capacity cruise ships visiting Bar Harbor may be influencing the data)

Day Trip Market:

The makeup of the day trip market for the DownEast & Acadia Region is:

- 33% = Outdoor (Travelers seeking to experience the natural environment and engage in outdoor activities)
- 21% = Touring (Travelers interested in sightseeing, learning and experiencing local culture and generally enjoying the local attractions)
- 15% = Shopping (Travelers participating in shopping activities)
- 12% = Beach (Travelers whose principal aim is to spend time at the beach/ocean)
- 6% = Special Event (Travelers who have come to attend a particular event)
- 5% = City (Travelers visiting a city to experience its culture and attractions)
- 5% = Theme Park (Travelers visiting a theme park)

As stated previously, in 2004, 8.4 million or 40% of marketable day trips were Maine residents traveling within the state. The DownEast & Acadia region enjoyed 3 million day trips, representing a 14% share of total Maine marketable day trips.

Although the data is not available, if a similar percentage of day trips to the region were taken by Maine residents as experienced statewide, then 40% or 1.2 million day trips would be attributable to Mainers traveling in-state.

Data is not available on the origins of day trip visitors to the DownEast & Acadia Region, but given that sizable populations exist approximately 1 hour away (Bangor/Brewer/Belfast), 2 hours away (Waterville/Augusta/Mid-Coast) and 3 hours away (Lewiston/Auburn, Portland, Southern Maine), it is likely that the region draws from each of these areas. And, given the relatively direct route to the area provided by U.S. Route 1 and I-95 south from Aroostook County, it is also likely that the region welcomes day trip visitors from Northern Maine as well.

There is evidence that the region appeals to more mature consumers of above average income. If one was to describe the typical vacation experience of these consumers, it would be a trip that includes visiting a historic area or site, time spent at a beach or the ocean's edge, enjoying a lobster dinner plus other activities that might include shopping, wildlife watching and visiting a local farm stand or blueberry field. That consumer would further characterize their trip as worry-free, relaxing, and full of beautiful scenery, nature, and the enjoyment of exploring charming towns and villages that remain authentic to the historical Maine.

There is also a significant portion of visitors whose experience is oriented to the outdoors, which can include "soft" activities such as walking, hiking, bird watching, wildlife watching, photography, etc., or more robust activities and outdoor sporting such as canoeing, kayaking, ATV riding, fishing, hunting, skiing, snowmobile riding, etc.

Nature based tourism is an area of opportunity for the region, as identified in the Strategic Plan for Implementing the Maine Nature Tourism Initiative completed by Fermata, Inc. in September, 2005. The findings of this report, which examined the DownEast & Acadia region as one of its three initial pilot regions, included this statement: "The nature resources that have been identified are substantial enough to serve as a foundation for a successful strategy. Culture and history should be used for enrichment to the natural resource based experiences."

This mix of touring and outdoor experiences serves the region well, as will be discussed more fully in the strategies section.

Target Market

For Overnight Trips:

From a traditional advertising and media standpoint, the primary target market for the DownEast & Acadia Region can be identified as:

- Adults, age 35+ (77%)
- Income \$50K+ (68%)
- Interested in Touring or Outdoor vacations
- Travel by personal vehicle
- Reside outside New England (66%)
- Interested in a worry-free, safe, vacation offering an adult atmosphere in a destination that is unique, beautiful, and exciting

A secondary target audience can be identified as a mirror image of the above, with the exception of geography:

- Adults, age 35+ (77%)
- Income \$50K+ (68%)
- Interested in Touring or Outdoor vacations
- Travel by personal vehicle
- << Reside in New England (34%) >>
- Interested in a worry-free, safe, vacation offering an adult atmosphere in a destination that is unique, beautiful, and exciting

The tertiary target audience is identified as:

- Adults, age 18-34 (24%)
- Income \$25K+
- Interested in Touring or especially Outdoor vacations
- Travel by personal vehicle
- Reside outside New England (66%) or in New England (34%)
- Interested in a vacation offering sports and recreation that is also worry-free, safe, offers an adult atmosphere in a destination that is unique, beautiful, and exciting

A note of caution: While the Longwoods International 2004 Visitor Study shows 66% of overnight trip visitors are from outside of New England, there are two factors that should be considered: 1) That 18% of overnight trip visitors are identified as Cruise visitors, and 2) That 20% of overnight visitors are reported to stay in a friends or relatives house, making this group – in the author’s opinion -- quite similar to VFR (Visiting Friends & Relatives) except for the fact that the friends or relatives aren’t there! Thus, we believe the New England Market is still very important and should not be ignored.

For Day Trips:

Reasonably, a day trip is likely to occur among those consumers who can travel to the destination, spend at least a few hours and then return home without arriving terribly late. To establish a set of reasonable criteria, if consumers were to begin traveling at 6am, at the earliest – and return home to arrive no later than 11pm, at the latest, this allows a reasonable total day trip window of 17 hours. Assuming consumers want to spend at least 50% of their day out of the car, this allows 8.5 hours for traveling, or 4.25 hours each way at the most. In general terms, this means that the radius defining the reasonable Day Trip market area for the DownEast & Acadia Region extends to approximately Providence, RI, Westfield, MA, and includes all of New Hampshire, Maine, and a substantial part of New Brunswick, Canada.

Taking this further, it is likely that the majority of Day Trips to the Region occur with consumers who travel approximately 3 hours to and from home. Accepting this, the Day Trip market area for the region can be more easily defined as all of Maine, southern to mid-New Hampshire, Boston, and the southern portion of New Brunswick, Canada.

Niche markets can and should also be targeted, if resources allow. Examples of niche or vertical markets include special interest groups, such as:

- Photographers
- Artists
- Bid Watchers
- Wildlife Watchers
- Rock Hounds
- Geocachers
- Hunters
- Fishers
- Hikers
- Campers
- RVers
- Boaters/Canoeists/Kayakers
- Bicycle riders
- Motorcycle riders
- ATV riders
- Horseback riders
- Sailors/Windsurfers
- Divers
- Ecotourists
- History buffs

Positioning

The positioning statement is a marketing tool used to define the unique selling proposition (USP) or unique customer benefit that a brand promises to its target audience. Successful marketers know that adopting a positioning strategy with a focus on a single, compelling consumer benefit is the most effective way to connect with customers. The positioning statement is never used as advertising copy, but is an important tool for marketing planning.

The classic positioning statement form is:

- To: (Target audience description)
- Brand/Product: (The brand and product to be offered)
- Is: (Category/Primary Competitive Set)
- That: (Single out the most important customer benefit)
- Because: (Identify the differentiating reason why)
- Support Points: (List of additional reasons why – important but not necessarily differentiating. Can include the “Must Haves” / the expected attributes shared with competitors)

Brands typically develop an overall positioning statement, and then craft subsequent positioning statements for each market segment. For the DownEast & Acadia Region, two positioning statements have been developed; one for the primary and secondary overnight trip target markets, plus a positioning statement for the day trip target market.

(The position statements appear on the next page)

Recommended positioning statement for the primary and secondary target audiences: (Touring and Outdoor Vacationers, Overnight Trip Market):

To the touring and outdoor vacationer,
The DownEast & Acadia Region is the Northeast U.S. vacation destination
That provides a completely fulfilling, relaxing and well-rounded
overnight vacation experience
Because it is a highly authentic, pristine coastal and wilderness destination
with a distinct “DownEast Maine” character and heritage.

Support:

The region also offers historic areas and landmarks, ocean shoreline and beaches, sumptuous lobster and seafood, wild blueberries, abundant wildlife and natural beauty, shopping, dining, museums, fairs, festivals, and activities in numerous charming towns, villages and cities, plus national and international parks and an enormous variety of outdoor sporting and recreation options.

Recommended positioning statement for the tertiary target audience (Touring and Outdoor Day Trip Market):

To those seeking a touring or outdoor day trip,
The DownEast & Acadia Region is the nearby destination
That provides a completely fulfilling, enjoyable and well-rounded day trip
Because it is a highly authentic and accessible pristine coastal and wilderness destination with distinct “DownEast Maine” character and heritage and abundant opportunities for day trip activities

Support:

The region also offers historic areas and landmarks, ocean shoreline and beaches, sumptuous lobster and seafood, wild blueberries, abundant wildlife and natural beauty, shopping, dining, museums, fairs, festivals, and activities in numerous charming towns, villages and cities, plus national and international parks and an enormous variety of outdoor sporting and recreation options.

Brand Personality

Marketers define personality traits of brands in order to establish the tone and manner of brand communications. As a component of brand identity, brand personality is important in making the essential emotional connection that is necessary to connect to the target audience.

The character and personality of the DownEast & Acadia Region includes these traits:

Genuine

Friendly

Independent

Resilient

Self-effacing

Dry sense of humor

Honest

Direct

No-nonsense

Fun loving

Proud

Brand Icons

The icons or visual symbols of a brand are the visual clues that communicate brand identity. For the United States, the Statue of Liberty is but one visual symbol or icon of the brand “The United States of America” – for the DownEast & Acadia Region, there are a precious few visual symbols or icons that rise above the long list of treasured images that residents of the region would recognize. These few iconic images are the ones that can be, instead, recognized by a broader audience, and are therefore useful in communicating the region as a branded destination.

Here is the short list:

Quoddy Head Lighthouse

Acadia National Park – Cadillac Mountain/Carriage Trails

Bar Harbor – Downtown/Waterfront

Bass Harbor Lighthouse

Wild Blueberries

Brand Themes

The themes of a brand are the key messages that are consistently presented and which represent the conceptual “platform” upon which communications are developed.

For the DownEast & Acadia Region, there are two brand themes:

Theme # 1:

In the DownEast & Acadia Region, one can experience the most authentic region of Maine

Theme # 2:

DownEast & Acadia offers the best nature tourism experience in the Northeast

Goals & Objectives

The overall goal of the DownEast & Acadia Regional Tourism Committee for this strategic marketing plan is:

To achieve continuing annual growth in overnight and day trips to the DownEast & Acadia region, and to successfully attract visitors to all parts of the region such that the economic benefit of increased visitation is realized and shared by all, while sustaining the character, culture and environment of the region.

The specific measurable objectives of this strategic marketing plan are defined in terms of a five-year timeframe:

- 1. Increase marketable overnight trips by 3% to 5% per year, for a total gain of 15% to 25% for the period 2006 through 2010**
- 2. Increase marketable day trips by 3% to 5% per year, for a total gain of 15% to 25% for the period 2006 through 2010**
- 3. Increase DownEast & Acadia Region's "share" of regional destination selection in Maine for marketable overnight trips from 18% (2004) to greater than 20% for 2007, and greater than 25% for 2010**
- 4. Improve performance among younger consumers, increasing the portion of marketable overnight trips from consumers aged 18-34 to at least 33% (from 24% in 2004), and maintain marketable overnight trips from consumers aged 35-54 at 35% or greater**

Strategies

In the following pages a conceptual summary is presented for each one of ten recommended strategies developed to facilitate the achievement of the overall goal and the specific objectives stated in the previous section.

These are the principal strategies, the “Big Ideas” that will drive progress and change.

With ambitious but realistic objectives, it follows that the plan requires ambitious strategies that are nonetheless executable, given the commitment, passion, diligence and talents of a team of people who will be recruited to put these strategies in motion.

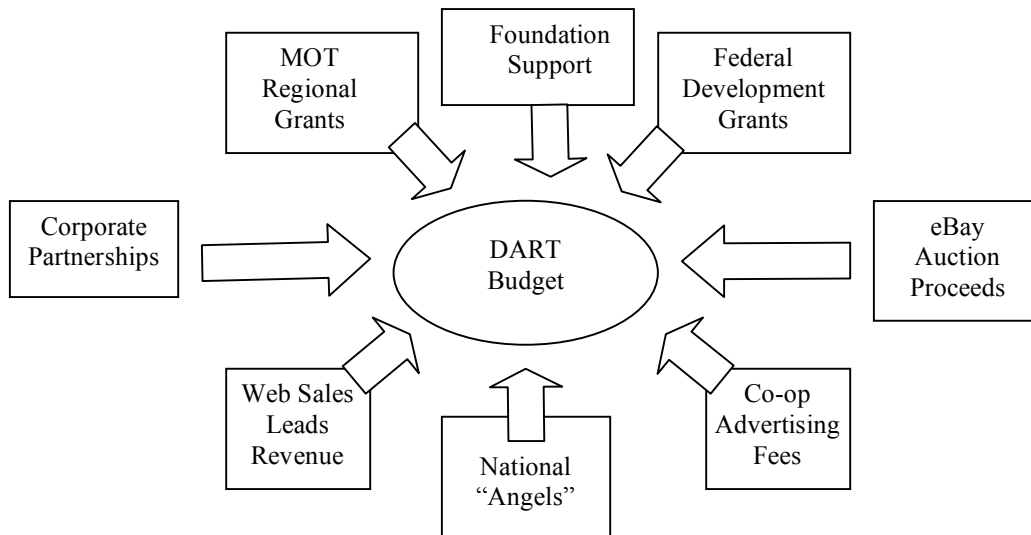
The recommended strategies or “Big Ideas” are:

- 1. Comprehensive Multi-Source Funding Strategy**
- 2. Signature Event Development**
- 3. Loop Tour Development & Promotion**
- 4. Mini-Centers**
- 5. Nature Tourism Capital of the Northeast**
- 6. Annual City Blitz**
- 7. In-State Overnight & Day Trip Promotion**
- 8. Niche Market Mini-Campaigns**
- 9. Branded Regional Promotions**
- 10. Education and Outreach**

1) Comprehensive Multi-Source Funding Strategy:

One of the most significant challenges facing the DownEast & Acadia Regional Tourism Committee is establishing an ongoing, reliable and robust source of funding that will enable the organization to undertake the ambitious marketing strategies outlined here. To that end, the first recommended strategy is a Comprehensive Multi-Source Funding Strategy.

Simply put, the Comprehensive Multi-Source Funding Strategy involves creating a system of funding channels that together support the complete budget needs of the organization. This funding model is illustrated below:



Description of source strategies:

- **MOT Regional Grants:** The Maine Office of Tourism must allocate 10% of the state’s marketing budget to regional tourism and special event promotion. DART is already participating in this regional grant program, and efforts should be made to inform and update the legislative representatives of the region on how these grants are being put to use, and how supportive the Maine Office of Tourism is being to the region. A multi-year plan should be developed identifying in advance the needs and targeted uses for ongoing grants of the maximum amounts. DART should work closely with the Maine Office of Tourism to assure successful outcomes from the regional grant program.
- **Foundation Support:** As stated in the Maine Office of Tourism Strategic Five-Year Plan issued in June, 2002, “America’s foundations – both corporate and individual – offer a new potential for destinations who seek to promote cultural and artistic amenities, develop travel industry educational training programs or seek to generate and sustain local jobs through visitor efforts.” DART should pursue this avenue.

- Federal Development Grants: DART should work through appropriate channels to enlist the aid and counsel of Maine's congressional representatives and senators to identify appropriate and meaningful federal grants or other funding mechanisms that would benefit the region. Given the critical importance of tourism to the economy of the DownEast & Acadia region, a compelling case can be made for generating significant funding for DART's efforts through existing programs or by special appropriation.
- Corporate Partnerships: Research should be completed to establish data on the spending habits of DownEast & Acadia visitors (perhaps with the assistance of the University of Maine). With this data in hand, DART should identify the larger corporate citizens and brands that benefit directly from tourism activity. A partnership program should be developed to provide these corporations an opportunity to support DART's efforts to increase the total number of visitors to the region. This marketing plan and its strategies should be shared as part of an educational outreach to the corporations, and as a part of the process of seeking their participation in a partnership program, with five-year commitments of support. DART should develop a package of recognition and advertising exposure as part of the program. Progress reports to the corporate partners would be appropriate.
- eBay Auction Proceeds: A program should be developed to acquire lodging, dining, entertainment, activities, tours, local art, merchandise and other materials from businesses and individuals in the region to be sold on eBay, with most or all of the proceeds going to DART. This could include off-season inventory that could be donated without displacing revenue, or items of any kind that could be turned into cash funding for DART. Also, this program would allow corporate partnerships to be created on an in-kind basis, with the products or services provided being converted to cash on eBay. To the degree that lodging and other vacation related items are posted on this popular site, it would also generate exposure and attention for the region among active consumers.
- Web Sales Leads Revenue: Listings of lodging, dining, shopping and attractions, etc. should continue to be provided by DART on its web site free of charge to businesses in the region, but DART should develop a sales leads program that would generate revenue for DART. The DART web site should be refined to enable DART to capture as many names and addresses of consumers expressing interest in the region as possible. These names and addresses have value as qualified sale leads, and they should be made available on a managed basis to qualified businesses in the region at a fair cost.

- Co-op Advertising Fees: In pricing the participation costs for co-operative advertising programs outlined later in this document, DART should include a margin of fee income that would be retained by DART.
- National “Angels”: The DownEast & Acadia Region is cherished by many from all across the country, including many who are fortunate to have high net worth. DART should develop an outreach program to seek contributions from individuals who care about the region, and who would support and want to be associated with the development of the educational and interpretive programs described later in this plan.

2) Signature Event Development Strategy:

An area of opportunity for the DownEast & Acadia Region is to increase the segment of its overnight trip and day trip market that relates to special events. Compared to the rest of Maine, the region experiences only half as many overnight trips for the purpose of attending a special event. This opportunity gap can begin to be closed by broader and more effective promotion of existing special events, but it can be argued that the region lacks a truly “signature” event of sufficient magnitude to impact visitor trip volumes.

Case studies should be examined of successful special event strategies from around the country. DART should lead the process of identifying a list of possibilities to be explored, and should then champion the effort to organize the event development project. The ultimate goal should be to identify, plan and create an exciting new annual event that meets criteria including:

- An event that is unique among the competitive set of other regions and neighboring states
- Must be something that the region can “own”
- Should be something that has an existing audience that will travel to enjoy the event and all that it offers
- Needs sufficient critical mass to draw huge numbers of visitors
- Multi-day event
- Best if it can somehow involve multiple locations in the region
- Optimal if it is somehow relevant to what the region stands for, what it represents as a destination
- Must be fun!
- Must be highly visual / colorful

Event development and marketing is specifically recommended in the proposed new or expanded marketing initiatives set forth by the Maine Office of Tourism’s Strategic Five Year Plan issued June 2002.

3) Loop Tour Development and Promotion Strategy:

Experience has shown that the touring vacationer enjoys opportunities for loop tours within a destination area. DART should lead a process of developing a set of loop tours within the region that provide a menu of day trip options for overnight visitors.

An obvious benefit of intra-region loop tours is the distribution of visitors to all parts of the region, and the presentation of “lots to see and do” to overnight visitors. A substantial factor in product satisfaction among touring vacationers is having enough interesting choices to make the vacation experience fulfilling.

Loop tours could be developed according to certain themes or interests. Or, more general loop tours could be offered, designed to provide a variety of scenic, entertainment and activities as options along the way. Different tour lengths should be offered as well, giving visitors a full range of product to meet their needs.

Once developed, communication of the loop tours would be essential. Distribution of maps in brochures would be effective, as long as accompanied by an educational and awareness effort among the hospitality community. Local advertising targeting overnight visitors is also recommended.

Loop tours could be periodically updated and varied to provide as much “coverage” as possible for all parts of the region.

In its optimum form, the loop tours would be supported by educational and interpretive signage, turn-outs, and place markers along the highways to be traveled. In fact, the Strategic Plan for Implementing the Maine Nature Tourism Initiative issued by FERMATA, Inc. in 2005 states: “The opportunity for developing highway based thematic itineraries exists and is well supported by the state’s transportation agency and others through the identification of several state and national scenic byways and other route identifiers.”

4) Mini-Centers Strategy:

To effectively support the distribution of visitors throughout all parts of the region, DART should lead the development of “mini-centers” across the region. A “mini-center” is a town or village area where a combination of lodging, dining, shopping and activities exist in a centralized area sufficient to be presented as a mini-center of attraction to visitors. This concept is important because it creates balance to the more obvious centers of Bar Harbor, Ellsworth, Bucksport and the like.

Using Milbridge as an example, it could qualify as a mini-center because visitors could easily find there the options of lodging, dining, shopping, etc. all in a concentrated area. As a mini-center, Milbridge can serve as a planned stopping point, a sub-destination that the visitor can plan for with confidence because he/she knows that there is an infrastructure of services there that cover his/her needs.

In promotional materials, on the web site and elsewhere, the mini-centers would be identified and shown as part of a network connected by the principal routes and roads in the region (and shown as part of the loop tours discussed earlier). The amenities offered in the mini-center would be listed, with contact information provided.

The historical and cultural significance of the mini-centers would also be defined and communicated. Natural features nearby would also be shared.

Planned strategically, there should be mini-centers identified such that every part of the region is within a relatively short distance of one, making it obvious that any part of the region can be easily reached and enjoyed.

Ideally, a “Visitor Center” of some form should be created consistently and placed in a prominent location in each mini-center, serving as a standardized, recognizable information resource for visitors as they travel throughout the region.

5) Nature Tourism Capital of the Northeast Strategy:

The DownEast & Acadia Region can seize ownership of a leadership position as “The Nature Tourism Capital of the Northeast”

With its abundant natural assets, and its unique distinction as the only region of Maine that features both unspoiled forestland and pristine coastline, DART can lead the initiative to create the “Downeast Wildlife and Heritage Trail”, as recommended by FERMATA, Inc. in the Strategic Plan for Implementing the Maine Nature Tourism Initiative. As the plan states:

This new Downeast Wildlife and Heritage Trail will serve to link other existing and planned thematic itineraries and trail systems (including the local sections of the new statewide birding trail, the existing state scenic byway, the proposed DOT Calias Branch Rail Trail, those trails described in the Cobscook Trails booklet published by the Quoddy Regional Land Trust, and the planned DOC Ice Age Trail) to unify and connect visitors experiences.

Beyond this, however, is the opportunity to lay claim to being the Nature Tourism Capital of the Northeast and use that positioning to align with an important touring segment of the tourism market. Proof points supporting the claim are those same items inventoried by FERMATA in their pilot region process, and similar items that need to be inventoried in Hancock County. (FERMATA’s assessments were limited to Washington County, but they do recommend that the Downeast Wildlife and Heritage Trail include the entire DownEast & Acadia Region.)

Opportunities for strategic partnerships exist that are synergistic to the target audience for nature tourism – such as L.L.Bean, or Garmin (manufacturers of GPS units for outdoors enthusiasts), etc. Through these partnerships could be realized significant advertising and promotional opportunities, as well as additional funding sources.

Inherent in this strategy is the responsibility of taking a real leadership position in the development of nature tourism for the state. DART would need to commit to supporting a long-term effort with substantial deliverables, but also substantial rewards.

6) Annual City Blitz Strategy:

This recommended strategy involves the planning and execution of a concentrated, multi-dimensional marketing communications effort targeted at a different particular city in each of the next five years.

Starting perhaps with Boston, DART would execute a “blitz” plan that would include a simultaneous swarming of communications promoting the DownEast & Acadia Region. Newspaper advertisements would coincide with press releases targeting the same papers. Radio promotions with trip give-aways to the region would happen at the same time as the newspaper advertising. Maine Office of Tourism advertising for Maine could be timed to run in the city as an additional layer of promotion. Banner advertisements on local city web sites would appear. Direct mail to inquirers for Maine vacation planning information would be sent to addresses in the area.

To give this effort a powerful grass roots component, selected area restaurants or retailers would be approached to run a customer contest drawing during the blitz period, with the grand prize being a free DownEast & Acadia vacation.

A trade component would be included to specifically involve local travel agents, especially AAA travel counselors.

Other cities to be “blitzed” in subsequent years could be Worcester, Hartford, Providence, Manchester, Albany or Portsmouth. The cumulative effect over time would be significant for the region.

At the heart of this strategy is the idea of concentrating limited advertising and promotional budgets to have a real – even if short-term – impact on a densely populated market area and reach as many target consumers as possible through a mix of media and promotions.

7) In-State Overnight & Day Trip Promotion Strategy:

Often, the opportunity to capture new customers is in one's own back yard, where consumers already know the brand and the product. The essence of this recommended strategy is a serious promotional effort within Maine to attract visitors for overnight or day trips to the region.

Southern Maine, Mid-state and Aroostook County each represent opportunity markets due to proximity – it is easy for consumers to get to the DownEast & Acadia Region.

Media costs are not prohibitive due to the relatively small population sizes in these areas. And the suggestion of a getaway fits nicely into today's busy lifestyles.

It is important that the communication include compelling reasons to go, however, so product planning will need to be led by DART, as people need to know that they will have fun things to do while on their DownEast & Acadia getaway. And while discounting does not have to be the key message, attractive pricing or value-added offers are necessary to stimulate the purchase and “go!” decision.

8) Niche Market Mini-Campaigns Strategy:

Taking advantage of the vertical market communications opportunities that make it possible to reach special interest niche markets, DART should plan and execute a series of mini-campaigns promoting the region to such groups as photographers, bird watchers, RV campers, etc.

Small space advertisements in magazines or banner advertisements on web sites are cost effective ways to reach these special interest consumers. So, a mini-campaign might consist of even a single, or a set of a few small advertisements that drive consumers to the DownEast & Acadia web site.

The process should begin with a review and prioritization of potential niche markets, followed by the development of a detailed mini-campaign plan.

Measurement of the campaign should be accomplished through unique URLs and phone numbers for tracking.

9) Branded Regional Promotions Strategy:

This strategy involves creating a series of major regional promotions each year with a national or regional brand, resulting in significant favorable exposure for the region.

DART would lead the planning and development process of the promotion, including the identification of potential partners. In order to successfully approach a potential partner, it will be necessary to make a professional presentation of the promotion concept and plan.

An example would be the development of a digital photography contest with a large national photography brand. Briefly, the promotion concept is a regional (Northeast U.S.) digital photography contest for amateur digital photographers (who use the partners product) based on photos taken in one of a short list of the Northeast's great places, of which the DownEast & Acadia Region is one. The other places would be from different geographic parts of the Northeast, such that the DownEast & Acadia Region would be the exclusive Maine "great place". The partner would advertise the contest, including the best photos submitted and the winning photos, and through this advertising, the region would receive favorable exposure.

Potential partners include:

- Kodak – Currently promoting the Kodak V570 Digital Camera
- Hewlett Packard – Currently promoting the HP PhotoSmart System
- Outdoor Photography Magazine – America's magazine for outdoor photographers

10) Education and Outreach Strategy

It is important that DART reach out to key stakeholders and educate these important audiences on the goal and objectives, strategies and plan for the region.

The stakeholder groups include:

- State and Federal Legislators, Elected Officials
- Maine Tourism and Economic Development Officials
- Regional media
- Travel and Tourism Industry in the region
- Businesses in the region
- Citizens of the region
- Students

The execution of an education and outreach program could take many forms, including:

- Presentations by DART committee members to DownEast & Acadia community and business groups
- Meetings with state legislators and local government leaders
- Meetings with editors of local newspapers
- A reception and presentation to travel and tourism industry members in the region (perhaps done in cooperation with the Maine Office of Tourism or the Maine Tourism Association)
- Classroom presentations on the Travel & Tourism Industry and its impact on the region
- “Report to the Citizens of DownEast & Acadia” – a summary report on tourism activity in the region, printed at year-end in local newspapers
- Special section of the web site

Sharing information and educating key stakeholders on the importance of travel and tourism in the region would support the goals and objectives of DART in many ways, from making the multi-source funding strategy easier to accomplish, to recruitment of additional volunteers to work on committees and teams organized to execute these recommended strategies. Most importantly, beginning to educate students about the history and role of travel and tourism in the region will enlighten the future workers, citizens and leaders of the region.

Core Marketing Activities

There is a foundation of core marketing activities that must be accomplished on an annual basis to assure the fundamental support of tourism to the region. These core activities include:

- **Web Site:** With greater than 75% of consumers using the internet to research and plan vacations, maintaining and continually updating/improving the DownEast & Acadia web site must be a priority of DART. A plan should be developed to continuously review and “freshen” the site’s content, and new, additional image assets should be secured to allow the site to present the region as the beautiful, exciting and alluring destination that it is. Additional actions that should be taken include:
 - Search Engine Optimization
 - Pursuit of a broad “links” program
 - Key word search program
 - Email messaging to inquirers giving permission
 - Site contents and promotions

- **Guidebook/Directory Advertising:** Annual advertising presence must be maintained in “Maine Invites You” and other key guidebooks and directories. Some of the publications that should be included are:
 - AAA Guidebook / Maine-New England
 - New England Group Tour Planner
 - Local / community guidebooks/directories – especially in neighboring areas – eg. Greater Bangor Visitors Guide, Portland Visitors Guide, etc.

- **Travel Shows:** Participation in selected travel shows and the Big E should be continued on an annual basis. New techniques should be developed and tested to maximize the value of participation in these shows, and names/addresses should be collected to allow for post-show communications.

- **Collateral & Distribution:** A plan should be adopted to keep an updated rack brochure available to consumers, by request and through a distribution network including visitor information centers, hotels and restaurants in Maine and beyond. The collateral itself should be updated/replaced every 2- to 3- years, in order to keep a fresh look and updated information available.

- **Inquiry Response:** Inquiries made by phone or via the web site must be answered and fulfilled in a timely manner, ongoing.

Recommended Annual Marketing Plan

On the following page appears a blocking chart showing the recommended annual marketing plan, with the adoption of the recommended strategies included in this plan.

The chart serves as a model, from which actual annual marketing plans can be developed.

The model assumes sufficient funding to allow for all elements shown – it is recognized that this represents the ideal case, and that each annual plan will reflect actual funding for that year.

Appendix

Included in this appendix are copies of the following public documents, used as source materials in the development of this plan:

- Downeast & Acadia Travel, A Travel & Tourism Report Covering Maine's Downeast Acadia Region – 2003 Travel Year, published by Longwoods International

- Selected pages from Travel and Tourism in Maine – The 2004 Visitor Study/Management Report, Prepared for the Maine Office of Tourism, July 14, 2005, published by Longwoods International

- Selected pages from Maine Office of Tourism Strategic Five Year Plan, June 2002, published by the Maine Office of Tourism

- Selected pages from Executive Summary, Strategic Plan for Implementing the Maine Nature Tourism Initiative -- September 2005, published by FERMATA, Inc.