

AMERICAN CULTURAL HERITAGE TOURISM
The Democratic Heart and Commercial Spirit of a Nation,
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“The creation of the United States of America is the greatest of all human adventures. No other national story holds such tremendous lessons, for the American people themselves and for the rest of mankind. It now spans four centuries and, as we enter the new millennium, we need to retell it, for if we can learn these lessons and build upon them, the whole of humanity will benefit in the new age which is now opening.”

Paul Johnson, author of [A History of the American People](#)

Several years back I was delivering a speech at the annual conference of the Association of American Museums. Upon leaving for the airport for my return to Washington, I had the opportunity to share a ride with Julian Bond, the Atlanta Civil Rights leader and current chairman of the NAACP. During our ride, I discovered that Mr. Bond had a detailed civil rights tour mapped out in his mind which would explain to visitors the experiences he and his colleagues encountered in their quest for a true American democracy.

Interestingly, he was fascinated by the idea that the travel and tourism industry could be a vehicle which would allow him to share his American experience with others. It was then that I realized that millions of Americans have unique, diverse and interesting experiences and histories to share, not only with their fellow citizens, but with the 45 million international visitors we host annually.

These diverse American stories are the heart and soul of the very image of the United States: a democracy which encourages and supports individuality and freedom. From a marketing perspective, these attributes are at the core of the “U.S.A.” brand and are a factor in the successful export of U.S. entertainment products, including tourism. And so it was in a car on the way to an airport that the seeds were planted for a program that would offer genuine opportunities for the U.S. travel industry to showcase, through public-private partnerships, our country’s extraordinary heritage to a worldwide audience. Today that program has breath, life and a name: ***American Pathways 2000***. Designed to encourage the development and sales of American cultural heritage tourism products, ***American Pathways 2000***, supports national efforts to “ensure an American travel experience that is second to none” as set forth at the 1995 White House Conference on Travel and Tourism.

What do we mean by American cultural heritage tourism?

American cultural heritage tourism is a profile of travelers who engage in cultural heritage activities in the United States while fifty miles, or more, away from home. American cultural heritage tourists visit:

- * Historic sites
- * Art galleries, theaters and museums
- * Cultural events, festivals and fairs
- * Ethnic communities and neighborhoods
- * Architectural and archeological treasures
- * National and state parks

How popular is American cultural heritage tourism with U.S. travelers?

American cultural heritage is more popular than ever! Museums have eclipsed theme parks in popularity with a record 225 million visits in 1997. The hosts of the nation's popular *Today Show* spent a week in April tracing their roots and visiting their ancestral homes. And history tours now outpace the ever popular fall foliage itineraries offered by the nation's tour operators. Clearly cultural heritage activities are entering mainstream American popular culture. As we look to the future preparing to enter a new millennium, the American people are demonstrating an active desire to experience where we as a people have been. Which begs the question, how does this phenomenon impact the nation's \$502 billion tourism industries?

Nearly 66 million traveling Americans engaged in cultural heritage tourism activities in 1996, according to the Travel Industry Association of America (TIA). This represents one-third of U.S. adults. The domestic American cultural heritage traveler is characterized as upscale, spending on average \$248 more per trip than his/her generic traveling counterpart. In addition, they are generally:

- * Older [48 years vs. 46 years for total travelers, with one-third 55 years or older]
- * Retired [18% vs. 15% of total travelers]
- * More educated, with a postgraduate college education [21% vs. 18% of all travelers]
- * Have no children in their household [41% vs. 45% of all travelers]
- * Take longer trips [4.7 nights vs. 2.9 nights for non-cultural heritage travelers]
- * Include multiple destinations on their itinerary [1.6 states vs. 1.4 states for

all travelers]

- * Spend more money [\$615 per trip, compared to \$367 per trip for those who were not cultural heritage travelers]
- * Participate in more activities [2.5 activities vs. 1.8 activities for all travelers]
- * More inclined to stay in hotels, motels and b&bs as opposed to private homes [56% vs. 39% of non-cultural historic travelers]
- * Travel in couples or large groups [These travelers are twice as likely to take group tours (7% vs. 3%)]
- * Travel more often during April and July, and less often in November, December, January and February
- * Include shopping as an activity

Does this popularity in American cultural heritage tourism expand beyond our borders?

An American just has to go abroad to understand the global reach of our “pop culture.” It’s *Law and Order* on a television set in Frankfurt, Germany; Garth Brooks blaring from an apartment in Argentina; or an eager line of people waiting outside of a Tokyo movie theater to see *Saving Private Ryan*. Everything from the Nike swoosh to the golden arches serve as advertising for the freedom of the American experience and, as a result, lure international visitors to our shores, thus contributing to tourism’s \$92 billion success as this country’s third largest export, behind capital goods and industrial supplies and materials.

Beyond its glitz and gloss, its sex, speed and violence, U.S. pop culture sells abroad because it reflects the appealing themes and myths of American freedom and individuality. This interest in the “American Dream” is reflected by the more than 23 million overseas visitors who come to the United States annually and in many cases is translated into further action once that traveler steps foot on our shores. According to a recent study done by the office of Tourism Industries (TI), close to 8 million overseas visitors engaged in American cultural heritage activities in 1997. With nearly one third of the market attracted to such activities, American cultural heritage tourism products provide added-value to U.S. tourism marketers. Like their domestic colleagues, overseas cultural heritage travelers to the United States represent the “high-end” of the overseas travel market to the United States, spending an average \$1784 per trip as opposed to the \$1558 spent by the generic overseas visitor.

Looking at the U.S.’ top producing overseas markets, cultural heritage travelers make-up:

- * 16% of Japan’s visitors to the U.S. (893,000 people)
- * 38% of the United Kingdom’s visitors to the U.S. (1,395,000 people)
- * 49% of Germany’s visitors to the U.S. (971,000 people)
- * 43% of Brazil’s visitors to the U.S. (403,000 people)

How does cultural heritage tourism impact the U.S. economy?

Looking at the 1996 TIA domestic study and TI's 1997 international study, estimates indicate that American cultural heritage tourism generates in excess of \$164 billion annually. Within this industry segment, overseas American cultural heritage travelers infuse in excess of \$14 billion in foreign revenues into the U.S. economy, more than the export of our energy products (\$13.1 billion) in 1997.

Why *American Pathways 2000*?

As we approach a new millennium in an age of fast-paced technology, people around the globe are interested in the history of human experience which can help explain our sense of time, place and purpose. *American Pathways 2000* sets forth to tell and share the stories and experiences of the American people by developing and promoting cultural heritage itineraries around one of four uniquely American themes: "*From Sea to Shining Sea*" (*the story of the indigenous peoples of the Americas*), "*I Have A Dream*" (*from slavery to civil rights....America's striving for a true democracy*), "*Lady Liberty*" (*immigration and the building of America*) and "*America's Cultural Mosaic*" (*ethnic influences in American popular culture*).

In October of 1998, First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton announced that the Department of Commerce would take the lead on the *American Pathways 2000* project as part of her White House Millennium Trails initiative. The following month, the Department of Commerce's office of Tourism Industries joined forces with the project's founding partners, the National Tour Association (NTA) and the International Association of Convention and Visitor Bureaus (IACVB), to issue a challenge to the nation's tour operators to submit itineraries to be considered for designation as official *American Pathway 2000* itineraries. Before year's end, the American Bus Association (ABA), United States Tour Operators Association (USTOA), and Receptive Services Association jumped on board to issue challenges to their members also.

In the end, 126 *American Pathway 2000* itinerary applications were received on or prior to the deadline of April 15, 1999. Ranging from several hours to several weeks and going from New York to Alaska, these 126 itineraries illustrate the diversity and richness of the American cultural heritage tourism product. With forty-six of the fifty states represented in the submitted itineraries, the most popular theme was "*From Sea to Shining Sea*" identified in fifty-seven applications, followed by "*Cultural Mosaic*" at thirty-nine, "*Lady Liberty*" at thirty-six, and "*I Have a Dream*" at thirty. Some applicants had itineraries that incorporated more than one theme.

All applications came from small- and medium-sized businesses, the lifeblood of the American travel industry. Mayflower Tours of Illinois was the most prolific, submitting eight applications. They were followed by Tourco, of Hyannis, Massachusetts, Greyline New York, and Sunshine Travel out of Apple Valley, Minnesota, each contributing seven. Most applicants were members

of either NTA (89) or ABA (60). Interestingly, members of RSA, which has its primary interest in international marketplaces and a membership of forty-seven, generated twenty-six submissions. Many applicants identified themselves as members of multiple organizations.

What's Next?

Representatives from the Smithsonian Institute, the U.S. Department of Transportation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the U.S. Department of the Interior and the National Endowment for the Humanities will join the U.S. Department of Commerce's office of Tourism Industries in reviewing the applications to ensure that submitted itineraries meet the established criteria. Any application which does so will be designated an official *American Pathways 2000* itinerary and, as such, will have use of the *American Pathways 2000* logo for promotion of that itinerary.

Now that we have a body of work from which to develop a campaign, the second phase of *American Pathways 2000* will be the telling of the stories that comprise the depth and breadth of the American experience.....stories that also support the small- and medium-sized tourism businesses that are integral in the sharing of our traditions with the people of the world. Corporate America is also joining in the effort. Alamo-Rent-A-Car will host the official *American Pathways 2000* web site at Alamo's own site (www.goalamo.com) and at a separate, still-to-be-determined URL address. The site will go live on June 14th, National Flag Day. In addition, Alamo will promote the *American Pathways 2000* itineraries in consumer and trade advertising, public relations and sales efforts.

It is my hope that when all is said and done, we as a people will have benefitted at all levels from *American Pathways 2000*. Small- and medium-sized businesses will have entered new marketplaces. Fellow citizens will have new appreciation, not for how we are different, but for how we are one people bound by a love for democracy. Corporate America will see diversity as an asset to global competitiveness. And it will be understood that American cultural heritage tourism is a means by which the democratic heart and commercial spirit of America converge to a positive end.