



**Minneapolis**  
City by Nature

Meet **Minneapolis**  
Convention & Visitors Association





# CONTENTS

<b>A LETTER FROM THE DT2030 CO-CHAIRS</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: A HISTORY OF LOOKING AHEAD</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2: INVESTIGATION AND ANALYSIS</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>CHAPTER 3: ASSESSING MINNEAPOLIS' CURRENT CONDITION AND TOURISM POTENTIAL</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>CHAPTER 4: SAYING "YES" TO TOURISM</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>CHAPTER 5: EIGHT BIG INITIATIVES FOR 2030</b>	<b>49</b>

# A LETTER FROM THE DT2030 CO-CHAIRS

You may be asking yourself, what will Minneapolis look like in 2030? The answer to that is: We get to decide. The future of our city is in our hands, and the steps we take today set the long-term vision for the kind of city we'll become.

Destination Transformation 2030 is the first tourism master plan for Minneapolis, and we're proud to be the co-chairs of the planning process that has brought us to its unveiling. Destination Transformation 2030 plots a course toward an even more economically vibrant Minneapolis, toward a city that is easier to get around and that enthusiastically embraces winter. It sets the stage for us to tell our story to the world and let them know what a great tourist destination we are.

Tourism is important for many reasons; it supports thousands of jobs and helps grow our local economy. In 2015, 31.6 million visitors came to Minneapolis–Saint Paul and spent

\$7.5 billion. Those dollars spread through the community, supporting our local economy and directly benefiting the 33,000 people who work in hospitality in our city alone.

Beyond the obvious economic benefits of tourism, continuing to transform our city so that it remains an attractive place for visitors also makes it a better place to live. Working toward having a greener, more walkable city with unique attractions and events contributes to raising the quality of life for all of us who are lucky to call Minneapolis home.

We have set some ambitious goals for Destination Transformation 2030. We will to increase those 31 million visitors to 50 million visitors in the next 14 years. We'll work toward building a signature, iconic visitor center on the riverfront. We'll strive for a radically re-imagined system of wayfinding to ensure that everyone,

visitors and locals alike, can make the most of the experiences our city offers. And that's just the beginning.

This challenge may seem daunting to some, but it is achievable. We have a terrific city that the world needs to know about, and with Destination Transformation 2030 as our road map, all of us in Minneapolis and the region will show the world what a great city we are.

## **MAYOR BETSY HODGES**

City of Minneapolis

## **BOB LUX**

Alatus, LLC and Chair, Meet Minneapolis Board of Directors

## **DAVID BERG**

Carlson







---

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# A PLAN TO EXPAND TOURISM IN MINNEAPOLIS AND THE METRO AREA

Minneapolis and its surrounding communities have much to gain by drawing more visitors and being more attentive to their needs. After all, a city that's livelier and more attractive, compelling and accommodating to travelers delivers those same benefits to residents. Moreover, a city with visitor-friendly attributes is more likely to attract private investment, quality jobs, a talented work force, valuable new public revenue streams and, if managed wisely, a more equitable distribution of opportunity for all residents.

By most measures, Minneapolis is already a successful city. It's the hub of the nation's 13th-largest metropolitan economy; second only to Chicago's in the Midwest. It's

also much admired among urban design experts and others who follow various "best city" rankings.

As a tourist city, it outperforms many of its peers – including Denver, St. Louis, Kansas City and Indianapolis – largely due to Mall of America, the metro region's top shopping and entertainment attraction.

Yet, as a draw for a wider swath of potential visitors, Minneapolis underachieves. For most travelers, the city is not on any "must see" list. Awareness of what the city has to offer is extremely low. Moreover, those who have never visited Minneapolis harbor negative views about it: *cold, remote and boring*.

People know about its giant suburban mall. But if the emerging focus is to attract the attention of diverse millennials who have never been here (which it is), then the city needs to make its portfolio even more fetching. We must make sure that crowds of visitors to Mall of America also get out and explore all that our community has to offer. When their awareness of Minneapolis grows, they become ambassadors for us, helping change the perceptions that persist about our city.

## A HISTORY OF LOOKING AHEAD

Throughout its 150-year history, Minneapolis and the metro area have produced many plans aimed at civic



improvement. The most recent wave of investment aimed at benefiting both residents and visitors included the Minneapolis Convention Center (1990) and Mall of America (1992), followed by Xcel Energy Center (2000), Walker Art Center (2005), Guthrie Theater (2006), Target Field (2010), U.S. Bank Stadium (2016) and a new MLS soccer stadium (2018). Big national and international events were recruited, including the Super Bowl, the Final Four, the Republican National Convention, the MLB All-Star Game, the Ryder Cup and the X Games.

Along with these big projects, a finer-grained network of small playhouses, music clubs, craft breweries, bike trails, art fairs, ethnic marketplaces and sporting festivals involving pond hockey and cross-country skiing were increasingly available to visitors.

But never has the city taken a strategic approach to tourism. Never has it published a tourism master plan. This plan, **Destination Transformation 2030**, is the first.

The city begins this task with a level head. While we do not aim to be Las Vegas or Orlando, we can offer visitors an authentic Minneapolis experience that's worth repeat visits. We want to celebrate and enhance the best of our city, not change the character of it. Minneapolitans are proud of the place we call home, and we simply offer a different kind of experience than many well-known "tourist" cities. No one envisions a city overwhelmed by seasonal visitor traffic, blocks and

blocks of tourist shops with restaurants so crowded that residents are pushed to the margins. The aim, rather, is to stretch the city's brand and exposure and to build a tourism component that takes its place alongside the city's many other assets.

In short, the aim is to make Minneapolis and its surrounding communities a better place to visit and, in so doing, a better place to work and live.

## INVESTIGATION AND ANALYSIS

To assess the region's current condition as a visitor destination, as well as its tourism potential, Meet Minneapolis, the city's destination marketing organization, sought the opinions of travel industry experts and conducted extensive research on tourists' attitudes. Travel writers, meeting planners and other key stakeholders were consulted, as were local residents and visitors. Researchers relied on interviews, focus groups, surveys and workshops. In all, five data collection methods were employed among 26 unique audiences and 3,026 interviews. A steering committee made up of civic and business leaders guided the planning process.

To sift through the resulting data, six subcommittees were formed around the issues of awareness, infrastructure, activities, policy, diversity and inclusion, and transportation and wayfinding. Subcommittee members came from a wide variety of fields, including business, culture, government, nonprofit, sports and community.







## STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES

What were the findings? Minneapolis stacks up pretty well against Midwestern competition in attracting visitors. But, overall, it's not meeting its potential – especially against a world-class city like Chicago, with its huge convention capacity and stellar attractions such as the Magnificent Mile shopping district, the Navy Pier, the Chicago River and Millennium Park.

Altogether, the number of visitors to the metro area has grown steadily in recent years, to 32 million in 2015 from 25 million in 2010. About 30 percent come purely for business. Of those who come for leisure, not all are tourists in the usual sense. Some come for obligations: to attend weddings, funerals, reunions and graduations, or just to visit loved ones. They are, in the parlance of the tourist trade, VFRs – here to visit friends and relatives.

There's a heavily regional flavor to their travel. Of all visitors, whether for business or leisure, 70 percent come from within 300 miles – either from Minnesota or adjoining states. Ninety percent arrive by car. Half stay for just the day. Of those who linger, the average stay runs between two and three days. Two-thirds check into hotels. Those who come here tend to return quite often. Seventy percent are, in a sense, regulars, returning three times a year.

Children, international visitors and visitors of color are not big frequenters of Minneapolis and its surrounding communities. Our visitors tend to be white and middle-aged with middle/upper incomes.

Conventions are an important draw. The city is popular as a “niche destination” for those familiar with it. Eckankar Worldwide, Great Clips, CHS Inc., Mid-States Distributing Company, Thrivent Financial, Aveda and Target Corp. are among the city's top convention “regulars.” But those who haven't tried the city are skeptical. Overall, Minneapolis is rated in the top third of the 40 leading convention cities.

What do most visitors do once they get here? Aside from family and friends, spectator sports are by far the biggest draw, followed by activities such as golf, bicycling and cross-country skiing. Suburban shopping also appeals to visitors, as do restaurants and brewpubs. Festivals, especially the state fair, are also important. Blue and Green Line trains are popular conveyances, although visitors would like to see the lines extended to more destinations.

Common complaints? Downtown's dearth of shopping and children's activities top the list, along with heavy traffic, construction and a perceived lack of safety downtown. One oddity that stands out is that many tourists fail to take advantage of what are regarded as the best restaurants, hippest bars, most impressive arts and entertainment venues and most scenic natural areas.

Two big factors explain:

- **INSUFFICIENT AWARENESS** People report a vacuum of information and marketing about Minneapolis.
- **POOR WAYFINDING** Even when people find out about top attractions, many fail to find them. Visitors complain about a near total absence of directional signs.

Despite shortcomings, many travelers regard Minneapolis and its environs as a high-quality destination. A survey by DKShifflet rated Minneapolis 8.5 on a 10-point scale for overall satisfaction, friendliness, helpfulness, value, feelings of safety and the likelihood of recommending the trip to others. That's against an 8.3 average all across the country. In another study conducted by Resonance Consultancy, travelers

**“AS THE ECONOMIC CRISIS  
AND SUBSEQUENT RECOVERY  
ULTIMATELY PLAY OUT, WE WILL  
SEE THE RISE OF CERTAIN CITIES  
AND REGIONS WITHIN THE U.S. —  
AND THE DECLINE OF OTHERS.”**

**—RICHARD FLORIDA**

“The Great Reset: How New Ways of Living and Working Drive Post-Crash Prosperity,” 2010.



ranked Minneapolis 26th best of 121 U.S. destinations. That's lower than Chicago (9th) but higher than other mid-American destinations, including St. Louis, Kansas City, Milwaukee and Indianapolis.

These visitors were impressed especially by Minneapolis' arts and culture scene, although natural features, restaurants, shopping, nightlife and hotels pulled scores down into the middle range.

What to make of all of this? Probably that Minneapolis has more to offer than meets the eye. The city has plenty of fixable shortcomings. But people who come here and who successfully seek out the region's best options are generally impressed by their experience. Visitors report a very high intent of visiting again and recommending Minneapolis to others as a destination.

Visitors of color are quick to recognize the Eurocentric monoculture that has dominated Minneapolis and its surrounding communities for 150 years and persists despite demographic trends projected to push the metro's minority population beyond 40 percent by midcentury. Any planning document aimed at 2030 and beyond would be foolish to ignore this trend. Changing demographics must be part of any tourism solution.

It was especially noteworthy that so many visitors seemed happily *surprised* by their visit. Their expectations were quite low after all. Some didn't anticipate an actual city here, expecting instead just

a state with lakes, dairy farms and a large shopping center. (We brand ourselves as "Minnesota" after all.)

The clear message is that our metro region lacks identity as an urban place. Moreover, people don't know much about us or have a misleading image of us as cold and rural, with a large mall. We, ourselves, often aid and abet this perception by referring to our metropolitan city as a state and feeling obliged to be self-deprecating.

### WHY A TOURISM MASTER PLAN?

Before turning, finally, to recommendations, it's important to summarize the benefits of turning a friendlier face toward tourists:

- A city that's more attractive and compelling to visitors also rewards those who get to live in it every day.
- Tourism is good for the economy and taxpayers.
- An expanded hospitality industry will bring entry-level jobs to those who need them most and offer training and career opportunities to thousands of Minnesotans stuck on the bottom rung of the socio-economic ladder.
- To address a critical labor shortage in the 2020s, the metro area must begin to draw significantly more domestic newcomers from states beyond the Upper Midwest. Tourism is perhaps the best way to introduce our city to prospective talent.

### EIGHT INITIATIVES FOR 2030

To see your city through the eyes of a newcomer, to pose as a stranger in familiar surroundings, these are probably the most important prerequisites to crafting a successful tourism master plan. This was the clear aim of the many contributors to this report: civic leaders, visitors and a wide variety of travel-savvy experts from around the country as well as local residents.

Rather than a "monumental" idea (a new version of the St. Louis arch, for example), participants recommended sharpening the advantages Minneapolis already enjoys while shoring up its deficits.

In some aspects, this plan's scope is metro-wide. It's plain that visitors see our destination not just as Minneapolis or St. Paul or a few of their suburbs but as a single, unified community. On the other hand, Meet Minneapolis is obliged primarily to promote activities in the central city, and that's where much of this plan's focus lies.

# WHERE WE WANT TO BE → 2030



**ATTRACT 50 MILLION VISITORS**  
32 MILLION TODAY



**\$10 MILLION MARKETING CAMPAIGN**  
ANNUALLY



**11 MILLION WINTER VISITORS**  
6 MILLION TODAY



**40,000 HOSPITALITY JOBS**  
32,500 TODAY

## 1 ATTRACT 50 MILLION VISITORS TO THE METRO AREA ANNUALLY BY 2030.

- That's up from 32 million visitors in 2015.
- As part of that increase, expand winter tourism from 6 million to 11 million visitors by 2030.
- Concentrate on drawing more visitors from beyond the Upper Midwest, younger visitors and more visitors of color.

## 2 LAUNCH A METRO-WIDE BRANDING AND MARKETING CAMPAIGN.

- Establish Minneapolis and its surrounding communities nationally and internationally as an inviting destination noted for a blend of urban sophistication, natural beauty and outdoor activity.
- Produce an aggressive and creative destination awareness initiative, investing \$10 million annually that leverages the resources, talents and collaborative skills of the broader metro community in both its public and private sectors.
- Develop a metropolitan brand that allows individual cities to retain their singular identities.
- Elevate the metro area to the "Top 10" among high-quality tourism experience destinations by 2030 by leveraging the region's robust arts, biking, brewing and culinary scenes, as well as its number-one-ranked park system and vibrant cultural communities and neighborhoods.

### **3 BUILD AN ICONIC VISITORS CENTER ON DOWNTOWN'S CENTRAL RIVERFRONT.**

- Activate the Mississippi River as the heart of Minneapolis' tourism experience.
- Use public and private investment to integrate the riverfront into the city with attractive green street-scapes, public art installations, markers and a gateway monument.

### **4 IMPLEMENT A UNIFIED TRANSPORTATION, WAYFINDING AND INFORMATION PROGRAM FOR MINNEAPOLIS.**

- Produce a legible network of signs at the airport; along freeways, streets and sidewalks; on bike trails and in skyways that provides clear direction toward major city destinations. Those include downtown, major attractions and notable districts.
- Replace the "Free Ride" buses on Nicollet Mall with a system of circulators that may include streetcars and water taxis.
- Work with partners to establish a reliable, real-time digital calendar of events, listings, openings and other bits of information helpful to visitors.

### **5 ADOPT A COMPREHENSIVE PLACE-MAKING PLAN TO DRIVE MINNEAPOLIS' TOURISM PRIORITIES AND INVESTMENTS.**

- Build and maintain a green, high-quality, and consistently-compelling walking experience along the sidewalks of downtown Minneapolis.
- With New York's High Line in mind, develop a signature urban walkway from the Sculpture Garden, down Nicollet Mall, to the riverfront.
- Encourage the expansion of retail opportunities at street level.
- Develop child-friendly activities downtown and along the riverfront.
- Emphasize safety – and the **perception** of safety – on downtown sidewalks.
- Develop "cultural corridors" along East Lake Street, West Broadway and other appropriate thoroughfares.
- Ensure that the Minneapolis Convention Center remains competitive and able to meet the evolving needs of meeting planners and customers.

### **6 ACCENTUATE WINTER AS A NOVEL TOURISM ADVENTURE.**

- Offer distinctive experiences for visitors that reflect the area's contrasting "theater of seasons" as a way to boost wintertime visitors to 11 million by 2030, up from 6 million today.

- Develop infrastructure to support outdoor and indoor winter activities.
- Create a signature event that features outdoor active living, lights and ice sculptures.

### **7 GROW AND EMPHASIZE HOSPITALITY JOBS AS IMPORTANT TO SOCIAL EQUITY AND THE METRO ECONOMY.**

- Grow the number of hospitality jobs in the metro area from 32,500 in 2016 to 40,000 by 2030.
- Raise awareness that these jobs represent an important entry point into the workforce for thousands of disadvantaged residents.
- Invest in programs to increase the cultural diversity of the hospitality labor force from entry level to the executive level.

### **8 IDENTIFY AND SECURE ONGOING RESOURCES TO IMPLEMENT THE TOURISM MASTER PLAN.**

- Meet Minneapolis will undertake this task in collaboration with public and private partners.
- Institute a tourism improvement district and/or changes in the city lodging tax to fund the plan.





VISIT

2030

MPLS

---

## INTRODUCTION

# ENHANCING THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Is tourism just for places like Las Vegas, Orlando, New Orleans and Nantucket? Or can less-flashy cities like Minneapolis benefit from showing a friendlier, more attractive face to visitors?

The clear answer is that Minneapolis and its surrounding communities have much to gain by drawing more visitors and being more attentive to their needs. After all, a city that's livelier, more attractive, compelling and accommodating to travelers delivers those same benefits to residents. Moreover, a city with visitor-friendly attributes is more likely to attract private investment, quality jobs, a talented workforce, valuable new public revenue streams and, if managed wisely, a more equitable distribution of opportunity for all residents.

In other words, enhancing the experiences of visitors goes hand in hand with the broader task of developing a metropolitan economy that can compete globally while continuing to supply the high quality of life and growing prosperity that residents have come to expect.

By most measures, Minneapolis is already a successful city. It's the hub of the nation's 13th-largest metropolitan economy; second only to Chicago's in the Midwest. It's also much admired among urban design experts and others who follow various "best city" rankings. Minneapolis is known especially for its highly trained workforce, its arts and culture scene and its rare juxtaposition of natural beauty and urban vibe. It is, as its tagline suggests, *a city by nature*.

## BOTH ADMIRER AND UNKNOWN

As a tourist city, Minneapolis outperforms many of its peers – including Denver, St. Louis, Kansas City and Indianapolis – largely due to Mall of America, the metro region's top shopping and entertainment attraction.

Yet, as a draw for a wider swath of potential visitors, Minneapolis underachieves. For most travelers, the city is not on any "must see" list. Awareness of what the city has to offer is extremely low. Moreover, those who have never visited Minneapolis harbor negative views about it: *cold, remote and boring*.

Despite its relatively higher visitor numbers, impressions of Minneapolis lag even some of the American heartland's less desirable destinations because it has no iconic attraction. It has nothing approaching Cleveland's Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, for example, or St. Louis' Gateway Arch or Kansas City's jazz clubs and barbecue joints or Austin's South by Southwest music scene or San Antonio's River Walk.

Minneapolis is recognized mainly for a giant suburban shopping mall. True, it's probably the best known such mall in America. And, when added to the city's lesser-known attractions, first-time visitors are generally impressed with their overall experience. But if the emerging focus is to attract the attention of diverse millennials who have never been here (which it is), then the city needs to make its portfolio even more fetching.

Throughout its 150-year history, Minneapolis has produced many plans aimed at civic improvement, but never has it published a tourism master plan. This is the first. This plan's intent is:

- To explain why expanded tourism is important for the future health of the city, region and state.
- To analyze the characteristics and potential of the local tourism market.
- To spell out strategies for attracting half again more visitors by 2030.

Eight specific steps are outlined; steps that Minneapolis will take to make the city and its region more hospitable to travelers and prospective newcomers while sharing the fruits of a higher visitor profile with residents. This plan isn't just about filling hotel rooms and restaurants. It's about revving up metro Minneapolis' chances to compete for growth and prosperity in the decades ahead. And it's about improving the social mobility of residents who need entry-level jobs and opportunities to move up the economic ladder.

***“I WOULD MAKE OF THE CITY ITSELF SUCH A WORK OF ART AS MAY BE THE FITTING ABODE OF A RACE OF MEN AND WOMEN WHOSE LIVES ARE DEVOTED TO A NOBLER END THAN MONEY GETTING.”***

**—HORACE CLEVELAND**

1888, commenting on the need to set aside natural lands for the enjoyment of Minneapolis residents and visitors.









**“SOME PLACES DO MASTER PLANS  
OUT OF DESPERATION; WE DO  
OURS OUT OF ASPIRATION.”**

—MELVIN TENNANT CEO, MEET MINNEAPOLIS



## CHAPTER 1

# A HISTORY OF LOOKING AHEAD

Although this is Minneapolis' first tourism master plan, the city has a long, impressive history of aspirational planning with visitors in mind.

Horace Cleveland's seminal *Suggestions for a System of Parks and Parkways* (1883), which set the stage for the city's remarkable network of public lakeshore and other natural features, was aimed not just at residents but at visitors who, it was hoped, would be impressed enough to settle here.<sup>1</sup> A decade later, parks pioneer Charles Loring articulated the system's core mission as establishing "a New England picture set in a prairie frame."<sup>2</sup> In other words, Minneapolis was not to be a just another prairie town but a green city with the woody feel of New England, its natural features open to a broad slice of residents and travelers.

Indeed, by the late 1800s, the region, with its cool breezes and clear water, had become a summer attraction for visitors from St. Louis and other cities in the lower Mississippi basin who sought respite from stifling heat and humidity. Excursions were offered on an extensive street and interurban rail system that connected the scenic St. Croix Valley to the shores of Lake Minnetonka. Sightseers of the day included Teddy Roosevelt and William McKinley.<sup>3</sup>

The wildly ambitious *Plan of Minneapolis* (1917) further demonstrated the city's aspirations.<sup>4</sup> Crafted by the noted Chicago planner E. H. Bennett, a close associate of the acclaimed urban designer Daniel H. Burnham, the project reimagined Minneapolis as a majestic city of grand tree-lined boulevards, monumental roundabouts

and dignified civic buildings – part of what was called the City Beautiful Movement. "Make no little plans," Burnham had famously advised. "They have no magic."<sup>5</sup>

But this magical "Paris on the Prairie" never materialized. Widely influential at the turn of the century, the City Beautiful Movement fizzled by the 1920s as the destructive memories of World War I dampened the public's faith in beautification and grandiose urban projects. Instead, Minneapolis, and especially St. Paul, acquiesced to a different kind of tourist reputation – offering safe haven to some of the era's most notorious gangsters, including Machine Gun Kelly and Baby Face Nelson.

<sup>1</sup> David C. Smith, *City of Parks: The Story of Minneapolis Parks*, 2008, The Foundation for Minneapolis Parks. <sup>2</sup> Ibid. <sup>3</sup> Goodrich Lowry, *Streetcar Man: Tom Lowry and the Twin City Rapid Transit Company*, 1979, Lerner Publications Company. <sup>4</sup> Edward H. Bennett, *Plan of Minneapolis*, 1917, The Civic Commission.

## A REAWAKENING IN THE POSTWAR YEARS

Following the Great Depression and World War II, the tourist trade re-emerged in the booming 1950s with reinvigorated versions of the Minnesota State Fair (first held in 1859), the St. Paul Winter Carnival (1886) and Minneapolis' summertime festival, the Aquateennial (1940). These popular events helped to set off a surge in civic investment in the 1960s and 1970s, all to the benefit of residents and tourists.

Among those investments: the launch of the Minnesota Twins and Minnesota Vikings, the flowering of theater, music and visual arts, an expansion of the international airport (which became a major hub for Northwest and, later, Delta) and the debut of the Nicollet Mall, which, for a brief period, was one of the nation's premier shopping streets.

The Minneapolis Convention Center (1990) and Mall of America (1992) followed, along with a wave of new cultural and sports buildings, most notably Xcel Energy Center (2000), Walker Art Center (2005), Guthrie Theater (2006), Target Field (2010), U.S. Bank Stadium (2016) and a new MLS soccer stadium (2018). Big national and international events were recruited, including the Super Bowl, the Final Four, the Republican National Convention, the Major League Baseball All-Star Game, the X Games and the Ryder Cup.

It wasn't just the big events that bolstered the local sports and entertainment markets. Metro-area

venues became part of a regular, seasonal circuit of games, concert tours and other performances. Today, Minneapolis and its metro area have some of the most successful venues in the country.

Along with these bigger activities, a finer-grained network of small playhouses, music clubs, craft breweries, bike trails, art fairs, ethnic marketplaces and sporting festivals involving pond hockey and cross-country skiing were increasingly available to visitors.

Two developments were especially noteworthy during this period:

- The opening of Mall of America was instrumental in doubling the metro area's visitor count from 5 million in 1990 to 11 million in 2000, then tripling it to 32 million by 2015.
- The broadening of Minneapolis' approach to tourism (the 2006 transition from the Greater Minneapolis Convention and Visitors Association to Meet Minneapolis) and its rebranding as a "City by Nature" also contributed to the surge.

Despite all of this, research shows that Minneapolis remains relatively unknown and underappreciated as a visitor destination. A more strategic approach is clearly needed. That approach is embodied in this plan, Destination Transformation 2030.

## ECONOMIC CRISIS SPARKS A SURGE IN TOURISM STRATEGY

Tourism master plans, in recent decades, have been produced mainly by national governments. Jamaica and other Caribbean nations employed tourist strategies to help rescue sagging economies. Thailand used a national plan to become one of Asia's top destinations. Singapore, Mexico and Ireland are among other countries that have taken strategic approaches. Most remarkably, perhaps, Iceland has proved that the right strategy can transform a cold, remote place into a popular destination (see page 46).

Within the U.S., states have been active as well. Nearly 50 years after its launch, "Virginia is for lovers" remains an indelible slogan that helped make Virginia the sixth most popular tourist draw among the 50 states. (Minnesota is 23rd.)

More recently, cities have taken up the tourism task, perhaps for obvious reasons. They and their metropolitan areas have become the main units of economic growth and competition. Seventy-five percent of the U.S. gross domestic product is generated in the 100 largest metro communities. Tourists are increasingly drawn to attractive cities, not just to the states they happen to be in. Travelers specify Chicago, Savannah, Santa Fe and Austin, for example, not just Illinois, Georgia, New Mexico and Texas. It makes sense for cities to promote themselves as destinations – not just for tourists, but also for investors and highly skilled workers.

The push for tourism planning accelerated when the industry faltered after the attacks of September 11, 2001, and again after the Great Recession of 2007–09. Disney, Universal and the major hotel chains were among businesses pushing for more strategic approaches, especially for attracting international visitors.

Locally, the downturn was noticed most acutely at downtown hotels heavily dependent on business travelers. Overall, 50 percent of Minneapolis hotel guests are here on business, with another 20 percent here for conventions. Any successful strategy aimed at broadening the city's tourism appeal would help the city to withstand fluctuations in the U.S. economy.

Another potent effect nationally was that the uneven nature of the recovery heightened competition among cities for attracting economic growth – particularly for attracting and retaining young talent. One way for cities to excel in this new game of sorting winners and losers was to gain

the attention of visitors who, if impressed, might be open to investing, creating jobs, living and working in a particular city.

## A LOCAL PUSH TO ATTRACT NEWCOMERS, FILL JOBS

Such a calculation was especially relevant to the Twin Cities metro. It consistently recorded high scores on quality of life but underperformed on attracting visitors and young talent from beyond its immediate region. An acute labor shortage projected for the 2020s threatened the health and momentum of the metro economy. An educated and capable workforce, always its greatest strength, could become a major weakness unless it attracted more national exposure and recognition. Economic development and tourism, it seemed, had become partners.

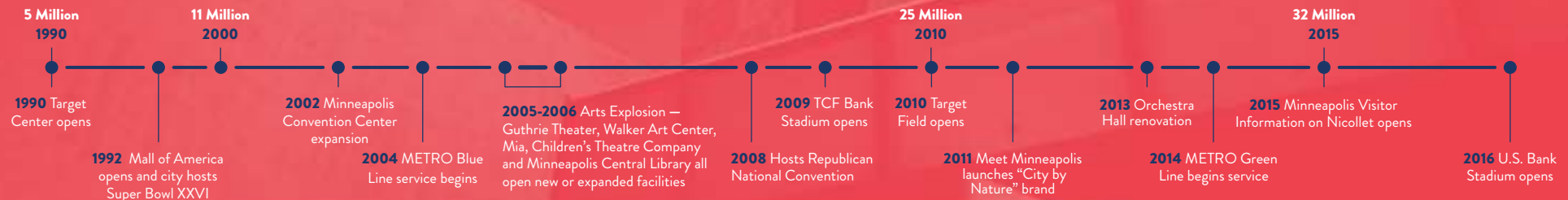
In 2011, Greater MSP, a public/private development partnership, was formed in recognition of the need for a

proactive strategy on growing the metro economy. Now, with this tourism master plan, Meet Minneapolis joins the effort.

The city begins this task with a level head. While we do not aim to be Las Vegas or Orlando, we can offer visitors an authentic Minneapolis experience that's worth repeat visits. We want to celebrate and enhance the best of our city, not change the character of it. Minneapolitans are proud of the place we call home, and we simply offer a different kind of experience than many well-known "tourist" cities. No one envisions a city overwhelmed by seasonal visitor traffic, blocks and blocks of tourist shops with restaurants so crowded that residents are pushed to the margins. The aim, rather, is to stretch the city's brand and exposure and to build a tourism component that takes its place alongside the city's many other assets.

In short, the aim is to make Minneapolis and its surrounding communities a better place to visit and a better place to work and live.

## MINNEAPOLIS-SAINT PAUL METROPOLITAN AREA HISTORIC VISITOR COUNTS & TOURISM MILESTONES





**“THERE’S NO CITY IN AMERICA  
THAT DOES WINTER BETTER, AND  
IT MIGHT JUST BE WHEN OUR  
HOSPITALITY IS THE WARMEST.”**

**—ERIC DAYTON CO-OWNER OF THE  
BACHELOR FARMER AND ASKOV FINLAYSON**

## CHAPTER 2

# INVESTIGATION AND ANALYSIS

To assess the region's current condition as a visitor destination, as well as its tourism potential, Meet Minneapolis sought the opinions of travel industry experts and conducted extensive research on tourists' attitudes. Travel writers, meeting planners and other key stakeholders were consulted in the spring of 2016, as were local residents and visitors. Researchers relied on interviews, focus groups, surveys and workshops. In all, five data collection methods were employed among 26 unique audiences and 3,026 interviews.

A steering committee made up of 30 business and community leaders shepherded the plan development process, providing direction, input and approval at key points. Mayor Betsy Hodges, Meet Minneapolis Board Chair Bob Lux and Carlson CEO David Berg co-chaired the steering committee.

To sift through the resulting data, six subcommittees were formed around the following issues:

- **AWARENESS**
- **DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION**
- **INFRASTRUCTURE**
- **POLICY**
- **ACTIVITIES**
- **TRANSPORTATION AND WAYFINDING**

Each subcommittee was composed of 10 to 15 members representing a wide array of community interests. Some were financial analysts, hotel managers, airline employees and marketing experts. Some were business owners, government officials, writers and restaurateurs. Others were nonprofit leaders,

neighborhood activists, pro sports representatives and real estate brokers (see figure on page 24).

Each committee met three times during October and November of 2016. In those 48 hours of meetings, the research results were discussed, analyzed and prioritized.

Subcommittee members held nothing back in hashing out their impressions and recommendations. One of the hottest topics: whether to emphasize arts and culture as the main draw for visitors to Minneapolis or to promote waterways, parks and active living. Among other issues that were dissected: winter and summer festivals, biking, cross-country skiing, kayaking, farmers markets, craft beer, transit, new technologies for wayfinding and for curating tourist activities, downtown safety perceptions,



skyways, retail problems, downtown streetscapes and greening, cultural corridors, ethnic inclusion, branding, framing, marketing, funding and collaborating.

This 10-month process was further enriched by the insights of the plan's steering committee and its three co-chairs: Minneapolis Mayor Betsy Hodges, real estate developer Bob Lux of Alatus LLC and Carlson Hospitality Group CEO David Berg. And it culminated in the crafting of eight initiatives for 2030.

### COLLABORATING WITH GREATER MSP

Apart from relying on the work of subcommittees and the steering committee, Meet Minneapolis found compatibility with a project of Greater MSP, the metro area's economic development partnership. The "Make It. MSP" initiative is aimed at attracting and retaining young talent for the Twin Cities region. In 2016, it conducted 800 interviews across the U.S. that, in part, reinforced the findings of this report: that most people assume Minneapolis and its surrounding communities are cold, remote and boring, but that those who actually visit here are surprised by the region's relative beauty and sophistication.

Peter Frosch, Greater MSP's vice president for strategic partnerships, acknowledged the obvious synergy between the two efforts – attracting tourists and attracting talented newcomers. "Exposure is powerful," he said, arguing that convincing people to visit, whether as tourists or as prospective workers, is an essential first step. He pledged continuing cooperation between the two projects.

# TOURISM MASTER PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE

**MAYOR BETSY HODGES** CO-CHAIR

**BOB LUX** ALATUS, CO-CHAIR

**DAVID BERG** CARLSON, CO-CHAIR

Annie Gillette, Cleveland, Walker Art Center

Brenda Langton, Spoonriver

Catherine M. Rydell, American Academy of Neurology

City Council President Barbara Johnson, City of Minneapolis

D. Craig Taylor, Minneapolis CPED

Dave Schad, Fleishman Hillard

Dennis Probst, MAC

Eric Dayton, North Corp

Eric Pehle, Weber Shandwick

Erick Garcia Luna, City of Minneapolis

Irene Quarshie, Target

Jayne Miller, Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board

Jeff Johnson, Minneapolis Convention Center

John Edman, Explore Minnesota Tourism

County Commissioner Marion Greene, Hennepin County

Matt Hoy, Minnesota Twins

Maya Santamaria, Santamaria Broadcasting

Melvin Tennant, Meet Minneapolis

Michele Kelm-Helgen, Minnesota Sports Facilities Authority

Mike Christenson, MCTC Foundation

Phil Trier, U.S. Bank

Richard Copeland, Thor Construction

Shiro "Don" Katagiri, Kiku Enterprises

Steve Cramer, Minneapolis Downtown Council

Susan Franson, Delta Air Lines

Tom Jollie, Padilla

Tom Mahlike, Mid-States

# PLAN SUBCOMMITTEES

## MINNEAPOLIS AWARENESS

**ANNIE GILLETTE CLEVELAND**  
**TOM JOLLIE**

Tom Mahlke	Eric Dayton
Kristen Montag	Tom Dupont
Dave Schad	Eric Pehle
Marion Greene	Doug Killian

## TOURISM DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

**IRENE QUARSHIE**  
**CATHY RYDELL**

Leah Wong	Betty Williams
JJ Haywood	Robert Lilligren
Jeremy Iggers	Michael Bergman
Chris Iles	Andrew Finsness
Michael Hernandez	Tesfa Wonde-magegnehu

## TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE

**JEFF JOHNSON**  
**JAYNE MILLER**

Kim Zoulek	Joanne Kaufman
Max Musicant	DeAnn Kazungu
Katie Nyberg	Kjersti Monson
Katie Smith	Theresa Swaney
Gülgün Kayim	Michael McLaughlin
Brent Foerster	

## TOURISM POLICY

**JOHN EDMAN**  
**DENNIS PROBST**

Paul Reyelts	Adam Arvidson
Jon Austin	Ingrid Schneider
Rick Bertram	Ben Shardlow
Kevin Upton	David Tinjum
Sarah Harris	Madonna Carr
Pete Mihajlov	Margaret Anderson
Gene Ranieri	Kelliher

## TOURIST ACTIVITIES

**SCOTT FELDMAN**  
**MATT HOY**

Steve Dietz	Angela Casselton
Tim McNiff	Billy Langenstein
John Munger	Kristin Prestegaard
Deb Becker	Deb VanDeWeghe
Brittany Allen	Christine Bauer
Mark Zirbel	Elizabeth Foy
Sue Zelickson	Larsen

## VISITOR TRANSPORTATION AND WAYFINDING

**STEVE CRAMER**  
**SUSAN FRANSON**

Shiro Katagiri	Richard Copeland
Kevin Lewis	Bill Dossett
Steve Mosing	Nathan Hermiston
Leif Pettersen	Cher Johnson





**THE PEOPLE WHO COME HERE, AND WHO  
SUCCESSFULLY SEEK OUT THE REGION'S  
BEST OPTIONS, ARE GENERALLY IMPRESSED  
BY THEIR EXPERIENCE.**

---

## CHAPTER 3

# ASSESSING MINNEAPOLIS' CURRENT CONDITION AND TOURISM POTENTIAL

As a destination for visitors, how is Minneapolis doing? Not badly, but not nearly well enough.

The number of visitors to the metro area has grown steadily in recent years, up to 32 million in 2015 from 25 million in 2010. The tourist trade is not insignificant to the local economy. Travelers spent \$7.5 billion here in 2015, adding meaningful sums to business ledgers and to tax revenues. Hospitality accounted for 10 percent of all jobs within the city of Minneapolis.

As a Midwestern destination, it's tough for Minneapolis to compete with Chicago. With triple the population, the Windy City draws 20 million more tourists annually than

we do. But Chicago has worked hard at becoming a world-class destination, with huge convention capacity and stellar attractions such as the Magnificent Mile shopping district, the Navy Pier, the Chicago River and Millennium Park.

Minneapolis stacks up better against the lesser markets of the American heartland, outdrawing the likes of Indianapolis, Kansas City, St. Louis and Denver (see the figure on page 28). The Twin Cities expects 37 million visitors by 2018, but there's potential for far more in future years if a proactive strategy expands our horizons.

### WHO VISITS HERE?

To understand our potential for growth, it's useful to consider who comes here and why.

About 30 percent of visitors to the Minneapolis metro come purely for business. Of those who come for leisure, most are not tourists in the usual sense. They are not here "on vacation" in the way people visit Palm Springs or Cape Cod. Many come, rather, out of a sense of obligation – to attend weddings, funerals, reunions and graduations, or just to visit loved ones. They are, in the parlance of the tourist trade, VFRs – here to visit friends and relatives.



# TOP MIDWEST DESTINATIONS 2015



ANNUAL VISITORS (MILLIONS)

SOURCES: DKSHIFFLET & DMOS



There's a heavily regional flavor to their travel. Of all visitors, whether for business or leisure, 70 percent come from within 300 miles – either from Minnesota or from the adjoining states of Wisconsin, Iowa, North Dakota and South Dakota. Ninety percent arrive by car. Half stay for just the day. Of those who linger, the average stay runs between two and three days – basically, a long weekend. Two-thirds check into hotels; the rest stay with family or friends.

Those who come here tend to return quite often. Seventy percent are, in a sense, regulars, returning three times a year. And, importantly, they recommend Minneapolis as a destination to others.

## **DOWNTOWN: NOT KID FRIENDLY**

Despite its family-friendly reputation, Minneapolis–Saint Paul is not a big draw for visiting children. Only 11 percent of groups visiting here include kids. Downtown Minneapolis, especially, is seen to be lacking in activities and attractions for children. Additionally, there are concerns about safety. The prominent presence of police officers reassures some visitors but raises questions for others about why it is necessary.

Our tourists tend to be older; two-thirds are over 35, and nearly one in four is over 55. More than 90 percent are white. Most fit a middle- or upper-middle-class profile, with nearly 40 percent coming from households

earning more than \$100,000 a year. Still, individual spending is relatively modest: just \$77 per day on average.

Minneapolis doesn't draw a lot of international travelers (less than 1 percent of all visitors). Of those who do come, half come for business. Mall of America is a major attraction for them. The largest numbers are from Britain, China, Germany and Canada. On average, international travelers stay three times longer and spend three times more money per day than U.S. tourists.

Conventions and other big meetings are an important part of the local tourism picture. Meet Minneapolis hosted 719 events in 2016, more than double the 332 it attracted in 2010. The 2016 meetings and sporting events generated an estimated \$460 million for the local economy. Eckankar Worldwide, Great Clips, CHS Inc., Mid-States Distributing Company, Thrivent Financial, Aveda and Target Corp. are among the city's top convention "regulars."

Overall, the city's convention facilities are large enough to draw midsized national events. Meeting planners rate Minneapolis in the top third among the largest U.S. and Canadian convention destinations (14th out of 40 according to the Watkins research Group's 2016 report, based on interviews with more than 600 meeting planners). Only 7 percent of those planners, however, had ever used Minneapolis – and those who had, rated the city far higher – fifth out of 26.

Watkins' conclusion: The city is a "niche destination," popular among meeting planners who know it well but less popular among those who don't. To broaden the city's appeal, meeting planners urged more advertising (and, facetiously, better weather).

## **ACCOLADES AND COMPLAINTS**

What do most visitors do once they get here? Aside from family and friends, sports are by far the biggest draw. Professional teams attract fans from far and wide. School teams draw parents, alumni and friends from across the state and region. Participatory sports are increasingly popular, especially golf, bicycling and cross-country skiing.

Adult getaways are popular among regional visitors. These visits provide a "city experience" for those from smaller communities. They are occasions to splurge, have fun and enjoy the restaurants and nightlife of Minneapolis.

Suburban shopping also appeals to visitors, as do restaurants and brewpubs. Festivals, especially the state fair, are also important draws. Blue and Green Line trains are popular conveyances. Four in 10 visitors report riding and enjoying the light rail system.

Common complaints? Downtown's dearth of shopping and children's activities top the list, along with heavy traffic, construction and a perceived lack of safety.

Downtown hotels are criticized for higher prices than suburban alternatives.

One oddity that stands out is that many tourists, even when familiar with the city, fail to take advantage of what are regarded as the best restaurants, hippest bars, most impressive arts and entertainment venues and most scenic natural areas. Indeed, surveys reveal that thousands of visitors tend to avoid plays, concerts, dance performances, museums, art galleries, historic sites, wildlife areas and the like. A dearth of wintertime events exacerbates the problem.

“Why would we go to Minneapolis for culture?” asked one Chicago focus group participant. “We have plenty of that here.”

Even with 200 miles of trails for biking, hiking and cross-country skiing, parks are underused by visitors. “We have parks in Fargo,” said one focus group member. “We live in lake country.”

Highly acclaimed restaurants are likewise underpatronized, and an active music scene, ranked fifth nationally (behind only Nashville, Austin, New Orleans and Cleveland), goes almost unnoticed.

## **NOT ENOUGH MARKETING; POOR WAYFINDING**

One reason is that many visitors come from short distances and don't bother to plan their trips. They just

go. And once here, they fall into routines often dictated by family and friends. Another reason is that visitors assume that these top attractions carry heavy price tags. But two bigger factors stand out:

- **NO AWARENESS** People are simply unaware of the best places. They report a vacuum of information and marketing about Minneapolis. One Fargo visitor noted that Winnipeg and Las Vegas advertise far more and have higher tourism profiles than does Minneapolis. Specifics matter, they said. It's not good enough to know that there's a cultural scene; visitors must know what's playing, when, how much it costs and how to get there. Also contributing to the problem is the abundance of destination marketing organizations in the metro area – 20 of them – each with its own marketing message.
- **POOR WAYFINDING** Even when people find out about top attractions, many fail to find them. Visitors complain about a near total absence of directional signs. Driving is difficult, especially in the city, they say. There's frustration and confusion over construction, and there's fear of wandering into dangerous neighborhoods.

## **STILL, GENERALLY HIGH MARKS**

Despite shortcomings, many travelers regard Minneapolis and its environs as a high-quality destination. Those who successfully seek and find

excellence in the arts, entertainment, nature, parks, dining, shopping and nightlife give Minneapolis high marks – some of the highest seen by travel consultants.

A survey by DKShifflet rated Minneapolis 8.5 on a 10-point scale for overall satisfaction, friendliness, helpfulness, value, feelings of safety and the likelihood of recommending the trip to others. That's against an 8.3 average among all other destinations across the country. In another study conducted by Resonance Consultancy, travelers ranked Minneapolis 26th of 121 U.S. destinations. That's lower than Chicago (ninth) but higher than other mid-American destinations, including St. Louis, Kansas City, Milwaukee and Indianapolis.

These visitors were impressed especially by Minneapolis' arts and culture scene, ranking the city fourth best in the nation, ahead of Chicago (seventh) and all other Midwestern peers. Less-than-stellar impressions of Minneapolis' natural features, restaurants, shopping, nightlife and hotels, however, combined to lower the city's overall score.

In a surprise, the city's parks and natural areas, while rated above those of other Midwestern destinations, ranked a disappointing 31st nationally. This is in stark contrast to the ranking of the Minneapolis park system as first among the nation's 100 largest cities by The Trust for Public Land in 2016.

Restaurants were also underappreciated, ranking 37th – well below Chicago’s seventh but higher than the culinary offerings of Kansas City, Milwaukee, St. Louis and Indianapolis.

Minneapolis’ music clubs and other nightlife venues also failed to stack up, ranking 37th – below those of Chicago, Kansas City, St. Louis and Milwaukee. Shopping also underperformed at 37th. Mall of America is big, but it doesn’t deliver the impressive urban atmosphere of Chicago’s bustling Michigan Avenue (the Magnificent Mile) or Kansas City’s stylish Country Club District.

Hotels were difficult to evaluate. Minneapolis has fewer hotel rooms than key competitors Denver and St. Louis and far fewer than Chicago. But 1,050 rooms were added in 2016, and 2,200 additional rooms are anticipated by 2020. As for cost and quality, big-city visitors seemed satisfied on both fronts (“as good as Chicago,” “friendly,” “less expensive than Chicago”), while travelers from smaller towns complained about the high cost of staying downtown along with the lack of free parking.

**CONCLUSION: A MIXED BAG**

What to make of all of this? Probably that Minneapolis has more to offer than meets the eye. The city has plenty of fixable shortcomings. But people who come here and who successfully seek out the region’s best options are generally impressed by their experience. Visitors report

# WHERE DO RESIDENTS TAKE VISITORS?

SOURCE: MEET MINNEAPOLIS, 2016

LAKES & PARKS	SCULPTURE GARDEN		BEER
	FESTIVALS	MUSEUMS	
	BIKING		MOA
MUSIC	MINNEHAHA FALLS		
THEATERS	STONE ARCH BRIDGE		
	NEIGHBORHOODS		

a very high intent of visiting again and recommending Minneapolis to others as a destination.

It’s especially noteworthy that so many visitors seem happily *surprised* by their visit. Their expectations, after all, were quite low. Some didn’t anticipate an actual city here, expecting instead just a state with lakes, dairy farms and a large shopping center. (We brand ourselves as “Minnesota” after all.)

The clear message is that our metro region lacks identity as an urban place. Moreover, people don’t know much about us or have a misleading image of us: cold and

rural, with a large mall. We, ourselves, often aid and abet this perception by referring to our metropolitan city as a state and feeling obliged to be self-deprecating.

“I loved being a tourist here, riding bikes and going to brewpubs,” said Danielle Steer, a young woman who moved here in 2014 from Monterey, California. “But when I met people and told them where I came from, they scolded me. ‘Why would you ever move here!’ they said.”

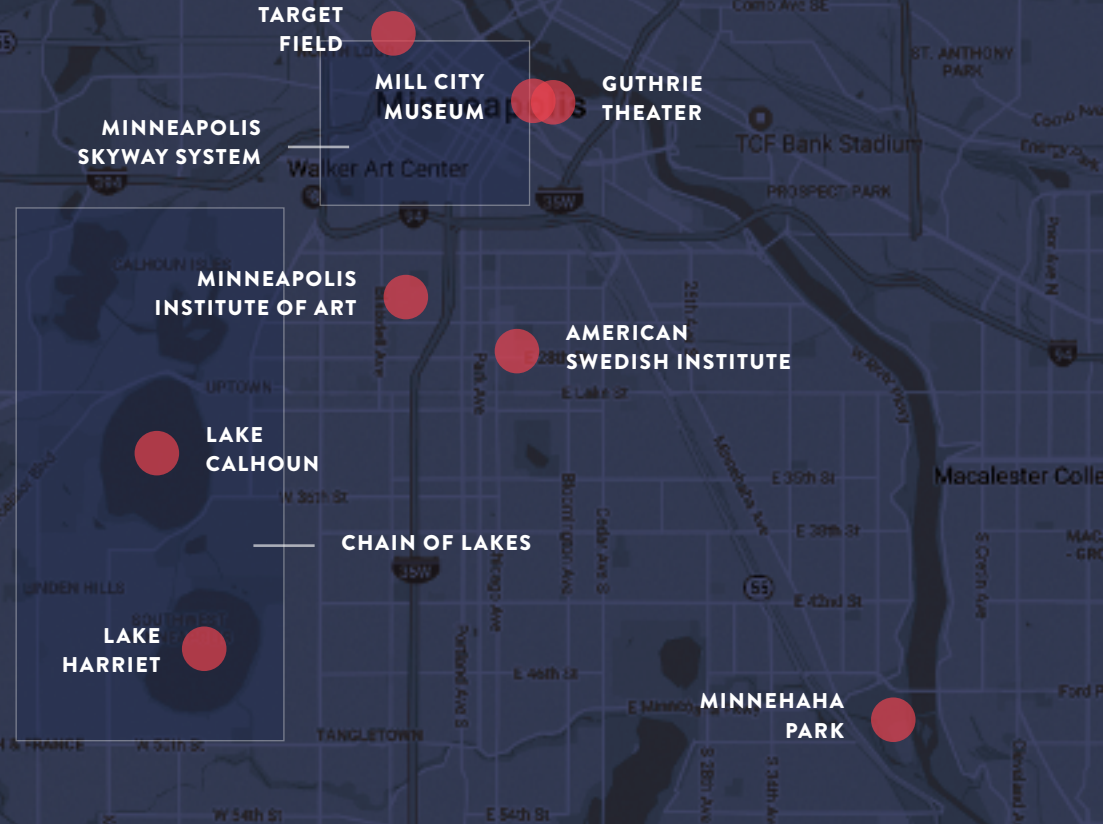
In that sense, we’re often our own worst enemies when it comes to promoting our metro area as an attractive choice for visitors – and a potential home for newcomers.

# MINNEAPOLIS' TOP 10

## POPULAR EVENTS

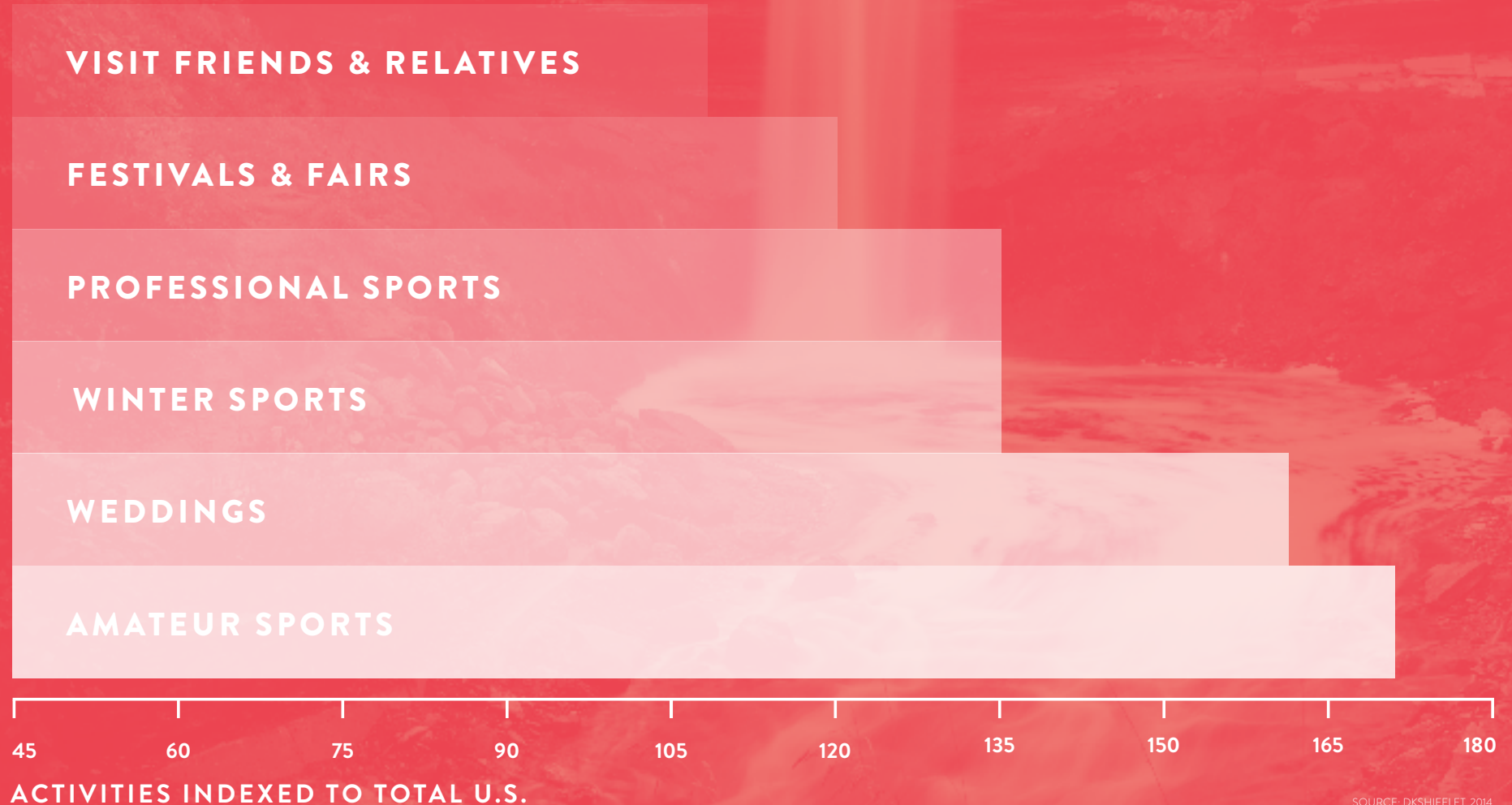
TWIN CITIES PRIDE:	400,000
UPTOWN ART FAIR:	375,000
STONE ARCH BRIDGE FESTIVAL:	80,000
POWDERHORN ART FAIR:	70,000
OPEN STREETS MINNEAPOLIS:	65,000
MINNEAPOLIS RED, WHITE AND BOOM!:	60,000
FRINGE FESTIVAL:	50,000
MAY DAY PARADE:	50,000
INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL:	40,000
ART-A-WHIRL:	30,000

## ATTRACTIONS





# VISITOR ACTIVITIES



SOURCE: DKSHIFFLET, 2014

# WHAT VISITORS SAY ABOUT US

Meet Minneapolis convened focus groups in three Midwestern cities to discover how visitors perceive us.

## FARGO

Looking for an urban experience. Minneapolis is good for partying and letting your hair down. Driving is tough. Wayfinding is a problem. Hard to find new “in places” and “cool shops.” Confusing skyways. Safety concerns. Homeless. Panhandling. Downtown not kid friendly. Big on sports, not so much on cultural attractions. Sometimes hard to find hotel rooms, especially at affordable rates. Downtown shopping is limited. Go to Albertville and Mall of America instead. LRT is great, but don’t always feel safe. Descriptive words that come to

mind about Minneapolis: green, artsy, cosmopolitan, heavy traffic, Mall of America, expensive parking, fun, exciting.

## DES MOINES

Minneapolis is easy to get to. Rivals Kansas City. Liberal, young, with a hip vibe. Expensive to stay downtown. Not kid friendly. Sports a bigger attraction than culture. Don’t know how to find hip places, craft beer. Need better signage and transit. Lots of unknowns about Minneapolis. Marketing, if there is any, doesn’t break through to Des Moines. Don’t know about museums, theaters or live music. Should have tour packages and city passes like Chicago and St. Louis. Chicago has so many things to do in such close proximity. By comparison, Minneapolis seems eclectic and outdoorsy. What’s missing? Entertainment district, music festivals, year-round farmers market, history tours, double-decker buses, theme parks, transit that connects attractions to other attractions.

## CHICAGO

What comes to mind in Minneapolis? Cold, lakes, nature, Mall of America, corporate headquarters, relaxed, good dining, pro sports. No real reason to go there except for family and friends. No awareness of what to do there. Biking and walking, maybe. Not impressed with arts and culture; Chicago has those. Feels comfortable but boring. Feels greener than Chicago,

friendlier, more liberal, more small-town, slower, quieter, less expensive. Rate Minneapolis a bit higher as a destination than Indianapolis, Kansas City, St. Louis or Milwaukee. People embrace winter. Museums, parks, music, theater and tap beer don’t hold much interest. Can do those things at home. Nothing unique about downtown. Minneapolis and St. Paul are considered one city. Time it takes to drive up there from Chicago is probably not worth it. Milwaukee is much closer. Has fun neighborhood festivals. Suggestions: package tours, advertising, putting a positive spin on winter.





# WHAT'S OUR IMAGE?

If the goal is to improve our appeal as a travel destination, it's essential to analyze our image. That image varies. People who have never been here tend not to think of us at all, and when they do, they think poorly of us: *cold, remote, Midwestern and boring* – with a large mall. “Diet Canada” is how one Chicagoan described Minneapolis. “Just a place to change planes,” said another.

Those who have been here, however, are often surprised and impressed – seasoned travelers a bit less impressed than those from nearby states. When asked to evaluate our attributes, three-quarters of travelers view us as friendly and down-to-earth. Two-thirds cite cleanliness. There's somewhat less mention of beauty, safety, culture, shopping, fun and “lots to do.” We score lower on sophisticated, creative, artistic, easy to get around, natural, green, vibrant, unique and innovative. We score lowest on fast-paced and hip.

Lack of awareness seems a huge problem. When asked to think of cities for leisure travel in a 2012 Meet

## WHEN YOU THINK OF MINNEAPOLIS, WHAT WORDS COME TO MIND? FROM NON-VISITORS



SOURCE: MEET MINNEAPOLIS, 2016

Minneapolis study, only three percent of U.S. travelers mentioned Minneapolis. (New York, Las Vegas and Orlando scored highest.) St. Louis, Denver, Kansas City, Milwaukee and Indianapolis scored similarly to Minneapolis.

“The biggest challenge we have is lack of awareness about our natural and built environment,” said Bob Lux,

principal of the development firm Alatus LLC and chair of Meet Minneapolis' board of directors. “People have favorable impressions of places like San Diego and Denver. But we have experiences that they can't come close to, like being smack in the middle of the city and walking around Lake Calhoun or Lake Harriet. That's unique! But people don't know about it.”



# IMPRESSIONS

FROM RECENT VISITORS

CULTURAL

FOODIE FRIENDLY

FRIENDLY

BEAUTIFUL

LOTS TO DO

FUN

GOOD HOTELS

GOOD RESTAURANTS

"YOUNG MILLENNIAL,  
LIBERAL VIBE"



SOURCE: MEET MINNEAPOLIS, 2016

# WHAT'S OUR IDENTITY?

We have an identity problem.

Prospective visitors to Atlanta and its suburbs generally say they're going to Atlanta. Ditto for Chicago, Seattle or Boston. Those travelers don't say they're going to Georgia or Illinois or Washington state or Massachusetts.

But travelers headed to our metropolitan community – the nation's 16th largest – often say they're going to Minnesota. In fact, *we ourselves* often describe our hometown as Minnesota. Who can blame us? Our sports teams are called Minnesota; our symphony orchestra is called Minnesota. Our TV stations promote their newscasts as "Minnesota's own" and "Minnesota's news leader." The *StarTribune* recently changed the name of its "metro" section to "Minnesota." The 2018 Super Bowl and the 2019 Final Four are branded as happening in "Minnesota."

The problem, of course, is that many travelers fail to understand that we're actually a city of 3.5 million people,



not just an expanse of frozen lakes and dairy farms, with a giant mall.

This lack of identity as a city hurts our ability to compete for young, talented, urban-oriented workers, and it misleads potential visitors to assume that we're a rural place with rustic charms and not much going on.

Our lack of urban identity offers an extra barrier to overcome as Minneapolis tries to raise its tourism profile.

# DIVERSE PERCEPTIONS

## DO VISITORS OF COLOR SEE MINNEAPOLIS DIFFERENTLY THAN OTHER VISITORS?

Visitors of color quickly recognize the Eurocentric monoculture that has dominated Minneapolis and its surrounding communities for 150 years and persists despite demographic trends projected to push the metro's minority population beyond 40 percent by midcentury. Any planning document aimed at 2030 and beyond, including this one, would be foolish not to take this trend into account. Clearly, market forces are gradually moving our community in a more cosmopolitan direction. Still, astute planning recognizes the advantages of also employing public policy to anticipate changes in the tastes and attitudes of a new and more diverse range of tourists and prospective residents.

Based on interviews with African-American, East African-American and Hispanic residents of Minneapolis, tourists of color tend to place more emphasis on ethnic festivals, public safety, diversity of restaurants and shops, walkable streets and the development of cultural corridors.

## WHAT DO RESIDENTS OF COLOR SAY THE CITY NEEDS?

I do take some people to Somali malls and mosques in the past, particularly, other Somalis that live in other states love to go Somali malls when they come here. Cultural festivals in the summer are great ways to spend time with others.

More eating places by the river. Very few things that call out to my culture. No soul food restaurants.

I think better ways to see downtown and communities' interactions from Latino, Hmong, and Somalis etc. Now we are separated, but it would be nice to have common place for everyone in the community.

Definitely the Lake Street corridor. It is incredibly diverse. We have a beautiful University, the U of M biking trails, Minnehaha Falls, Streets that are bike-friendly, canoeing on the lakes. We also have a convention center, but we have communities that offer food from different parts of the world. I bring them to Mercado Central, Global Market, and the Mall of America. Also our new stadiums. The soccer stadium will be a big plus.

## WHERE DO RESIDENTS OF COLOR TAKE VISITORS?





# WHAT TRAVEL WRITERS SAY ABOUT US

## IMPRESSED BY

Arts, culture, friendliness, culinary scene, outdoor activity.

## LESS IMPRESSED BY

Nature-city mix, sophistication, street life (unsafe perception), beauty, parks, lakes, Mississippi River, shopping, public transit.

## BIGGEST CHALLENGES

Awareness, ordinariness, cold, winter, remoteness; lack of marketing, identity, attractions, sophistication.





---

# WHAT MEETING PLANNERS THINK OF US

## TOP RATED

Vancouver, British Columbia, San Diego, Toronto, San Antonio, Austin, Seattle, Montreal, Boston (on a scale of 100, all rated between 50 and 75).

## OUR RATING

35 (top third, along with Pittsburgh, Denver and Washington, D.C.)

## WHY?

Minneapolis is seen as a niche destination, well liked by clients who are familiar with the city, but rated average by those who haven't done business here.

## HOW COULD MINNEAPOLIS IMPROVE?

Advertising and marketing to make meeting planners aware of all that Minneapolis offers. Also mentioned: a convention hotel, lower prices and (facetiously) better weather.



# STRENGTHS

- Juxtaposition of natural beauty (lakes, streams, scenic wetlands, parks and trails) and cultural sophistication (theater, music, art, design, dance and cuisine).
- An active, healthy population that participates year-round in biking, cross-county skiing, hiking, sailing, kayaking, canoeing, fishing and other activities.
- A vibrant sports scene with major league teams in the NFL, MLB, NBA, NHL, WNBA and MLS, plus big-time college and small-college sports.
- An active music and club scene.
- A growing reputation for restaurants and brewpubs.
- A major airport with direct flights to 133 U.S. cities and 29 international destinations.
- A reputation for friendliness and helpfulness (sometimes called “Minnesota nice”).
- Relatively easy access to activities, sometimes called “more to life,” meaning that more can be done in a day than in most other cities.
- Affordability. It’s a relative asset, but compared with many of the hottest markets, Minneapolis’ hotel rooms, restaurant meals, theater and concert tickets and other tourist essentials are reasonably priced.
- Ability to embrace long, cold winters.

LAKES

SHOPPING

OUTDOOR  
ACTIVITIES

ARTS AND  
CULTURE

ACCESSIBILITY

FRIENDLY

BEAUTY

SOPHISTICATED

CULINARY SCENE

# CHALLENGES

- Lack of awareness of attractions in Minneapolis and the region.
- Insufficient marketing campaign and budget to improve awareness.
- Confusion about our name, brand and identity.
- Lack of an iconic attraction, festival or local cuisine.
- Overcoming negative reputation of cold, remote, boring and rustic.
- Poor signage and other wayfinding systems on freeways, streets, sidewalks, skyways and bike trails.
- Limited transportation options within the metro area, especially transit.
- Perceived lack of safety on downtown sidewalks.
- Lack of greening and other “walkability” features on downtown sidewalks.
- Lack of grooming along freeways and at entrance ramps to downtown.
- Dearth of retail shopping downtown.
- Lack of children's activities downtown.
- Structural problems in working together regionally to address tourism problems.
- Long, cold winters.





**“EVERYTHING WE DO TO MAKE  
OURSELVES ATTRACTIVE TO VISITORS,  
WE GET TO ENJOY OURSELVES.”**

**—MAYOR BETSY HODGES MINNEAPOLIS**



## CHAPTER 4

# SAYING “YES” TO TOURISM

What’s in it for us? That’s a question commonly asked whenever change is suggested. Why should Minneapolis become a bigger tourist destination? Aren’t our roads, parks and restaurants crowded enough already? Aren’t we fine just the way we are? Isn’t it folly to think that a rather remote place like ours, with a harsh climate like ours, can become popular with tourists? Even if it were possible, what would we gain? What’s in it for us?

Quite a lot, actually. And maybe we don’t have a choice about raising our visitor profile if we want to grow and prosper in the decades ahead.

First, a dose of perspective: Even if a tourism plan succeeds, Minneapolis is a unique destination, a

different kind of place from many of the beach-y or otherwise touristy destinations many people think of when they travel. There won’t be blocks and blocks of T-shirt shops and trinket stores. A bit more traffic? Maybe. But also more people walking, biking and riding transit. A bustling, thriving city is a better draw for visitors and a better fit for residents, too. We have plenty of space for more activity.

As for suggestions that our ambitions are far-fetched, consider Reykjavik. A decade ago, no one could have imagined Iceland’s capital as one of Europe’s most popular destinations. Tourists – especially well-heeled ones – are looking for offbeat places. Our off-the-path place should join the list.

What’s the upside of turning a friendlier face to travelers?

- A city that’s more attractive and compelling to visitors also rewards those who get to live in it every day. “Happy tourists means happy residents,” said Bob Lux, principal of the development firm Alatus LLC. “They’re doing some of the same things – going to parks, theaters, walking the streets. There’s a direct relationship between the hospitality industry and residents.”
- Tourism is good for the economy and taxpayers. Additional sales and property tax revenues generated by visitors and the hospitality industry will keep taxes lower for residents and local businesses.

- An expanded hospitality industry will bring entry-level jobs to those who need them most and offer training and career opportunities to thousands of Minnesotans stuck on the bottom rung of the socio-economic ladder. The yawning gap between poor minorities and affluent whites is, perhaps, the metro's most vexing problem – and its greatest competitive disadvantage. If managed correctly, tourism will help mitigate the region's disparities.
- Even if every young adult in the metro were trained and ready for the job market, the metro region would still face a significant labor shortage in the 2020s. That's why a continuing flow of immigrants is important. More than that, it's why the metro area must begin to draw significantly more domestic newcomers from states beyond the Upper Midwest. Tourism is perhaps the best way to introduce our city to prospective talent.

Greater MSP, the region's public/private economic development agency, recognizes the linkage. "Tourism complements our efforts to retain and attract talent, and to encourage investment," said Peter Forsch, the agency's vice president for strategic partnerships. "The more people we get here to see us, the greater our opportunities become."

Forsch's "Make It. MSP." movement emphasizes attracting and retaining young professionals. The program has five goals: to welcome newcomers and

improve social inclusion, to support innovative people, to connect people to the community, to connect people to employers and to close near-term talent gaps – especially racial gaps.

Indeed, the movement has a special focus on attracting and keeping young professionals of color, 60 percent of whom say they consider Minneapolis a temporary stop on the way to someplace else.

While young professionals of all races rate Minneapolis high on amenities and job opportunities, they complain about what they see as an insular and closed culture. "It's the other side of Minnesota Nice," said one newcomer, who echoed a common complaint: a lack of friends. "Minnesotans are happy to give you directions, except to their homes."

Christa Nelson, who recruits employees for HealthPartners, sees all of this up close. Her company once recruited regionally; now, it must go national to get the talent it needs, selling not just the attributes of the company but of Minneapolis. "People are as interested in the lifestyle as they are in the job," she said.

Peter Callaghan, writing in Minnpost.com in October 2016, summarized the dilemma with this headline: "How 'Minnesota Nice' Could Become a Serious Economic Problem for the Twin Cities."

# AN ICELANDIC LESSON FOR MINNEAPOLIS

Anyone skeptical of Minneapolis' potential for tourism should consider Reykjavik. A decade ago, Iceland's capital – indeed the whole country – was off the international travel map, stuck in a far corner of the North Sea, out of sight, out of mind.

Now, it's one of Europe's hottest destinations. How did it happen?

The short answer is that Iceland rallied to take advantage of two catastrophic events. In 2008, the tiny country's three largest banks failed, sending the economy – and the value of the currency – into a tailspin. Then, in 2010, a massive volcanic eruption further complicated Icelandic life. Both events moved the country toward desperation, drawing international media attention the likes of which Iceland had never seen.

To take advantage of the moment, the country (population 330,000) turned defense into offense. It mounted a unified public/private tourism campaign, hiring an exceptionally creative London-based marketing firm. Icelandic officials, citing an old Nordic proverb – “Keen is the eye of the guest” – understood the importance of letting outsiders guide the effort. Non-natives would see more clearly the nation’s assets and flaws as a tourist destination.

Thanks largely to the British marketing effort, Iceland was quite suddenly no longer cold, remote and boring in the minds of potential visitors, but warm-hearted, exotic and enchanting, with a primal landscape that evoked the mysteries of its Viking heritage, paired with its newly-found excellence in art, music and cuisine. It was the blend of nature, adventure and an unassuming sophistication that charmed a new wave of mostly upscale visitors.

The “personal touch” was featured. The prime minister flipped pancakes for tourists at his house and led nature hikes. Ordinary Icelanders volunteered as guides. Celebrities, including Bjork, Eric Clapton and Yoko Ono, got involved. Social media was a huge force, pushing out 22 million testimonials.

The airline industry played an important role, too. Icelandair had long used Reykjavik as a mid-Atlantic hub to reshuffle passengers headed to various points in Europe and North America. Now, it blended that strategy

with packaged incentives inviting passengers to stay over in Iceland for up to a week without paying a penalty on airfare.

The results were astounding. After several stagnant and declining years, the visitor flow surged by 17 percent in 2011, then, starting in 2012, grew by at least 30 percent every year for four straight years, to the point that native Icelanders began to complain about too much success too fast. By 2016, tourism had overtaken fishing and aluminum as the nation’s top industry, adding \$3.2 billion a year to the economy.

The parallels to Minneapolis aren’t perfect. We lack the desperation, the cohesive public/private agility and, at least for now, the extraordinary marketing campaign needed to approach Iceland’s success. What we share with pre-2010 Iceland, however, is the potential to become a surprise destination, an off-the-beaten path discovery, an unconventional, far-north counterpoint to the orthodox American tourist spot. We may not have quite the haunting landscape of Iceland, but we do have the unusual contrast between the natural and the cultural, the outdoors and the arts, and we have the same sort of shy, unassuming sophistication that Icelanders seem to have perfected.



# 2030 GOALS



**ATTRACT 50 MILLION VISITORS**  
to the metro area annually

---



**ADOPT A PLACE-MAKING PLAN**  
to drive tourism priorities & investments

---



**LAUNCH A METRO-WIDE BRANDING  
AND MARKETING CAMPAIGN**  
with an annual spend of \$10 million

---



**ACCENTUATE WINTER TOURISM**  
to attract 11 million visitors

---



**BUILD AN ICONIC VISITOR CENTER**  
on downtown's central riverfront

---



**INCREASE HOSPITALITY JOBS**  
to 40,000

---



**IMPLEMENT UNIFIED PROGRAMS**  
for transportation, wayfinding and information

---



**IDENTIFY & SECURE RESOURCES**  
to implement the tourism master plan



## CHAPTER 5

# EIGHT BIG INITIATIVES FOR 2030

Imagine yourself as a first-time visitor to your own city. What are your impressions? What are you seeing, hearing, feeling, tasting? Are you finding your way around? Are you seeing and doing interesting things? What photos are you snapping? What memories are you storing away? How eager are you to return?

To see your city through the eyes of a newcomer, to pose as a stranger in familiar surroundings, these are probably the most important prerequisites to crafting a successful tourism master plan. Trouble is, no two people see their city in exactly the same way. In that sense, there are more than 3 million potential self-evaluations of Minneapolis and its surrounding communities – and many, many potential suggestions for improving Minneapolis' appeal to visitors.

The process employed by this initiative (as outlined in Chapter 2) faithfully reflects a blend of assessments and thoughtful suggestions from experts, civic leaders, visitors and a wide variety of travel-savvy residents. Rather than a “monumental” idea (a new version of the St. Louis arch, for example), participants recommended sharpening the advantages Minneapolis already enjoys while shoring up its deficits.

Not keeping the city a secret emerged as a particularly popular fix. Emphasizing its blend of nature and urban sophistication was another central theme. Giving tourists a clearer picture of what to do and how to find their way around was deemed important, as was a greater emphasis on the riverfront, wintertime activities, cultural

diversity, transportation options and the downtown walking experience.

In some aspects, this plan's scope is metro-wide. It's plain that visitors see our destination not just as Minneapolis or Saint Paul or a few of their suburbs, but as a single, unified community. On the other hand, Meet Minneapolis is obliged primarily to promote activities in the central city, and that's where much of this plan's focus lies.

**THIS PLAN ESTABLISHES EIGHT INITIATIVES FOR 2030. HERE'S A CLOSER LOOK:**



## **1 ATTRACT 50 MILLION VISITORS TO THE METRO AREA ANNUALLY BY 2030**

- That's up from **32 million visitors in 2015**.
- As part of that increase, **expand winter tourism** (January–March) from 6 million to 11 million visitors by 2030.
- Concentrate on drawing more visitors **from beyond the Upper Midwest, younger visitors, and more visitors of color**.
- Leverage visitor momentum created by hosting the **2018 Super Bowl and the 2019 Final Four**.

Placing a greater emphasis on winter visitors should help boost metro tourism overall. Iceland's example shows that well-heeled travelers are looking for off-the-beaten-path alternatives and exotic experiences. Few other U.S. cities can offer – in close proximity – fine dining, sophisticated arts and culture, and dog-sledding, cross-country skiing or, in summer, extensive bicycle touring.

It's good also to remember that these initiatives aren't aimed only at filling hotels and restaurants but are a way to **catalyze economic growth, sharpen competitiveness, and ameliorate socio-economic disparities**.



## **2 LAUNCH A METRO-WIDE BRANDING AND MARKETING CAMPAIGN**

- Establish Minneapolis and its surrounding communities nationally and internationally as an inviting destination noted for a blend of **urban sophistication, natural beauty and outdoor activity**.

- Produce an aggressive and creative **destination awareness** initiative, investing \$10 million annually by 2030 that leverages the resources, talents and collaborative skills of the broader metro community in both its public and private sectors.
- Develop **a metropolitan brand** that allows individual cities to retain their singular identities.
- Employ the Metro Tourism Committee as the **collaborative vehicle** for the initiative.
- Elevate the metro area to the **"Top 10"** among high-quality, visitor-experience destinations by 2030.
- Launch a **signature event** for the metro region.
- **Increase tourists' awareness** of all there is to do in Minneapolis: arts and culture, biking, craft beer taprooms, award-winning cuisine, food and festivals in our cultural communities, events across the 12 months of the year, the four seasons, beautiful parks and lakes, outdoor activities, and sports – both amateur and professional.
- Increase awareness of Minneapolis as a brand and a destination at **Minneapolis–St. Paul International Airport**.

If ever there was a time for a city to be bashful about promoting its assets, this isn't it. The digital age has

heightened the competition among cities trying to land talent, investment and attention – including the attention of tourists. As this report’s research clearly shows, Minneapolis is punching well below its weight in visitor awareness. As a tourism destination, it’s pretty much off the map – and some of those who are aware of the city harbor negative views about it.

An aggressive and creative marketing and branding campaign is clearly in order; one that spends advertising money at levels similar to those of our metro competitors and one that emphasizes this area’s rare combination of cultural attractions and active outdoor activities.

It’s important for visitors to know that they can spend the day kayaking, bicycling or cross-country skiing, then dine at a gourmet restaurant, attend the theater or a symphony concert and end the day at a brewpub – all within a few hours and within a few miles of their hotels.

It’s important also that this ad campaign and branding exercise labels our hometown not just as a state but also a metropolitan place. And that it, while identifying our unified destination, respects the individual identities of Minneapolis, Saint Paul and other metro cities.





### 3 BUILD AN ICONIC VISITORS CENTER ON DOWNTOWN'S CENTRAL RIVERFRONT

- **Activate the Mississippi River** as the heart of Minneapolis' tourism experience.
- Use public and private investment **to integrate the riverfront into the city** with attractive green streetscapes, public art installations, markers and a gateway monument.
- **Animate the riverfront** with festivals, activities and events.
- **Coordinate** these efforts with the activities of Saint Paul and other metro cities along the Mississippi.

As industry retreated from the central riverfront, Minneapolis, over the past several decades, repurposed the area for recreation, conservation, residences, offices and cultural attractions. Still, for many visitors, the



Mississippi River remains elusive. Even many who find it complain that there's little to do or learn once they get there.

A visitors center, located perhaps on the site of the now-shuttered lock and dam headquarters, would provide a fresh focal point for the river and an appropriate starting place for tourists visiting the region.

As important, perhaps, are signs and tree-lined walkways needed to integrate the riverfront into the rest of the downtown grid. Although many native Minnesotans take the river for granted, thousands of visitors see Minneapolis as lying near the headwaters of one of the world's greatest and most famous waterways. They expect beauty, activity and water traffic. We should give it to them.



## 4 IMPLEMENT A UNIFIED TRANSPORTATION, WAYFINDING AND INFORMATION PROGRAM FOR MINNEAPOLIS

- Keeping visitors in mind, design, produce and maintain a legible and consistent **system of signs** at the airport; along freeways, streets and sidewalks; on bike trails and in skyways that provides clear directions toward major city destinations. Those include downtown; major cultural, sports, entertainment and shopping attractions; parks and notable districts.
- Designate districts (North Loop, East Town, Loring Park, Old St. Anthony, Eat Street, Camden, Dinkytown, Uptown, Midtown, etc.) that help visitors and residents navigate the city.
- Commission a professional consulting firm to undertake the **wayfinding research and design**; establish an oversight committee.
- Improve pedestrian and roadway navigation at **Minneapolis–St. Paul International Airport**.
- Replace the “Free Ride” buses on Nicollet Mall with a **system of circulators** that connect the downtown core to adjacent districts. These circulators may include streetcars and water taxis.
- Support efforts to **expand the light rail and rapid bus systems** as well as sustain the core transit network that ties the metro region together.
- **Leverage new technologies** in both wayfinding and transportation to include digital mapping and digitally-based ride-sharing. Improve the taxi and skyway systems.

- Work with partners to establish or enhance a reliable, real-time digital **calendar of events**, listings, openings and other bits of information helpful to visitors.

One consistent complaint among visitors is their frustration at finding things to do and finding their way around. Indeed, there is no single, reliable, agreed-upon digital resource to offer visitors complete and curated choices on hotels, restaurants, theater tickets, bike rentals, jazz performances, art shows, breweries, skyway directions, etc.

Likewise, there is no common-sense, uniform system of signs directing visitors to those choices. Freeway signs offer such insights as “West 62” and “North 35W”, (meaningless to visitors) without mentioning downtown Minneapolis, for example. All signs – for drivers, sidewalk pedestrians, skyway pedestrians and cyclists – should be recast with visitors in mind.

Meanwhile, the city should designate broad districts (Midtown, Uptown, North Loop, etc.) as a special consideration for visitors. (These are not necessarily designated neighborhoods; nobody will search out detailed names like “Nicollet Island/East Bank” or “Cedar-Isles-Dean.”)

Supporting expansion of the transit system is a no-brainer. Especially helpful to tourism would be a more attractive downtown circulator that puts our best foot forward as a mode of travel for tourists.



## 5 ADOPT A COMPREHENSIVE PLACE-MAKING PLAN TO DRIVE MINNEAPOLIS' TOURISM PRIORITIES AND INVESTMENTS

- Build and maintain a green, high-quality, and consistently-compelling **walking experience** along the sidewalks of downtown Minneapolis.
- With New York's High Line in mind, develop a **signature urban walkway** from the Sculpture Garden, down Nicollet Mall, to the riverfront.
- Encourage the expansion of **shopping** and other retail opportunities at street level.
- Develop child-friendly and **family-oriented** activities downtown and along the riverfront.
- Emphasize the importance of safety and the **perception of safety** on downtown sidewalks.

- Work with public and private partners to **alleviate homelessness** and panhandling on downtown sidewalks.
- Develop **"cultural corridors"** along East Lake Street, West Broadway, East Franklin Avenue and other appropriate thoroughfares.
- Create a tourism infrastructure **coordinating entity** to align the city's built and natural environments and to curate an authentic, distinctive and compelling visitor experience.
- Work with MnDOT and other partners to beautify and maintain **freeway entry points** to downtown, the University of Minnesota and other key districts.
- Advocate for attractive, clearly defined vertical connections that join **sidewalks to skyways**.
- Ensure that the **Minneapolis Convention Center** remains competitive and able to meet the evolving needs of meeting planners and customers.
- Encourage **hotel development** that generates new demand.

To sell "the sizzle, not the steak" is an old advertising admonition. And, indeed, atmospherics are important in the tourism trade. But a city must also live up to its hype. It has to deliver not just the anticipation of a delicious steak, but the steak itself. It has to build and maintain the brick-and-mortar infrastructure it takes to impress and entertain visitors.

That means paying attention to details large and small. Impressive stadiums, concert halls, museums, parks, hotels, restaurants and the like are imperatives. But when a visitor finds himself or herself in an untidy setting – a weedy parking lot or a patched and treeless sidewalk with empty storefronts – it detracts mightily from the overall experience.

Yes, a city like Minneapolis must be "authentic" in its approach to visitors. But there's no danger that the city will ever be mistaken for Disneyland – nor would we want to be. But we need to be sure that when we invite visitors over for a nice dinner and good conversation, we've cut the grass, picked up the dirty clothes on the living room floor and cleared away yesterday's dishes from the dining room table. As a competitive destination, attention to detail in our streetscapes and other surroundings makes a major impact on visitors. As Chicago's former mayor, Richard M. Daley, famously observed, "To be a world-class city you have to look like one."

That, in turn, requires a plan, a systematic and ongoing program to build and maintain not only the main features of a tourism infrastructure but the connective tissue that holds it together. To be a successful tourist city, every detail must be considered, from the time a visitor steps off an airplane or drives into the city limits to the time she departs. Successful tourism isn't just about the destination; it's about the total experience. It's about putting your best foot forward.



## 6 ACCENTUATE WINTER AS A NOVEL TOURISM ADVENTURE

- Reflect the area's contrasting "theater of seasons" as a way to boost **wintertime visitors** to 11 million by 2030, up from 6 million today.
- **Develop infrastructure** to support outdoor winter activities, including heated sidewalk cafes, winter outfitters, art installations and winter-themed street performances.
- **Create a signature event** that features outdoor active living, lights and ice sculptures.
- Emphasize **health and wellness** amid a connected network of lakes, parks and riverfront.

- Celebrate "hygge," the Nordic ethic of **wintertime coziness** – exemplified by roaring fireplaces, candlelit rooms, hot drinks, fuzzy socks and sweaters and conviviality among family and friends. Include "sauna," the healthful contrast of hot and cold, as part of the Nordic wintertime experience.
- Transform passive public spaces into **active locations** for skating, wall-climbing and other winter activities.

It's no surprise that winter is low season for travelers to Minneapolis. After all, broadcasters nationwide take delight in telling everyone as often as possible how frigid it is here. When strangers find out where we're from, their first comment is always about cold and snow – as if those are negative things! Well, it's hard to refute the wind-chill evidence. We do have cold, often snowy winters – so cold and snowy that they form a potential novelty for thousands of would-be visitors who've rarely experienced snow, never felt the ultimate briskness of a north wind on their cheeks, never truly appreciated the thrill, after an invigorating day of Nordic skiing, of cozying up to a roaring fire with a blanket, a hot drink and a loved one.

Winter may never outrank summer in these parts. But there's an upside that hasn't been tapped.





## 7 GROW AND EMPHASIZE HOSPITALITY JOBS AS IMPORTANT TO SOCIAL EQUITY AND THE METRO ECONOMY

- **Grow the number of hospitality jobs** in the metro area from 32,500 in 2016 to 40,000 by 2030.
- Establish regular **coordination** among the hospitality industry, the business and education communities and government representatives.
- Invest in programs **to increase the cultural diversity of the hospitality labor force** from entry level to the executive level.

It's important to **raise awareness** that these jobs represent an important entry point into the workforce for thousands of disadvantaged residents and their families, and that these jobs can put people on a

ladder to middle class, thus playing an important role in moving the metro region toward socio-economic equity.

That kind of progress isn't important just for disadvantaged people but for the metro region as a whole. We are **stronger competitors** when our socio-economic disparities are lessened, and when we can retain and attract the critically needed talent required to spur new investment and greater prosperity.



## 8 IDENTIFY AND SECURE ONGOING RESOURCES TO IMPLEMENT THE TOURISM MASTER PLAN

- **Meet Minneapolis** will undertake the task of planning, managing and advocating for the plan in collaboration with public and private partners.
- Institute a **tourism improvement district** and/or changes to the city lodging tax to fund the plan.

- Collaborate with a private fundraising partner to launch a **strategic funding initiative**.
- Forge other **partnerships** with the business community, nonprofit partners, and federal, state and local governments in Minneapolis and across the metro area to accomplish the plan's goals and initiatives.

Meet Minneapolis is the logical entity to pursue planning, managing, fundraising and advocating for the tourism master plan.







**Minneapolis**  
City by Nature

**Meet Minneapolis**  
Convention & Visitors Association

Meet Minneapolis is a private, not-for-profit, member-based association. It actively promotes and sells the Minneapolis area as a destination for conventions and meetings, works to maximize the visitor experience and markets the city as a desirable tourist destination to maximize the economic benefit to the greater Minneapolis area. Meet Minneapolis is accredited by the Destination Marketing Accreditation Program (DMAP) of the Destination Marketing Association International.

Special thanks to Kevin Hanstad, Director of Market Research & Public Policy for Meet Minneapolis, for leading the development of the tourism master plan. Also, thank you to the project team, including Melvin Tennant, Jeff Johnson, Bill Deef, Kjersti Monson and Matt Laible. Thanks to John Kaatz for his input throughout the process. Thanks to Steve Berg, for drafting the plan document. Thank you to Carmichael Lynch Relate for the design and production of the Destination Transformation 2030 document and presentation.