

ASSESSMENT AND SUGGESTIONS

Notes:

Although the restaurant (below left) needs the planters planted, this type of setting draws people in. The umbrellas add tremendous appeal. The shortage of seating areas in Waterton is obvious when you watch people with ice cream looking for a place to sit. We saw this occur (top, right) nearly every day we spent in Waterton (three weeks). Even across the street (below right) there is a shortage of seating areas.

This particular spot would be an ideal place for a plaza area (as shown on pages 17 and 18). It would also provide the necessary seating, in such short supply.

Overall, Waterton is stunningly beautiful and there is a good mix of retail shops and dining. The missing ingredient was beautification and places for guests to hang out and gather. With the creation of a couple of plaza areas, the village would become a magnet for family reunions, weddings, business retreats, club events, and would provide a place for live entertainment and artists in action.



Real Men Don't Ask for Directions (The Rule of Wayfinding)

Suggestion:

Directional signs help visitors navigate your area, telling them what attractions and amenities are available and where to find them. The importance of easy-to-follow wayfinding can not be overemphasized. If visitors can not find what they are looking for, they will simply head down the road.

Make sure you “connect the dots” between signs and attractions.

It is best to list no more than five items on wayfinding signs. Any more information and they will be ignored, because they can not read in passing.

Waterton should develop and implement a decorative pedestrian sign plan and program.



While in Waterton, we would have never located the beautiful falls had it not been for a local worker's direction. Wayfinding signs, like the ones (top, right), would be more than sufficient for Waterton. In this instance, they were created for Leavenworth, Washington - a Bavarian theme town. In Waterton they should be decorative and fit the lodge-style feel of the community. Signs like those created for Leavenworth are made from a recycled plastic, but look and feel like sandblasted wood, fitting the overall ambiance of the area, yet lasting far longer than wood.



These signs in Nakusp, BC (bottom, right) are not pedestrian-friendly. Many shops, not on the main drag, are easily missed by visitors.



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Suggestion:

The pizza restaurant (right) was a recommended place to eat, but when is it open? There were no signs. Put the kiosk to work, and let visitors know when to come back! In many cases, we had a very difficult time trying to figure out which businesses were still closed for the season, were permanently closed, or were simply closed for the day.

Merchants should get together and eliminate the use of “CLOSED” signs, replacing them with signs that would say when they will be open. This inexpensive idea will increase retail sales and invites visitors back to a time when you are open. A perfect example of this was during our early June arrival to Waterton. We drove to the Prince of Wales Hotel, but posted on the doors were signs simply stating “Closed.” We assumed it had gone out of business and was permanently closed, because the doors were chained shut, pillars needed paint and there were other signs of disrepair.

We went to the visitor information center (across the street from the hotel) and they provided us with a piece of paper that listed lodging options in Waterton. Where the Prince of Wales hotel was listed it simply said “Closed.” Other lodging options said the same thing.

We asked numerous people in Waterton, “What happened to the Prince of Wales?” Everyone said it was simply closed for the season, yet we could not find a single person (we asked dozens) that knew when it opened. Sad situations like this could easily be avoided by using “Closed for the Season” signs with an opening date. Businesses closed for the day (or for a few hours), need to tell visitors their hours of operation.

It was shocking to see how busy Waterton was during the three weeks we were there in June, and yet only about half the businesses were open. We encountered businesses with insufficient staffing, still “in the process of opening for the season,” and we ran into many hit and miss situations for what time of day they were opening. There is simply no reason why Waterton can not host a strong six month season, like other resort-oriented towns throughout North America. In fact, the peak travel months for the baby boom generation (who account for 80 percent of all travel spending), happen to be April, May, June, September and October. Waterton is missing a golden opportunity by fully operating only during July and August. If only half the businesses are operating in June, they why should someone visit then? Most people will want to visit when all services are available.

What does this sign mean? (bottom, right) Keep all four wheels on the ground at least 90 percent of the time?



Wash rooms attract more than flies (The Rule of Visitor Amenities)

Suggestion:

Washrooms translate to spending. The most common reason travelers stop is to use the facilities, so be sure to provide washrooms where visitors can spend time and money. They can be surprisingly effective at bringing in customers, if they are located next to a gift shop, restaurant, or attraction. And businesses shouldn't say "No." They should tell people where they can find a washroom (bottom, right) And remember - if you allow people to use your facilities, they will most likely make a purchase. If you just send them away, chances are, you will lose a sale.

If you have washrooms (top, right), be sure to market them. It is best to place them in the "shopping district."



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Suggestion:

Develop 24-hour visitor information. Include brochure distribution. Place kiosks where visitors can spend money.

Visitors don't just travel during business hours. It is essential to provide visitor information around the clock. Location is also critical - you want visitors to find the information quickly and easily. Kiosks should be designed to fit the character of the town, weather-proof, maintained and stocked regularly.

A kiosk, modeled after the one shown, bottom left, would be a good fit in Waterton. It fits the mountain setting and can provide information on one side and brochure distribution on the other side. The Information Station (top and bottom, right) in Moses Lake, Washington, was built by volunteers and helps cross-sell to other area attractions and amenities. Ashland, Oregon installed a visitor information panel (bottom center) outside of its chamber offices.

Waterton should have two, three or even four kiosks in various locations, each cross-selling to other areas in Southwest Alberta, and vice versa.



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Suggestion:

Visitor information should be available at all visitor attractions. And each should cross-sell other attractions in the area. The more there is for visitors to do, the longer they will stay.

Visitor information is very conveniently located in Banff, as shown in all the photos on this page. They have developed portable visitor information kiosks to make them easily accessible.

It would be phenomenal, if Southwest Alberta had 40 or 50 similarly designed kiosks that informed visitors to immediate area sites and also cross-sold to other areas in the region. For instance, Waterton would be marketed throughout the region, and Waterton would market attractions outside the park as a reciprocal program. This area of Alberta has some amazing attractions, but currently few, if any, cross sell each other. The more you have to offer collectively, the further people will travel, the longer they will stay, and the more likely they are to come back for repeat visits to the region. You are also a lot more effective as one loud voice than a number of small independent voices.



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Suggestion #19:

Develop half a dozen visitor information kiosks to sell attractions in the park, activities and other areas in the region.

Offer information such as when and where can a visitor rent a boat. Telling them when they will be able to do an activity helps to bring them back. Visitor information does not always have to be in free-standing kiosks. The samples shown on this page are ideas to be considered.

The option (top right) has brochure holders on the door and next to the door of the visitor information center. A great place for information would be at public wash room locations (both lower photos).



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Suggestion:

The focus of the park information center is on the park - rules, regulations, stewardship and public safety. The focus is not on the local business community. We believe it should provide information for both. Workers there really did not seem to have any connection (we secret shopped them several times) with the village at all. The visitor information center in the village was closed most of the month of June. With no exterior information, visitors had to rely on the Park information office, which had little information for the village.

Add a brochure holder to this visitor information display (bottom, right) at Cameron Lake (top, right).

The business community needs a visitor information center, besides one in the park. It should include local lodging information, restaurants, unique shops, other attractions and activities in the area besides the park, plus some park info. The slip of paper (below) is what we received from the park info center. When inquiring about lodging in Waterton, we received some pretty poor information; but it was better than nothing. The business community needs to take a leadership role in marketing businesses in the village.



Waterton Lakes National Park-Accommodations List – 2007 *Shoulder Season Rates*

- 6 ASPEN VILLAGE INN: **\$109 - 188** plus GST and room tax. Phone: 859 – 2255
* High Season Rates for May long weekend \$154 - 270
- 8 BAYSHORE INN: **\$109 - 185** plus GST and room tax. Phone: 859 – 2211
*High Season Rates for May long weekend \$154 - 234
- 4 BEAR MOUNTAIN MOTEL: **\$7** plus GST and room tax. Phone: 859 - 2366
- 3 CRANDELL MOUNTAIN LODGE: **\$89 - 159** plus GST and room tax. Phone/Fax: 859-2288
- 2 KILMOREY LODGE: **\$123 - 240** plus GST and room tax. Phone: 859 - 2334
- 9 NORTHLAND LODGE: **\$75 - 149** plus GST and room tax. Phone: 859 - 2231 Fax: 859 – 2630
- 1 PRINCE OF WALES: **Not Open** plus GST and room tax. Phone: 859 - 2231 Fax: 859 - 2630
- 7 WATERTON LAKES LODGE: **\$114 - 174** Phone: 859 - 2150 Fax: 859 - 2229
- 7 WATERTON INTERNATIONAL HOSTEL: **Not Open**
- 5 WATERTON GLACIER SUITES: **\$174 - 274** plus GST. Phone: 859 - 2004



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Suggestion:

Another kiosk should be in the marina area.

The bulletin board (bottom left) should be changed to include visitor information with brochure distribution.

Make all the bulletin boards work for you - build more to provide plenty of information in strategic locations. We found it nearly impossible to get information about the region or even about the village, while in Waterton.

We saw, on several occasions, people seeing the gateway center (top, right) at the entrance to the park, assuming the park was closed. One time I followed three RV'ers who stopped here, got out, talked to each other and then left. At a pull off, west of the park, I stopped and spoke with them. They had assumed the park was closed for the season and were heading on up to Banff, even though they had planned on spending a couple of nights in Waterton.

Consider using the boarded up windows as signs that state "Park Open - Gateway ahead 500 meters." Better yet, could this be an information center?



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Suggestion:

This part of the marina would be an excellent location for visitor information (bottom, right). Just after this photo was taken, a woman slipped and fell due to the wet lawn clippings blown into the sidewalk area, instead of being blown into the lawn area. Maintenance folks should avoid doing this. It is also unsightly.

Another good location for visitor information would be the lawn area just west of Pat's bike rental shop. Most visitors pass here.

The entire Southwest Alberta region could see a tremendous increase in tourism spending, if there was a cooperative effort in developing:

- A region-wide wayfinding system for major attractions and amenities
- Visitor information kiosks each cross-selling other attractions and amenities in the region (there should be several in Waterton)
- Kiosks that include brochure distribution.



20/20 Signage Equals \$\$\$ (The rule of signs that sell)

Suggestion:

Use perpendicular “blade” signs for retail shops in the village shopping area. Make them decorative and consistent in height and size. Neither pedestrians nor drivers can see signs that are posted on the face of buildings unless they are across the street.

Perpendicular signs are easy to see and read, making it much easier for potential customers to see what businesses are there and what is offered. That translates to more sales. The photos on this page show some examples of blade signs in downtown retail districts. Clockwise from top right: Leavenworth, Washington; Nantucket, Massachusetts; Carmel, California; Banff, Alberta.

Blade signs do not have to be large or backlit, but should be consistent in overall design, height from the sidewalk, and in distance from the building facade.

We recommend that merchants work together to develop a sign system for downtown shopping districts, that could also include the use of sandwich boards, outdoor displays, and beautification. This will help unify the look and feel of the shopping district, and will also help develop a buying cooperative, where prices are reduced since the vendor will be providing materials and services for the entire business community.

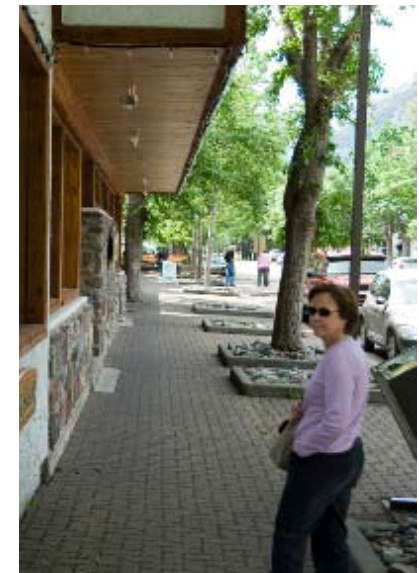


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Suggestion:

Can you tell what is in any of the shops on these streets? (top and bottom, right) Pedestrians walking down the street, as well as drivers going past, have no idea what stores are there. Perpendicular signs would change that, letting visitors know what is offered.

Always promote what it is you are selling first, then the name of the business. Grizzly Rick's Market (bottom left) saw sales increase dramatically when they added "Snacks • Sundries • Drinks" to their sign.



Other Notes on First Impressions

Notes:

The Waterton Lakes area and national park is truly a world-class destination in terms of scenic beauty. It easily rivals Banff and Glacier but is more intimate and relaxing.

We had no problem navigating the park (inside and out.) The directional signs, for the most part, is excellent.

The Prince of Wales Hotel is stunning and is absolutely an outstanding icon for the park. It was closed when we arrived, and we had no idea when or if it was going to open. Even workers in the village did not know when the hotel might be opening. Our first impression was that it was permanently closed. The front doors were chained closed and there was nothing stating that it was in business.

Add signs stating when the hotel will be open. Is there a restaurant at the Prince of Wales? Gift shop? Include them on the sign, to pull more visitors in.



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Note:

The Prince of Wales is Waterton's icon, much as the Banff Springs Hotel is for Banff. It could easily be a year-round destination. Will the owners invest in it?

purchase tickets for two, three or four people. Particularly foreigners who rely on credit cards for larger purchases. We are quite sure the cost of taking credit cards would be far less than requiring cash and then carrying less people on each tour.

Note:

The lake cruise looks like a terrific activity and (perhaps) an "anchor tenant" to the village and park. The clock is a great idea, but here is the challenge: the operator only takes cash, which probably reduces the amount of business by 50 percent. We spoke with dozens of visitors who simply do not carry the kind of cash needed to

Suggestion:

Add an arrow to the ticket office on the sign (below, right). Include brochure distribution here as well. The brochure for the tour is excellent and having it easily available would increase ridership.



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Suggestion:

Most of the lodging facilities in Waterton need to work on curb appeal:

- Keep weeds out of gardens, cracks in the sidewalk, and in planters
- Keep litter picked up
- Keep lawns mowed and tidy
- Add flowers - in gardens, planter boxes, hanging baskets.

Visitors will pay more to stay in a beautiful setting. Waterton is a world-class place and the businesses (here) need to look the part. The hotel shown here (bottom two photos) is in Pincher Creek and it looks like a much nicer place to stay, than the hotel shown to the right. Curb appeal can account for as much as 70 percent of sales at lodging facilities, restaurants, retail shops and golf courses. Visitors will almost always “judge the book by the cover.”



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Suggestion:

For all businesses in Waterton - never use "Closed" signs. Instead, tell the visitor when you will be open. It will keep visitors in the area longer and will entice them to come back.

It is great that Waterton has a movie theater. Is it open every day? Just seasonally? Include the days it is open on the sign.

Is Bear Spirits closed permanently? Open on weekends? Only July and August? At noon instead of 10 a.m.? Let customers know when you will be open - if you are still in business.

Suggestion:

Is the Waterton Heritage Center open at all? Any regular hours? Add the hours and days it is open to the sign.

Is the Heritage Centre an interpretive center or a museum, or is it an office for the organization?

The building and its location would be excellent Interpretive Center for Waterton.



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Notes:

Red Rock Canyon was a real treat. Had local workers not told us about it, we would have never visited this local gem.

The display (bottom right) is very good but was another almost-missed amenity in Waterton village.

Suggestion:

Washroom facilities? (top right) Guess again.

Add better signs. We thought the monument was the pavilion. We found this great interpretive center (of sorts) on our last day in Waterton - after staying in the community for nearly three weeks.



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Note:

What a great experience! A bear eating dandelions by the side of the road, buffalo in the paddock, and right on cue, these fawns were born the morning the Prince of Wales opened for the season. They were right in front of the hotel.

Walking into the Prince of Wales Hotel was awe inspiring. The staff is exceptionally friendly.

The people in Waterton are terrific hosts and do a good job of making visitors feel welcome and at home.



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Suggestion:

What a spectacular destination. It does not get more beautiful than this (right). Waterton really is a lesser-known “gem” that deserves far more recognition. One of the few shortcomings is that the business community needs to live up to the surroundings.

Think of Waterton as a mall, with all the merchants working together.

- Get consistent operating hours. Consider a “shared worker” program to cover for lunches, trips to the post office, etc.
- When is Waterton really “open?” Pick a date, then add a week on each end every year to gradually extend your season. June and September are probably the best months to visit, but are you open?
- Do not be open until you are ready, though. A poor experience will kill the hope of bringing customers back. You must deliver on the promise.
- Let visitors know when you will be open - get rid of the “closed” signs, and tell customers your hours.



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Suggestion:

There is no reason Waterton can not have a strong six month season (or longer) - if you want it. Whistler, B.C. is a year-round destination, even though it began as a ski destination. The summer months are now busier than the winter months, and much of the reason for that is the shopping, dining, events, gathering spaces, and beautification throughout Whistler (all three photos, this page.)

- Invest in the lodging properties so that you can extend your seasons and profitability. So that your accommodations are as much of a draw as the scenery. We visited six lodging facilities in Waterton and none of those we visited would rate (on a scale of one to five) better than a three, and most would rate a two, yet visitors would pay more for higher quality. Ninety-five percent of the accommodations in Whistler Resort rate four to five stars in terms of quality. People will travel to Whistler for the accommodations.

- Create and foster a beautification program. Mow the lawns; remove the weeds. Whistler spent millions of dollars in capital projects to entice visitors to “hang out” in the village, which translates to millions of dollars in retail sales and services.

- Create gathering places. There should be additional sidewalk dining, places for entertainment, additional seating areas, interpretive displays throughout the village, and pedestrian-oriented wayfinding to the lake-front walkways, waterfalls, village shops not located on the main streets.

