

# Creating Visitor Journey Maps for Historic Sites

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When people visit historic sites, they not only take a tour but they probably explore your website, buy tickets for the tour, shop in your store, and use the restroom. While the tour might be outstanding, the entire experience can be spoiled if the visitor couldn't find a parking spot, got soaked in a thunderstorm, was frustrated by a broken credit card machine, or encountered a dirty restroom. For most people, a visit to an historic site isn't just about the tour, but the whole experience from beginning to end. If one element goes awry, the entire visit can go bad—even if you had absolutely no control over it (like the weather).

To improve visitor satisfaction and increase attendance and impact, historic sites are now examining the entire visitor experience to be sure every part functions well and works seamlessly from beginning to end. One of the best ways to analyze and improve the experience is through a “journey map,” a diagram that lays out every step in the visitor experience from home to historic site to back home. It can help organize planning and evaluation; simplify understanding of complex processes; and easily show how different parts of the organization contribute to an excellent visitor experience. For the past two decades, hotels, airlines, and other customer-oriented businesses use this technique to generate higher satisfaction rates and build stronger relationships for increased profitability. Only recently have non-profit organizations adopted mapping as a method for analysis and planning.



Figure 1. A Visitor Journey Map lays out each step in the visitor's experience from home to historic site to home again.

In journey mapping, each step represents a “touchpoint” where a visitor makes a major decision or relies on the site for information (Figure 1). For example, driving to the site is a touchpoint because the visitor is following signs along the street. The county may have installed some of those signs and the site put up others, but the driver is using all them to figure out where to go.

While this flowchart provides a useful overview, journey mapping also involves analysis to identify areas for improvement. Each touchpoint is assessed to determine how much they help or hinder the visitor experience. For example, are directional signs missing or inaccurate? Are they along the roads most used by visitors? Can they be read at night? Are they lost in a clutter of other signs? Is a directional arrow sufficient or does it need to include distance? What are the ideal locations for signs? Should they have a consistent design so that they are more easily recognized?

Armed with this information, the site has a much better sense of how to improve and enhance the visitor experience. Here's how to get started:

## A. Create a Visitor Journey Map for the Current Conditions

Choose a specific audience (such as walk-in visitors) who have a specific goal in mind (such as the daily tour). Sketching on a notepad or using sticky notes on a wall, identify all of the major steps in the visitors' journey from their home to your site and back to their home. Draw the diagram like a flowchart moving from left to right, stacking elements that are closely related in columns (Figure 2).

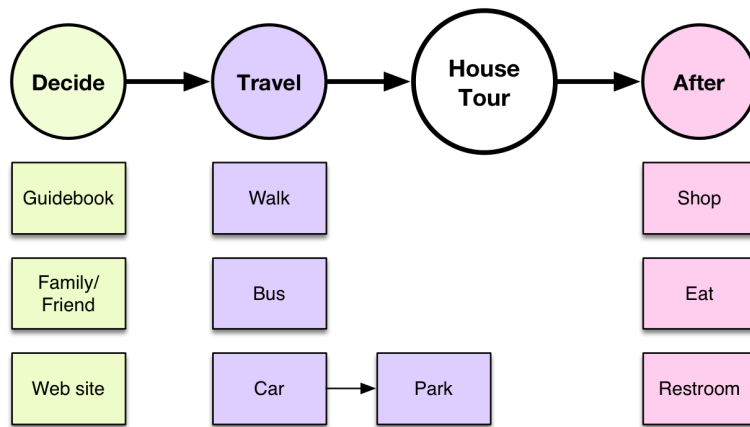


Figure 2. Creating a visitor journey map starts by laying out the major visitor actions and decisions. This diagram is for illustration only and shows a portion of a complete journey map.

You will quickly discover that you will have to rely on assumptions to fill-in gaps or that there are several different “routes” used in the same journey. You may also find that the journey is different depending on the audience (such as local residents vs. tourists) or program (such as general vs. special tours). If you are puzzled by which map to draw, start with the audience or program that is the most popular or has the biggest impact. You will probably create separate maps for other situations but start by focusing on one map to learn the process.

It is crucial to focus on current conditions only; you’ll be tempted to add touchpoints that are planned in the future or you’d like to do, but don’t exist now. Remove superfluous or minor points by including only those that affect at least ten percent of the current visitors; ranking them from most to least likely to affect visitors; or drawing an imaginary line that separates greatest impact (more than 50 percent) from least (less than 50 percent). For example, in today’s growing social media environment, it’s easy to add Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, Pokemon Go, and others, but don’t include them if they’re not making a significant long-term impact on a visitor’s decision to visit.

After you’ve created your first draft, check your journey map with others to see if you overlooked a step or if it should be organized differently (for example, someone may notice that tour ticket sales is missing in Figure 2). If your journey map is mostly based on assumptions or anecdotal information, begin to fill it in with more reliable information about your visitors’ behavior or characteristics whenever possible (Figure 3). For example, if you conducted a visitor survey, you may have identified how much they were motivated to visit by a guidebook, their family and friends, or your Web site. This may require analyzing data you already have (such as a sales register) or new research (such as a random survey of visitors). Although it may be difficult to obtain data for some touchpoints, if it’s important for measuring future performance, you’ll want to collect it now to establish benchmarks.

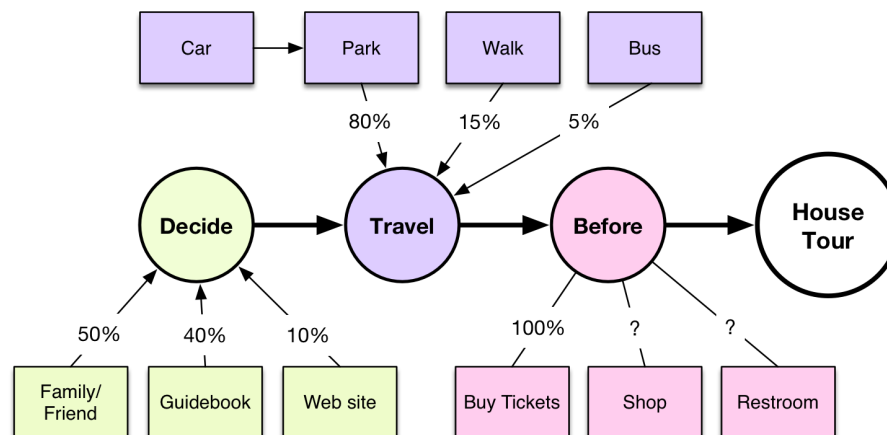


Figure 3. Additional data informs the visitor journey map and identifies areas that may require further research.

If the map has become too complex with details, consider creating a simpler map by working at a higher level. Focus only on those activities that involve the greatest number or percentage of people and save the rest for later analysis (Figure 4). Although this may omit important details, it also clarifies the key journey that may deserve the greatest attention.

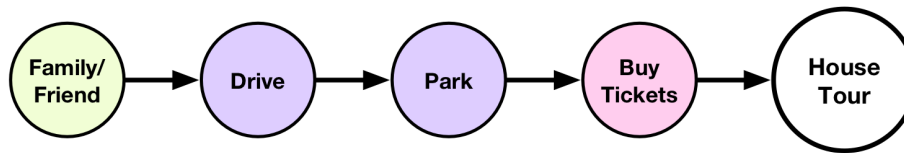


Figure 4. A simplified journey map that focuses only on the most significant or popular aspects of each touchpoint may clarify an otherwise complex and detailed diagram.

## B. Assess and Evaluate Each Touchpoint

Armed with a map that describes the visitor journey as accurately as possible (at this point, a variance of +/- 10 percent is sufficient; 100 percent accuracy is very difficult to achieve), begin to assess the impact of each touchpoint on the visitor. Be sure to examine this primarily from the visitor's perspective, not your own. For example, you are probably very familiar with the route to the site and don't notice the signs, but first-time visitors rely heavily on directional signs and may be frustrated if one is missing. Adopt a grading system (such as A-F, 0-10, color, smiley face emoticons) and evaluate each touchpoint, noting what helps or hinders the experience (Figures 5 and 6).

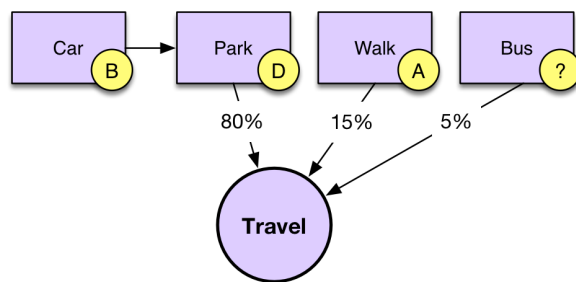


Figure 5. Each touchpoint is evaluated from the visitor's perspective to identify strengths and weaknesses, as well as areas that may require further research.

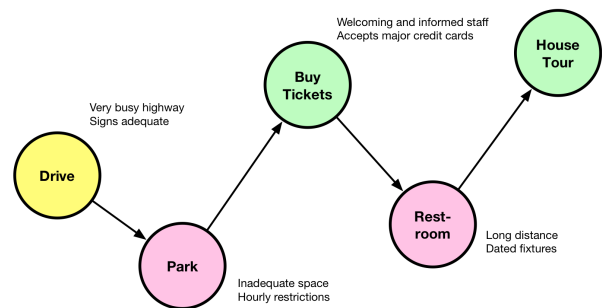


Figure 6. An alternative graphical approach is to show rating by position (high is positive, low is negative) and color (green is positive, yellow is neutral, and red is negative).

Check your ratings and rationale with others. If you discover significant disagreements or a heavy reliance on assumptions or anecdotes, conduct visitor research (such as satisfaction surveys or interviews with a random sample of visitors).

The typical result of this process is a long-range plan to achieve as high a rating as possible for each touchpoint. Implementation usually starts with those touchpoints that have the greatest impact on the visitor experience or can be the easiest to improve, but it can also begin with more visitor research to reduce the risk of decisions or identify the most serious pain points. This long-range plan is typically organized by year and then by touchpoint, clarifying a goal for each touchpoint and listing the tasks required to achieve the goal. As in other plans, each task or objective should be assigned with deadlines and a budget.

### C. Develop an Ideal or Aspirational Visitor Journey Map

You may also discover that rather than improving the existing visitor experience, you may want sharpen and shape it in a new way. For historic sites, this can occur if a significant building is slated to open or close to the public, if you are attempting to reach a new audience (e.g., local young adults), if you want to introduce new interpretive content (e.g., women, domestic servants, slavery) or techniques (e.g., a self-guided tour on a smartphone), or if a significant new opportunity for your visitors is available in the region (e.g., Uber, a heritage trail).

You can either revise the current journey map (resulting in “before” and “after” versions) or start fresh by creating a new map, adding or removing touchpoints and including metrics for success (a vision for the future). While most journey maps are drawn as linear diagrams with a clear start and end, historic sites may wish to experiment with circular formats to develop a cyclical process for increasing support and building relationships.

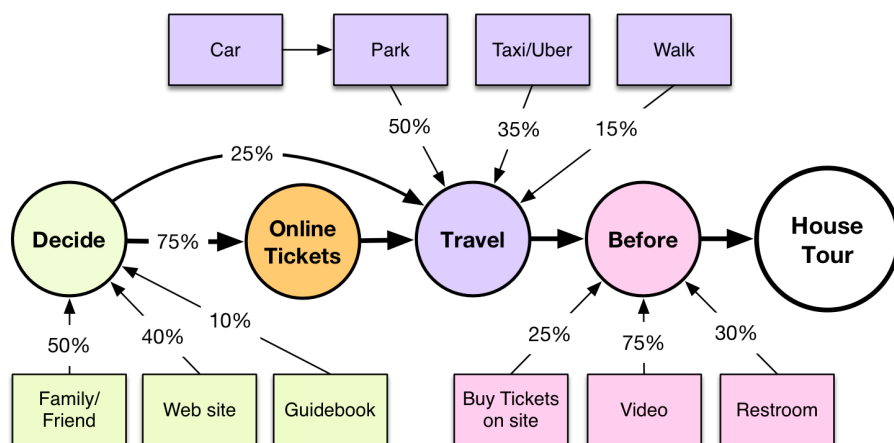


Figure 7. A diagram showing a desired visitor journey adding online ticket sales, an orientation video, and travel via Uber or taxi, along with goals for participation rates.

Journey maps are a useful tool for improving visitor satisfaction and providing direction to the organization, it is essential that they are not merely built on assumptions and dreams. Incorporate visitor research before, during, and after using journey maps. Secondly, improving the touchpoints can still result in an unsatisfactory experience if the transitions in-between were neglected. Like all tools, journey maps can be both useful and limiting.

### To learn more, visit [EngagingPlaces.net](http://EngagingPlaces.net) or read

Edelman, David C. and Marc Singer. “Competing on Customer Journeys.” *Harvard Business Review* (November 2015).

Kalbach, James. *Mapping Experiences: A Complete Guide to Creating Value Through Journeys, Blueprints, and Diagrams*. O’Reilly Media, 2016.

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