

# A Manual for Interpreting Community Heritage for Tourism



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T T T P**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Acknowledgements

I Introduction	1
Interpretation and Heritage	1
What is Interpretation?	2
Know the Audience	3
Interpretation and Tourism	4
Interpretation and Raising Local Awareness	5
II Identifying the Community's Story	6
Inventory of Resources	6
Subjects of Interpretation	7
Resource Development Form	8
Who Decides on Interpretation?	9
Who are the Visitors?	9
III Developing Themes	11
Why a Theme?	11
Types of Themes	12
Story Development Form	13
Who Decides the Theme?	14
IV Planning for Interpretation	16
How and Why to Plan	16
Interpretive Plan General Outline	17
V Making it Happen	18
Organisation	18
Who is on the Team	19
Goals of Interpretation	19
Mission Statement	20
Objectives	20
Evaluation	22

VI Presenting the Community	23
Hired Help	23
Tailor-made Interpretation	24
Interpretation for Children	24
Funding	25
VII The Possibilities	26
Brochures	26
Maps	27
Heritage Trails	28
Guiding	30
Display Panels	30
Display Cases	32
Festivals	33
Performances/Re-enactments	34
Audio Visual Interpretation	35
Multi media Shows	36
Light and Sound Displays	36
VIII Interpretive Centres	37
Planning an Interpretive Centre	37
Possibilities: The Building	39
Funding and Organisation	42
Displays	43
Volunteers	49
Conclusion	50
Bibliography	51

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This manual should be seen as a work in progress and we welcome any feedback, comments or case study information.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Every community has stories to tell about its history, people, and cultural heritage. Developing a program of interpretation puts a community in control of how these stories are presented to others and will encourage tourists to value and appreciate local heritage in the same way community residents do. That bond can lead to a successful, healthy and sustainable tourism industry.

In the same way that translators interpret across languages, communities can interpret their heritage in order that it is meaningful across different cultures. Interpretation (explaining a community's story in an engaging, vibrant way) is a useful tool for tourism destination management and conservation. It can be used to encourage respect and appropriate behaviour from tourists as well as to promote feelings of pride and awareness within a community.

Thoughtful interpretive programs offer the visitor a more meaningful experience than simply a holiday at the beach or a nice view and will reinforce and celebrate local heritage.

### Interpretation and Heritage

In this manual, "heritage" refers to both built and living culture. It includes architectural styles and building practices, temples, colonial and new churches, archeological sites, festivals, myths, food preparation techniques, musical traditions, and unique ways of thinking and acting. Although the natural environment is an important part of every community, and its connections with both built and living culture should be acknowledged, this manual focuses on cultural heritage. The same interpretive principles discussed here, however, can also be applied to natural resources (e.g. parks, rivers, farms, mountains, etc.).

This manual discusses different ways to present a community and the story of its heritage. Resources such as brochures, walking trails, visitors' centres, festivals and computer technology can inspire tourists to return to learn and see more--and by the way, spend more!

This manual introduces ways to present an entire community as a living archive where local history can be discovered, identified, and interpreted in a personal and captivating way. It is designed for heritage and tourism managers, both public and private, or individuals who wish to establish interpretive programs in their communities.



## What Is Interpretation?

There are two ways to communicate with visitors: a *factual* style or an *interpretive* style. The difference is not in *what* information is presented, but in *how* it is presented. An interpretive style reveals a story or a deeper message than a factual style which presents mostly facts.

The goal of interpretation is not instruction but to change attitudes and behaviour, to motivate and inspire, and to take information and make it meaningful and exciting. Ultimately, this style of presenting information makes visitors more sensitive, aware and understanding of a community's point of view.

The following is an example of the difference between factual and interpretive styles of communication:

A European woman touring a temple complex points at a Bodhi tree and asks her guide, "What kind of tree is that?"

If using a factual style, the guide would answer "A Bodhi tree" and leave it at that.

If using an interpretational style, he might say "A Bodhi tree...this species of tree is very important to Buddhists because the Buddha sat under a Bodhi tree as he achieved Nivana, a state of enlightenment which is the ultimate goal of Buddhism in the way heaven is the ultimate goal of Christianity. We believe that every Bodhi tree is holy because it is connected to the original one. People often decorate the tree and offer incense to it as a Christian might light a candle to a statue of a saint."

Which answer would the woman remember? Which one would spark her interest in the community she is visiting?

Interpretation is not just glossy brochures, appropriate signage and a well-edited video; it is the *art* of telling the story of a community. This 'story' is a collection of selected facts and experiences which can be given emotional and sensory meaning. All five senses can be used to enhance the experience of the visitor's environment. For example the audience may be directed to FEEL the cool marble of a temple floor, SMELL a distillery or market, and HEAR the cries of street vendors. Too often we depend on sight as the major sense for appreciating a new location even though we normally use all our senses in understanding an environment.

Good interpretation will inspire further exploration. Once the main tourist area has been explored the visitor may be directed to a self-guided tour to further explore the town. If there are problems in town planning such as an unsuccessful attempt at repairing a traditional building because few people remember the old carpentry techniques, these should not be glossed over but rather pointed out. Discussing these problems with visitors will encourage them to care about a community's issues and possibly help to improve the community.

Any interpretation campaign, whether it features informed tour guides, illustrated booklets, written materials, films, visitors centre displays, or signs at the site itself, should aim first to attract the visitor's attention, then to inform, entertain and stimulate in a comfortable and attractive setting.



## Know the Audience

An important part of interpreting is relating what the visitor experiences to things that are familiar to her. The use of comparisons and background information will help the visitor identify with the message.

Often it will be necessary to interpret across cultures and gaps in knowledge, so it is helpful to know something about who the visitors are. Each part of the world has a different way of understanding family, religion, food, time, and everything else! If most of the tourists to a community, (based on the above example) know a lot about Buddhism, the interpretation will be different than for the average international tourist who may know little about the same topic.

It is important to appreciate the visitors' needs, age differences and wide range of backgrounds and educations when preparing interpretive material. Language and translation concerns can be an issue in communities with a large number of international tourists. For example, if a community receives a lot of French tourists, in order to interpret the community for them it may be necessary to supply French-speaking guides and/or printed material.



A familiar site may need to be reinterpreted to interest a local population. School children touring a temple complex, for example, may be inspired and interested in hearing about the lives of novice monks throughout the ages. A site can be endlessly reinterpreted because there are many stories and perspectives from which to view it. However, each story should be phrased in terms of a general theme that is consistent with the sense of place unique to the community.

## Interpretation and Tourism

Although it is far easier to give tourists a good first impression and promote return visits than it is to attract new visitors, seasonal attractions and festivals can be a good way to initiate visits. An integrated network of attractions beyond one ancient palace, historic site, or present day celebration will encourage tourists to extend their stays or return in the future to see more. The longer they stay in a community, the more connected and engaged they will be and the more economic benefits the community will gain. They will also tell their friends (word of mouth) which is a very effective promotion strategy.

Interpretation not only makes tourists' visits richer but it gives communities a tool to manage and control tourism and tourists in their area. By interpreting a community and providing reasons behind, for example, clothing restrictions, tourists will be less likely to offend residents and more likely to adhere to local customs. A complete interpretive plan can also help to regulate tourists. If there are places or ceremonies, for example, that are considered private and inappropriate for tourists, the locals have a right to decide which sites and activities are open to the public. Tourists may be more sympathetic, however, if the reasons *why* tourists are not allowed to participate are clearly explained.

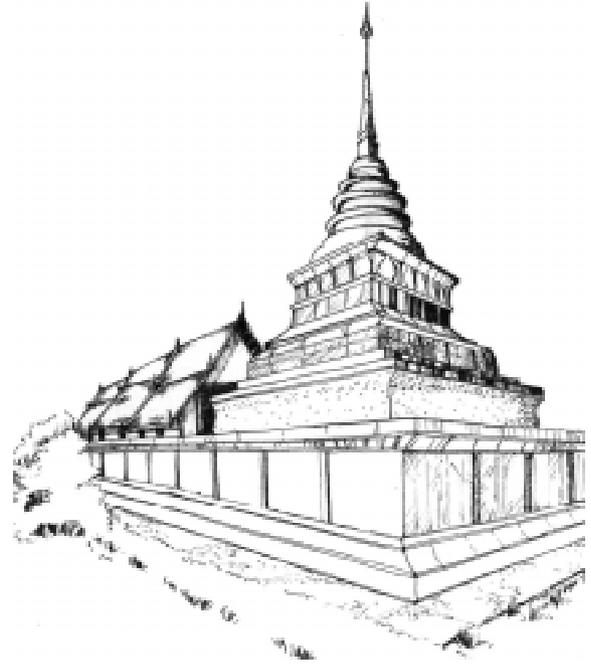
A successful tourism industry cannot be measured simply by the number of tourists. Evidence has shown that an ever-increasing number of tourists is not necessarily a healthy tourism goal. In fact, if a community's physical and social limits or "carrying capacity" are exceeded, the resulting conditions can cause a severe drop in economic and other benefits to the community. Interpretation can be a way of increasing tourist spending while discouraging many of the problems associated with mass tourism.

Many tourists are looking for more than a whirlwind trip to a large city or a few days on the beach. They are seeking to understand a sense of place in communities which have unique personalities. They are interested in seeing other people's ways of life and interpretation can help heighten this experience. However, these tourists are on holiday and want to have fun, not be in a classroom. They do not need to become experts but they want to have a good time as they learn something.

## Interpretation and Raising Local Awareness

Heritage education enhances civic pride and support for a site's preservation. It can foster community acceptance of tourism and the visitors it brings. Interpretation can be used to explain heritage to the general population as well as to local schoolchildren.

From the Bodhi tree example, it is clear how interpretation facilitates the learning process. It is important to consider how best to present a community and each site so that the public will understand its value. Awareness can help residents make better-informed decisions regarding their cultural environment. This is especially important for threatened architectural and archeological sites where increased support and awareness could improve chances for preservation. Community support can also encourage public and private sectors to financially support heritage preservation.



## II. IDENTIFYING THE COMMUNITY'S STORY

### Inventory of Resources

The first step a community should take is to research and then make an inventory of its heritage resources. These resources may include historic buildings as well as everyday things like food preparation, a system of community land ownership, religious practices and festival customs. The objective of this is to closely examine the fabric of the community to determine what stories to tell. If this inventory is omitted there is a danger that the interpretation will focus on only the most obvious features and will not recognise the unique qualities that give a community a distinctive sense of place. A methodical search of the area's physical and cultural features should be made and any which are not appropriate for tourists should be noted.

Newer buildings may not be as attractive architecturally as historic ones, but can transmit as much information about the cultural, social and economic conditions of the time. For example, a mundane and repetitive detail found on the main commercial street could be boring to look at but may indicate a new manufacturing technique that had a major impact on the local tile industry. Alternatively, references to historical architectural details may be evident in present-day buildings. A standard list of questions for each building or resource to explain its sign-



Architectural details can be interpreted to tell a story.

ificance as well as its age can also be helpful. Try to view the community through a visitor's eyes; this can give a fresh perspective on what is interesting to visitors. It may make the community more aware of resources that visitors are curious about but that locals take for granted.

Mapping is invaluable when taking stock of the physical resources of a community such as historic buildings and environmental features. Maps can be useful when planning tourist routes and walking trails while organising a systematic inventory. They can be hand drawn or produced with a computerised GIS system.

The task of collecting the initial information will likely appeal to inhabitants with an interest in the local history. Information may be gathered by interviewing older residents and advertising in the local paper or at community gatherings for information or old photographs. Students can be a valuable source of information and teachers can incorporate identifying and collecting information about local resources into their curriculum. A child's enthusiasm may inspire parents to contribute information or artifacts, photos and old documents for the interpretive program. Local and national archives may also have useful material.

Many communities have traditionally relied on oral rather than written systems of communication. In these cases, it is important to talk to local experts and older people who may have valuable information that can contribute to interpretation. Taped or video recordings of their memories can provide archival material to be used over and over again. The elderly can be asked to participate in this project. An outsider who is invited to examine the collected material may again provide a fresh insight into what is unique.

As part of the research process it may be useful to compile a handbook of local facts and figures both past and present on which the interpretations can be based.

### Subjects of Interpretation

The resources and objectives of a community will determine what story to tell. If there is an important collection of historic buildings, or a distinctive artistic tradition, this could be a major component of the story's theme. Good interpretation however, can make even what seem like everyday resources interesting. In a project run by the Thai Volunteer Service project, several villages in Thailand interpret their daily life for visitors. Tourists grind corn, work the fields, pick fruit and catch crabs. They learn cooking techniques and the sources of traditional medicine. There are no important temples or archaeological sites here, but the villages' resources are interpreted in a way that makes them interesting to the visitors. The experience of spending a few days immersed in a village's way of life will stay with tourists far longer than if they had spent the time looking at poorly interpreted temples.



If a community does not have one major attraction, imagination and brainstorming can help to discover what might be unique and interesting to outsiders. It may be surprising to hear that visitors from another country are interested in the everyday life of other communities, but it is often true. Cooking methods and building methods, for example, may be very different than those in another country. By interpreting these aspects of heritage, a richer picture of the community is created. What local residents may consider boring, everyday life may be fascinating to tourists and unlike anything they have seen before.

If a community does have a major attraction, looking deeper to find other resources can lengthen a visitor's stay and enrich his experience there.

The interpretation and presentation of culture and heritage involves more than staged dancing and singing shows and then explaining the myths behind them. Interpretation should include questions about:

- Political, social and economic history of the community.
- Religious and intellectual life of the community.
- The reaction of individual characters to historic events.
- Demographic information, such as the dominant cultural groups and their political affiliations.
- Education and leisure.
- Women's issues, changing roles and responsibilities.
- Existing settlement patterns and what they indicate about planning or the lack of it in the area.
- The community's relationships with the surrounding areas.
- Existing architecture, which should be explained in the bigger context of the town or region. It is important to recognise that the uniqueness of a building lies in its variation of detail, arrangement and scale as an example of a particular style.

If these factors are considered when evaluating each potential resource, (i.e. each building, craft, festival etc.) managers will develop a much more interesting picture of the resource and its significance to the community.

### Resource development form

The following points can be considered when creating a form for recording the significance of each resource. It can be useful to have a standardised form to make sure nothing is left out and to maintain professionalism. Forms may include several pages of relevant information. Additional information may need to be standardised. The individual, completed forms can help to build a general interpretive plan. A form should include the following information:

- Resource Index No.
- Resource Name
- Resource Location(s)
- Description
- Accessibility (car, bus, walking, seasonal, etc.)
- Interpretive Significance
- Attached photograph/illustration

## Who Decides on Interpretation?

Different people will have different opinions about which heritage sites, living heritage resources and artifacts are important and how they should be interpreted. Experts in fields of architecture, history or music may have interesting perspectives, but the local community should be able to decide how to interpret their own community for visitors. There may also be conflicting ideas within a community. A minority group, for example, may feel that their contribution to the history and heritage of a community is undervalued. By working with experts and stakeholders who hold diverse views, however, all the stakeholders can be represented and a holistic vision of the community can be presented to visitors as well as the local public.

### Museum of the American Indian, New York City

The exhibit “Creations Journey” displays interpretations by different specialists with each artifact. A representative of the cultural group that produced it, an anthropologist, a historian and a curator each offer an interpretation of why that object is important. An excerpt from the wall text reads: “These objects, because they are in a museum, stand outside their own cultural contexts and different people bring different ideas and values to their interpretations of what the objects mean.” An artifact may be accompanied by an excerpt from a Zuni poem or song, for example. This may be juxtaposed with an art historian’s interpretation of the same artifact.

One piece, a woven coat, is accompanied only by a transcription of a myth related to weaving. The text does not explain the history of the specific coat but it interprets the spiritual nature of weaving for that culture.

## Who are the Visitors?

In order to interpret a community in a way that visitors can relate to, it is important to keep up to date on who those visitors are. In fact, a community is able to control which types of tourists it attracts, depending on how the interpretive program is planned. The more that is learned about them, where they come from and their motives and expectations of their visit, the better programs and services that relate to their needs and experiences can be planned.

The type of visitors helps determine what kind of interpretive presentations will be used. If a large portion of visitors are older tourists on a bus tour, a long, self-guided walking trail is

not the most effective style of presentation. If most of the visitors are young, healthy backpackers, that type of trail would be fine.

In many communities, statistics on tourism are not available, so alternatives may need to be developed for information gathering. It is possible to evaluate the success of an interpretive program by asking local tour guides to ask their tourists what they learned and felt after visiting the community, or by asking hotel owners about their feedback from guests. If most tourists only visit for the day, talking to bus or ferry boat operators can help gather enough information to understand who is coming to the community and what kind of experience they are having. Not only does this information help plan interpretation projects, but it can help with designing strategies to increase or change the type of tourists that come to a destination.

When developing a plan for community interpretation, consider the tourists' needs in terms of rest areas, shade, toilets and safety as well as their interpretive needs (to be interested and engaged in what they are seeing).

### III. DEVELOPING THEMES

#### Why a Theme?

The main goal of developing a theme is to focus on exactly what (given limited time, money and other resources), the interpretation should communicate to the visitors. What is the story, the "big picture"? The information collected during the heritage resource inventory will determine the theme.

The theme is the one thing visitors will be able to remember or understand as a result of the time they spent in a place. It should aim to capture the essence of what the community is trying to attract them to. What kind of tourist experience should the destination provide?

It is necessary to identify what is unique about a community so that it is marketed as something special. In order to retain integrity it is ideal to identify and preserve what is authentic. In every community, heritage, tourism, environment and public life are part of an interrelated system. A theme should be broad enough to be able to address these connections.

#### Andong, Korea

The village of Andong has a theme for tourism: 'Andong as the home of Korean Confucianism, with a heritage of morality and traditional etiquette demonstrating the Sonbi spirit of temperate living', according to tourism brochures. Each of the sites and activities in Hahoe Village supports this theme. The famous Hahoe Mask Dance Drama, for example, demonstrates village ritual life and class conflicts. A tourism brochure from Hahoe, however, mentions the following, "On most occasions today, the mask dance is performed simply as an entertainment, losing much of its original splendour and religious significance."

By addressing issues like this, the theme becomes relevant to the past AND the present and there is opportunity for interpretation about contemporary life in Andong.



Interpretation at each site should focus on illustrating the main theme. Subthemes for each resource should support this main theme. In Hahoe, each historic building has its own story, as does each example of living heritage such as the mask dance. All reinforce the main theme of Andong as the home of Korean Confucianism. One building may focus on the upper classes, another on the lower. One may be used to illustrate daily life for women and another may illustrate building techniques.

## Types of Themes

### a. Chronological:

- Early history of the area, settlement patterns
- Early kings and conflicts
- "Golden period"
- Colonial period
- Colonial/world wars
- American-Vietnam war
- Developments since post-colonial independence

### b. Specific topics:

- Industry today
- Vernacular architecture
- Market centre
- Education
- Traditional arts and crafts

### c. Life/history within areas of the community:

- Main commercial street
- Riverbank
- An older village within the town
- A conserved neighbourhood



A chronological theme could focus on a group of historical features or on how characters responded to an event in a particular setting. The display and interpretation should unfold in a sequence of episodes such that each episode can communicate a complete notion on its own or can be linked to other events, past and present, to form the whole story.

### Story Development Form

A story development form can be developed for each resource. This standardises the theme development process and encourages managers to consider how each example illustrates the theme and why it is significant.

The following is an example of the type of standardised form which can be completed for each resource and site.

Resource Index #:

Site Name: *Weaving collective*

Interpretive Theme: *The theme for this site should focus on the impact of colonial design on traditional weaving and how contemporary designs combine many influences to create a unique local style.*

Justification: *This site is one of the oldest weaving collectives in the town still in operation. It illustrates the continuity of traditional arts while also incorporating outside influences*

Site Objectives:

- *To provide a location where visitors can watch local artists at work.*
- *To provide daily access and interpretation at the site.*
- *To protect the site and the industry by allowing tourists to buy the textiles.*
- *To encourage visitors to interact with local women who are often confined to in-door duties.*

Interpretive Program Objectives:

- *A majority of visitors will gain a basic understanding of how the collective works and how it supports the local economic and social structure and women's roles.*
- *A majority of visitors will learn how local arts change over time.*
- *A majority of visitors will learn how modern manufacturing techniques threaten local industry and how the community hopes to combat that.*



Interpretive Concepts: *specific information to be communicated through interpretation e.g. which materials are used, how the collective is structured etc.*

Interpretive Modes:

- *Interpreter/guided tours run by visitors centre/local government*
- *The use of interpretive signs outside the building.*
- *Interpretive brochure which could address several topics.*
- *Designated weaver(s) could give daily tours/demonstrations.*

### Who decides the theme?

There are often outside pressures to develop a theme that may not seem appropriate to the local population. National governments and commercial groups such as tour companies may want to choose a highly symbolic or political theme at the expense of popular forms of cultural expression of locally defined importance.

UNESCO World Heritage Site Luang Prabang in Lao PDR, for example, may represent the old Lanna kingdom to Thai visitors, the colonial era to French visitors and may hold deep religious significance for Laotians. The combination of these aspects contribute to Luang Prabang's sense of place and interpretation may focus on the connections between these three different perspectives. Ultimately, however, it is the local community that should decide what to present as most significant; the other topics can be discussed *in terms of* that theme.

Ideally, all stakeholders should be consulted and participate in the interpretive planning process to ensure representation. The dangers of not taking control of the development of a community's theme are expressed in the example below.

### Khajuraho, India

Although the historic 10<sup>th</sup> century temples and surrounding area of UNESCO World Heritage Site Khajuraho are attractive and interesting for several reasons, tourism development in Khajuraho has focused almost exclusively on the sensual art of the temples' stonework. Only 2-3 % of the hundreds of sculptures adorning the temple are erotic, yet this aspect is emphasised in government tourism promotional materials. Brochures on Khajuraho do not suggest excursions to nearby sites such as a national park, waterfalls, lakes, palace, and museum.

This reduces Khajuraho to a single-issue destination: the erotic becomes the theme. However, by those who live there, this theme is not considered appropriate or representative of the town and surrounding area. The region could support a varied tourism program but local people have generally not been consulted on these matters. The Khajuraho sales strategy continues to reflect only the single image of Khajuraho's romance.

## IV. PLANNING FOR INTERPRETATION

### How and why to plan

The bottom line is that a plan is important in developing a sustainable and well-managed tourism industry in any community. Interpretation is an important component of destination management and should be part of a general tourism management plan. A separate, specific interpretive plan can help manage heritage resources, develop a marketing program and serve as an example for other communities. It can also be important when looking for funding for an interpretive project.

There are two ways to plan for interpretation. The most common is “defensive” planning, (i.e. problems have occurred and planning is an attempt to fix them). It is generally better to plan ahead and anticipate things that might go wrong after the plan has been implemented (e.g. changes in the types of visitors, changes in funding and budget). This “offensive” planning includes ensuring there is room to expand existing interpretive services.

When coming up with a plan consider the following elements:

- What are the resources, theme and sub-theme to be interpreted?
- Why are these resources and themes being presented to tourists and what do should their presentation accomplish?
- Who are the visitors to the community? How can the theme relate to them?
- How, when and where are the interpretive program and services presented?
- What will it cost, in terms of people, time, resources and budget to implement the plan?
- How will the parts of the plan be evaluated to see if all objectives are achieved?

### Interpretive Plan General Outline

The outline on the next page takes into account all the elements mentioned above and can be used as a model for establishing an interpretive plan for an entire community or a plan for one historic building. Each community and situation is unique, so this outline should be considered an adaptable model for plan development, not a blueprint.

# Outline of Interpretive Plan

## I. Table of Contents

## II. Introduction

## III. WHY

- A. Philosophy, policies, goals and objectives of the planning agency/committee and for the interpretive plan
- B. Administrative/financial structure
- C. Scope of work/scope of plan

## IV. WHAT

- A. Conduct an inventory of all community tourism resources, using a site inventory form:
  - 1. Site location
  - 2. Site description
  - 3. Seasonal accessibility
  - 4. Interpretive significance
  - 5. Include photos, maps, or drawings if appropriate
- B. Site index map
- C. Generate main interpretive theme and supporting subthemes

## V. WHO

- A. Determine demographic characteristics of your visitors
- B. Isolate specific target groups
- C. Consider visitor motivations, expectations, perceptions
- D. Consider visitor orientation systems (pre-visit, on site, post-visit)
- E. Consider any visitor use patterns (time of visit, festivals, seasons, etc.)

## VI. HOW/WHEN/ WHERE

For each resource inventoried consider:

- A. Interpretive theme for each individual site
- B. Site objectives
- C. Interpretive program objectives
- D. Recommended interpretive modes/services
- E. Justification
- F. General planner comments

## VII. I&O: Implementation and Operations

- A. Phasing strategy, budgets, staffing needs, etc.

## VIII. SO WHAT

- A. Evaluation strategies that could be used to see if the interpretive objectives are being accomplished

## IX. Bibliography and appendices

## V. MAKING IT HAPPEN

Developing and ultimately implementing an interpretive plan requires a lot of co-ordination and organisation. It may not be possible to do it all at once, but a good plan should allow for gradual development.

### Organisation

An important aspect of planning is to co-ordinate with private companies and government agencies that have a stake in developing an interpretation plan.

Local government is often the deciding factor in what a community can or cannot achieve and local personnel are cultural brokers who need to be trained to understand the significance and benefits of tourism. All stakeholders should be included when developing an interpretation plan so that, regardless of which agency is developing the interpretive plan, it truly represents the community.

A region needs a varied and rich mix of attractions. If communities can co-operate instead of compete with other local communities by offering slightly different experiences, each can identify a theme and establish a niche.

It is essential that travel agents, tour operators and guides become sensitive to these concerns because they have a major influence on the economic and social relationship that develops between the tourists and hosts as well as on the behaviour of the visitors. Mechanisms must be developed to ensure that the tourism industry is involved at all levels of site preservation. Working together is cost-effective, and good business.

Open communication is necessary because different agencies, organisations, and individual stakeholders will have different goals and objectives; with effort on all sides, a feasible plan can be developed.

## Who is on the Team?

It is important to consider who will be involved with the planning project. There is great value in tapping into the imagination and creativity of others. Consider possibly having the following people on a team:

**Project or team leader:** This person is responsible for making the plan happen. He or she would develop the outline for the plan's content and project timeline, and be the interpretive expert for the project. The leader is the ultimate writer or editor for the final planning document.

**Supervisory Staff member:** Depending on how a given organisation is set up, it is good to have a person who approves the finished plan. He or she should know what is going on from the very start, may not be involved in all aspects of the planning process, but will be a part of key meetings and decision points (such as approving themes, objectives, etc.)

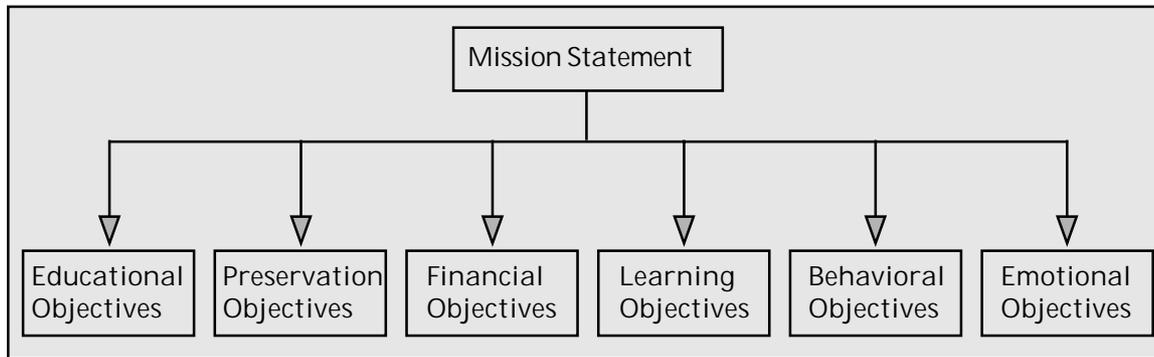
**Support Staff:** Support staff can be brought in whenever needed. The input from specialists like biologists, archaeologists, historians, conservationists and designers will provide the essential fact-based materials needed to develop the theme and objectives for interpretation. Local experts familiar with community folklore and stories could also be included. The staff should also review draft materials to ensure the content is correct and to ensure that interpretive services will not damage a site (such as at delicate or ecologically sensitive sites).

At the beginning of the planning process, the project leader should explain exactly what each person's role will be in the planning process and lay out a timeline. Set dates for meetings in advance to ensure that all the appropriate team members can fit them into their schedules.

## Goals of Interpretation

Interpretive planning (or any kind of planning for that matter) requires a mission – clear goals and objectives. It will be necessary to determine what the objectives are for presenting the community and what visitors should take from the experience.

The objectives should answer questions like: Why develop an interpretive program? What should the community get out of the program? What should tourists gain from the interpretation?



## Mission statement

A mission statement summarises the overall goals of a project and should direct all the interpretive services and programs. It is meant to be a general statement and sets out 1.) who is organising the project 2.) what the project aims to accomplish 3.) why the project is important. It should reflect the individuality of the community and the goals of the specific interpretive program.

The mandate (or mission statement) of the UNESCO World Heritage site of Hue, Vietnam project for "Preservation and Presentation of Hue Monuments Complex from 1996-2010" states:

"The planning project aims to present all precious values of Hue's cultural heritage which includes those of the tangible and intangible cultural heritages, the cultural urban heritage and the natural landscape and townscape in educating people for the maintenance of tradition, national cultural identity and in improving their cultural enjoyment" .

## Objectives

There may be a variety of goals to be achieved as a result of an interpretive program. The goal may be, for example, to raise funds in order to build a visitor's centre, to educate local school-children, to increase the length of visitors stay, or all three! These objectives are an important feature in interpretive planning.

All objectives should be consistent with the mission goals and not undermine the principles and philosophy of the project. It may be necessary to adjust the goals to fit the mission statement. Mass international tourism, for example, may not fit into a village which aims to produce a unique and authentic experience of daily village life.

The objectives of the "Project for Preservation and Development of the value of heritage in the Hue old capital city from 1996-2001" are:

"To preserve the cultural heritage in Hue old capital city; to bring into play all precious values of this heritage including the material cultural vestiges, the intellectual cultural heritages, the cultural value of the environment, landscape of the city and the Nature, in educational works to preserve the traditional national cultural identity, and to increase the standard of cultural enjoyment of the population..."

Financial Objectives:

How is the interpretive program to be funded? Will it be self-supporting? Who will benefit financially?

Example: To secure capital through public-private sponsors to build a heritage trail, signs and accompanying brochures.

Preservation Objectives:

How can interpretation enhance heritage preservation (in terms of public support and funds)?

Example: To identify and display important heritage resources in the community, to lobby for funds to preserve them and to serve as a vocal opposition to their destruction.

Educational Objectives:

How can the interpretive program fulfil local and tourist heritage education goals?

Example: To provide free or subsidised access to all interpretive resources for school groups and to develop special school programs. To educate visitors and residents on the importance of valuing heritage resources.

A master plan needs specific objectives as far as what information visitors should learn, how they should behave, and how they should feel after visiting the community.

Learning objectives:

What specific information will the visitors learn through interpretation?

Example: The majority of visitors will be able to list five ways the town uses traditional building techniques.

Behavioural objectives:

What should the visitor do? How should the visitor behave? These objectives are often considered the “results” of the interpretive services.

Example: The majority of visitors will treat all buildings and temples with a sense of respect.

Emotional objectives:

These are important in stimulating the behavioural objectives. They help the visitor feel anger, surprise, pride or other emotions related to the site.

Example: The majority of visitors and locals will feel that heritage preservation is vital to the town’s sense of community.

## Evaluation

It is important to re-evaluate these objectives constantly, at least on a yearly basis. There is little use in implementing an interpretive program if it is not monitored regularly. It is important to find out what elements of the program visitors enjoy and why, and which ones do not achieve the interpretive goals set for them. Were the times inconvenient? Was the trail too long? Was the visitors centre too hot to concentrate on the video? You may find that it is necessary to modify the program accordingly. The interpretation style may need to be adjusted to achieve the project’s goals and objectives (also check to make sure the objectives are reasonable).

Again, if dependable statistics are not available, the informal techniques mentioned in the previous section (e.g. checking with hotel registers, tour operators, etc.) should provide some basic information.

## VI. PRESENTING THE COMMUNITY

Now that this manual has discussed the benefits of interpretation, here are some examples of different ways to tell the story of a community. The nature of a community's finances, objectives, and theme will determine which forms of presentation are right for the community.

The type of visitors will also help to determine the way a community is presented. If the interpretation is primarily for local schoolchildren hands-on, interactive interpretation may be best. They could, for example, try making bricks with a traditional method to see how difficult it is. If the main audience is foreign tourists, a video could be subtitled in a language other than the destination's native tongue. This seems like basic common sense, but it is amazing the number of times so-called interpretive strategies do not take the audience into account!

No matter which modes of presentation are used in interpretation, make sure there is enough material (physical and informational) to make changes or additions; after evaluating the program text, photos, or maps may need to be changed.

Each community is unique. Once an inventory of the community's resources has been taken, be creative and look beyond the following examples when developing a plan for how to best present the community.

### Hired Help

For each of these possibilities for interpretation, it is best to consult professionals with regard to design and production. If there is concern about the cost of hiring an expert, keep in mind that most universities and colleges are often willing to advise and assist at less than market rates. Talented students of marketing, film, graphics or education departments may be available under supervision of an experienced professor.



## Tailor-Made Interpretation

The best interpretive techniques are the ones that are unique to the site. For example, a private tour company in historic Levuka, Fiji offers a “Tea and Talanoa” session to tourists. *Talanoa* is the Fijian word for “having a chat”. A number of old-time residents host visitors in their homes and talk about the old times. All the houses are colonial vintage, and in many cases are furnished with antiques. Some have the personal artifacts of several generations on show or in daily use. In this example, the tour company recognised that local people are an important resource. They developed a tour whereby interactions between tourists and residents can provide income to locals and increase mutual understanding.

## Interpretation for Children

While creating ideas for interpretation, be conscious of the separate material that may be produced for children. The existing material should not be watered down but rather a separate set should be produced. The interpretation can be tied into the school curriculum by taking school material and relating it to the immediate community.

For example the same series of interpretive panels could contain information directed at adults in one colour background while a different set of information in a second colour could focus on another subject matter aimed at children. A brochure for children could focus on the story of a child along the heritage trail or on collecting drawings of different architectural details.

Interpretation for children should stimulate the children's active participation in the theme. The information should not be handed out in a passive manner but rather incorporate a question and answer segment as well as discussion and explanation.



## Funding

Although both local and national governments can be a source of funds, there are other ways to finance an interpretive program. Revenue from tourist entrance fees, as well as hotel and restaurant taxes can be used to support interpretive programs without relying on other government sources which can change according to political and economic forces. NGOs and development funds can also provide income for start-up programs or specific projects but should not be depended on for maintenance and ongoing costs of interpretation.

No matter who is providing the funding for an interpretive program, an interpretive plan and good organisation will reassure funders the managers are professional and serious about creating and running interpretive programs.

Appropriate government departments may have funding for an interpretive program that will increase income from tourism or encourage pride of place and local education. However, they may not, so it is wise to research other potential funding sources.

The private sector is an often underused funding resource. Even if a project is run through a government agency, public-private partnerships can result in very productive alliances. Private-sector partners may have a different agenda and goals than the managers of an interpretive program, but through compromise and communication, a happy medium which meets the needs of all partners is often achievable.

### Calgary, Canada

A free city map was co-produced by the Calgary Parking Authority, the city planning department, the convention and tourism bureau and private businesses for use during the Olympics in 1988. This map not only shows the location of important city sites and contains short interpretive descriptions, but also notes parking lots and locations of the businesses that have contributed to the cost of producing the map.

*Additional information on funding can be found in the section on interpretive centres and applied to other types of interpretive programs.*

## VII. THE POSSIBILITIES

When reading about the different ways to present a community, keep in mind that more than one mode of presentation can be used or several can be combined together. For example, a brochure could contain a map and accompany a walking trail. A computer program could refer to a walking trail and a performance could have an accompanying brochure or display case outside the performance space.

### Brochures

Brochures are the easiest and least expensive way to get information to a community's tourists. Even a simple one can guide a visitor's trip by telling him where to go and what to see and why those places and activities are significant to the community. Hotels, restaurants and tour companies can distribute the brochures as can visitor's centres and museums. Brochures can be designed to include different types of information including guidelines for behaviour and politeness. They can also be tailored for specific events such as festivals or dance performances, or even for an individual site. The brochure should illustrate and support the theme and objectives of an interpretive plan. Often a map and brochure are given out together, and the brochure can include interpretation of a self-guided trail.

### Design

The cover design of a brochure is very important. It conveys to the visitor the essence of the story and provokes interest in the rest of the brochure. It must have "attraction power" i.e. something to make it stand out from other brochures in its appeal to tourists. There are many other design considerations, for which it is best to consult a professional designer. For example:

- What colour/weight/texture of paper?
- What colour of ink?
- How many photos and graphics?
- How is the brochure designed to be marketed? (Will it be given out at an information desk or is it for a brochure rack? If it is for a brochure rack, remember that usually only the top third is visible in the rack.)



## Writing

- Keep the text short. For brochures, try not to have more than two short paragraphs of fifty words each per subject and use graphics as much as possible.
- The text should be interpretive, that means it should provoke, relate and reveal the story being interpreted.
- Avoid using technical language.
- Remember the behavioural objective: have visitors “look for”, “listen to”, “touch the” in the text. They will remember more of what they DO than what they READ.
- The brochure should be produced in the language(s) spoken by the majority of visitors. It may be necessary to consult a professional translator.

## Maps

Brochures and maps can accompany each other or each can stand alone. Often maps have short explanatory interpretations of major sites on the reverse side. Maps can show tourist highlights, heritage trail routes and include out-of-town destinations as well. The things left off the map are also important. If there are places that are not appropriate for tourists to visit (such as sacred sites) they do not need to be on the map.

### Klong Kwang, Thailand

An interpretive map was designed by the CUC UEM Project in cooperation with the residents of the small village of Klong Kwang. The map is simple, fun and colourful and inexpensive to produce. It highlights interesting points with drawings and photographs. The villagers decided which sites to include: a noodle house, the sleeping Buddha archaeological site (the town's main attraction), headman's office, organic farm and a craft loom. There are no street names, because there are only a few dirt paths in the town. The map interprets the daily life and sites which are important to residents of Klong Kwang and of interest to visitors. This local map presents a much different image of the town to visitors than a technical street map would.



## Heritage Trails

A walking trail is one of the most suitable interpretation tools for main commercial streets, cities and towns. It presents the subject firsthand so visitors are encouraged to explore the site for themselves. Subjects of the trail usually include buildings of historic interest, but interpretation should include information about planning, history, industry and related social issues.

### Patan, Nepal

The Patan Tourism Development Organisation created a self-guided walking tour that includes traditional houses, ponds and squares as well as the impressive temples and palaces of the Durbar Square in Patan, part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site in the Kathmandu Valley. The tour describes the religious, social and political forces which have affected the sites in the past and the present. The following is an excerpt from the walking tour brochure, distributed free with an entrance fee to historic Patan.

*"You will have already noticed how tall modern buildings affect the generally low, three-storeyed skyline of Patan. In the past, the height of the local temples tended to set the limit for residential buildings. The skyline, however, has changed rapidly in the last two decades due to several reasons: land values have greatly escalated; new building materials are now available; community controls have loosened; joint families have broken up, increasing the demand for separate dwellings; and the government is unable to enforce even the regulations that do exist. There are still quite a few streets, however, which retain their original integrity, whereas elsewhere the past has to be left to the imagination."*

Trails should be no longer than a few miles in length in order that a visitor can expect to complete it. The start of the trail should be clearly marked, as should the length of the trail. Several different overlapping trails with separate themes could be developed in one area. An introductory trail could present the town, while another trail could explore the buildings of a particular era and another could deal with aspects of the town's traditional arts. Trails with a specific theme such as the town's multi-ethnic makeup, as told through architecture, may have more appeal than one that simply presents the buildings of the area.

After the trail has been planned and each of the seven to ten trail stops has been identified, the next is to "plan" each stop, i.e. to develop the specific objectives that each trail stop should accomplish. It may be helpful to write one learning, one behavioural and one emotional objective for each trail stop. These objectives will determine what topics need to be researched for the text and graphics for each stop.

### Self Guided Trails

A self-guided trail relies on a printed brochure and a map to direct the visitor around a route which may not be otherwise marked. This is the least expensive type of trail to produce and it also allows for the option of a guide.

### Signed Trails

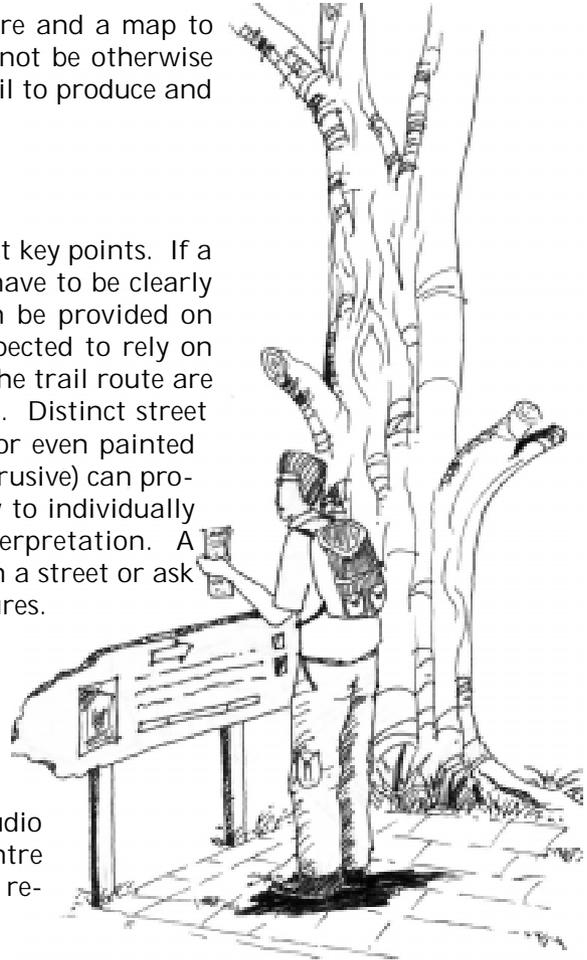
This type of trail is marked by display panels at key points. If a printed guide is not provided, the route will have to be clearly indicated along the way. A simple map can be provided on each panel, but the visitor should not be expected to rely on that alone. Markers or display panels along the trail route are very useful for orientation and interpretation. Distinct street furniture, inset metal studs in the sidewalk, or even painted footprints on the sidewalk (although quite obtrusive) can provide markers for the trail. It is not necessary to individually mark each building which is part of the interpretation. A panel may describe a collection of buildings on a street or ask the visitor to be aware of certain urban features.

The cost of a signed trail will vary widely depending on how elaborate it is.

### Sound Trail

Another growing system is the creation of an audio cassette which can be rented at a visitors centre with a cassette player and which serves as a recorded guide for visitors.

A sound trail is another option: listening posts which are permanent features installed along the route have a broadcast tape device included in post. The visitor activates it by pressing a switch. The sound can be played out loud or broadcast through an earplug that is available for hire. The ear plugs have the advantage of producing better sound and avoiding the problem of ambient noise.



## Guiding

The subject of guiding, its certification and training could fill a whole manual by itself so what follows is only a brief overview of the topic.

Most self-guided trails can come alive with the help of a local tour guide who interprets the trail to the visitors' background and expectations. A guided trail is one of the most effective and intimate of the interpretive tools.

A guide can be the most important part of a visitor's stay in a community. The chance for personal interaction with a local resident is valuable in itself, and if the guide is skilled in interpretation he or she can open the door to new levels of understanding. Often guides become friends with their clients and cultural learning takes place both ways.

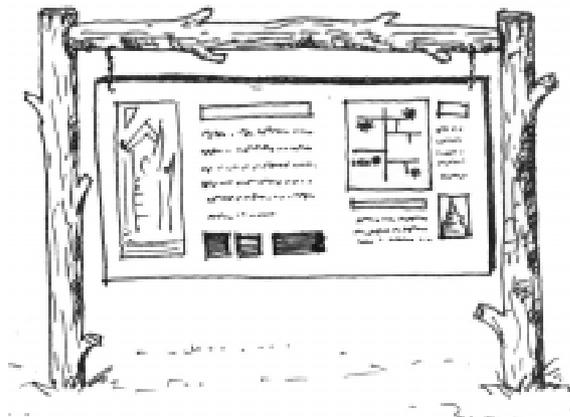
Interpretation can be relatively sterile unless the person doing the interpreting is emotionally involved in the stories being interpreted and in the people receiving the interpretation.

A guide certification program can ensure that guides are presenting the most interesting and accurate information to visitors and that they are trained in interpretation and how best to engage the people on their tours. Certifying and training guides ensures they are operating according to specific guidelines about service and interpretation. If tourists are informed about the certification they may try to seek out trained guides. Certification also keeps money and control in the community instead of dispersing it to outside guides who do not have local knowledge or a stake in presenting the community according to the locally defined theme.

Students, seniors and those with an interest may be recruited as volunteer guides in communities and historic sites.

## Display Panels

Display panels are two-dimensional signs which can contain interpretive information, maps, photographs and graphics. They have a practical application for a town because they are relatively inexpensive and easily designed and mounted.



The panels should provide a balance between text, pictures (such as reproductions of paintings), new and historic photographs, graphics and blank space. Blank space provides a rest for the eyes. A photograph can reduce the need for a lot of text.

#### London, England

The Museum of London has designed a London Wall Walk which follows the ancient wall around the city. Durable tile panels mark points of interest along the way. The tiles feature black and white drawings of the Wall over time and its changing look and function, as well as text and maps.

Panels may mark a trail through the town or simply note interesting sites and facts. The design of the signs should be consistent throughout the town; it is helpful to have a professional designer create an easily recognised sign system. Hiring a specialist is worth the cost since a well-designed sign system will provide a positive image to a town while presenting the interpretive message in the best possible light.

There are a number of issues in choosing a sign system: the location of the signs, their size and shape, the type of illustrations, the nature of the maps and text, concerns about vandalism and the kind of panel to adopt.

#### Design

The size of the panel should relate to the scale of the site or building. It should not be too small or it may be lost in a very large wall. An interpretive panel which seems huge inside on a desk will seem much smaller when installed outside.

The choice of colour will also be influenced by the constraints of the site. In some locations strong colours may not be appropriate while in others subdued colours could be too dull. Directional signage on the highway or point-of-interest signs may have to be brightly coloured so that they can be seen from a rapidly approaching car. However, once the visitor is at the site the signs should not dominate the surroundings.

#### Illustrations and Text

Interpretive signs require less illustration than printed media such as brochures. The fact that the signs are located in an area which requires interpretation will mean that the visitors will read them, so illustrations should be restricted to those which truly add to the visitors' understanding such as a clear drawing in ink line or a photo montage showing the building or site as it once was.

Maps can demonstrate basic relationships between towns or relate the town to the region. They can also show the development patterns for the area or how the area has changed over time.

A check can be made to see if the text can be easily understood and read clearly. Remove all the “ands” and “thes” and see if an individual can fill them in without any trouble. The length of time it takes to read the sign can also be established with the help of a volunteer. The maximum length of text should normally be 100-150 words. If there is a lot of text which cannot be further edited, it should be divided up into a sequence of signs. Each panel should read as an independent segment so that the visitors will acquire some information even if they do not complete the text. The content should connect with the theme, such that each panel will add to the story of the community.

Think of the information to be presented as an upside-down pyramid. The most interesting and important things should come first. That way, even if people do not read everything, they will at least absorb the main points.

#### Vandalism/Durability

There are various techniques of installation which discourage vandals. Wherever possible, signs should be placed in a prominent, well-lit location which can be easily supervised by police or staff.

Anything which can be used as a missile to damage the sign should be cleared from the site. The signs should be mounted on substantial posts or plinths instead of a single post. Two posts are required for an image larger than 15”x20”. A panel which is too flimsy looking or elegant seems more likely to invite attack. If panels become part of a railing system they may be less likely to be interfered with. Damaged panels should be repaired and replaced as soon as possible to reduce the chance of copycat vandalism. New panels seem to encourage more damage so they may have to have more supervision initially or be roughed up to reduce their fresh appearance. The panels which employ more expensive methods are also more vandal resistant and durable.

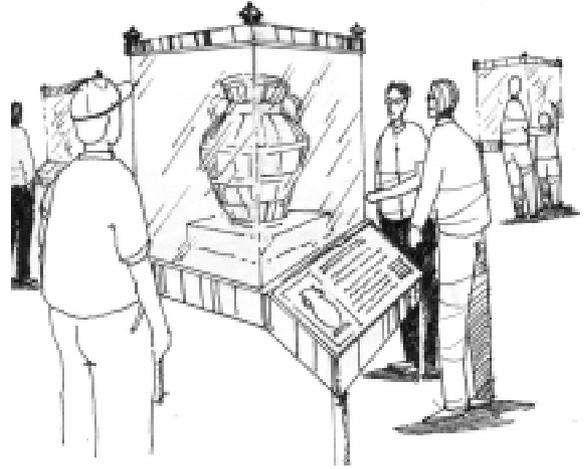
#### Display cases

Beyond their ability to showcase two-dimensional photographs and text, display cases can show three-dimensional objects or artifacts. If sited outdoors and well-lit, the cases can be seen at all hours of the day and by the local public as opposed to if they are located inside an interpretive centre.

If vandalism is a problem in your community, display cases may not be the best medium since they are vulnerable to abuse.

The cases should be located in a prominent location for easy supervision, but shielded from the extremes of the weather. The case should not block pedestrian or emergency access and a wide sidewalk can normally provide enough space. The same constraints which apply to the installation of display panels apply to display cases.

There must be a ventilation system in the case which allows moisture and heat to escape without dust entering. Installing lights which are connected to the street lamp supply will extend its use. Bullet-proof glass is recommended as well as glass which is resistant to ultra-violet radiation.



## Festivals

Festivals are a spectacular way for tourists to learn about a community because they appeal to all the senses and often celebrate important cultural events. They incorporate rituals, ceremonies and other examples of living heritage such as food, religion, clothing, dancing, and music. Interpretation is important for festivals; tourists will want to learn about the myths or religious meaning behind a ceremony, and why a community acts the way it does at festival time. When taking inventory of the community's resources, remember that some festivals may not be appropriate for tourists, for example observers may not be welcome or non-initiates may not be able to participate. Safety may also be an issue. Some festivals will present a community better than others and be more accommodating of tourists.

### Sai Kung, Hong Kong, China

New festivals can be created to present and promote a community. The community of Sai Kung, near Hong Kong, is a former fishing town. The fishing industry declined and the community looked to tourism as one new generator of income. Although the community already celebrated a Dragon Boat Festival and other ocean-related festivals, they created the Sai Kung Seafood Fair in 1992. This annual celebration attracts many visitors who come to look at the fish and seafood, and most importantly, to eat! This new festival is appropriate for the visitors, who mostly come from Hong Kong on day trips. Although the festival is not based on ancient traditions, it reflects the modern reality of Sai Kung and also is consistent with their theme of fishing village and reaffirms their community's connection with the sea.

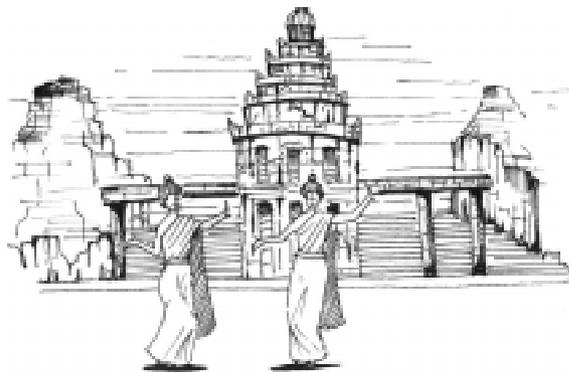
Each community can create an event, whether it be a weaving festival, boat festival etc. where tourists can participate and learn about the community.

### Performances/Re-enactments

Local music and dancing can be performed and interpreted for tourists. Activities and rituals such as large formal dinners with traditional food, drink, seating and utensils can give visitors an idea of what life is like in the community. These performances can also serve to fund and support cultural traditions. Tourism has, in some cases, inspired a revitalisation of artistic traditions because it produces a demand and economic support for the arts.

However, when these traditions are taken out of their usual context, such as when a ritual dance that is traditionally performed only in temples is performed in a large hotel, it can become more important as an economic tool than a meaningful religious offering.

Re-enactments of daily life or traditions often use actors, and focus on historic, not contemporary life and do not address real community problems. On the other hand, re-enactments or folk villages do not interfere with a community's daily life and lessen the impact of tourism by keeping it separate from living communities.



When developing an interpretive plan it is important to consider which aspects of your artistic and daily traditions it is appropriate to include in the performance/re-enactment repertoire.

#### Tamaki Maori Village, New Zealand

The two Maori brothers who started this village wanted to provide an authentic, spiritualised Maori cultural experience but feared that culture would be compromised for commercialism. "For many years, Maori had seen their culture bastardised in order to provide a clean, neat, tourism industry package" (Hatton, 1999) because tourism companies had their own ideas about Maori culture and how to present it. The brothers developed their village through consultation with local elders in a six month process to ensure it was appropriate.

To begin their Tamaki Village experience, tourists board a bus to the site and each tour elects a chief and learns how to organise their behaviour according to Maori social hierarchy. The village features re-enactments of everyday life as experienced by ancient Maori: food preparation, weapon-making, carving, song and dance.

### Audio-Visual Interpretation

A presentation using sound and images is the most dramatic way to present a story. Visitors seem to absorb more information from an audio-visual presentation than by reading it themselves. However, these types of media, such as videos and slide presentations, are also the most expensive.

A film or slide show can provide an introduction to the site or provide most of the interpretive display. It can be copied and distributed to tourist or education centres as a way of attracting more visitors to the site.

#### Singapore

Little India, the Indian district of Singapore, is a major tourist attraction in the city because of its restaurants, shopping, festivals and colourful population. The Singapore Tourism Board produced a video "Little India Through the Eyes of Dr Uma Rajani" (a prominent local doctor). This film interprets the area from the perspective of an insider and airs next to the food court in the Little India Arcade where many tourists stop for lunch.

## Multi media shows

These spectacles combine dramatic special effects with performances of dance, music and theatre to produce a sensory experience aimed at capturing a feeling of a particular time and place. Although these shows may transmit some facts through dialogue or song, their main function is to appeal to the visitors' emotions and senses. Multi-media shows are expensive and may not be appropriate for every community. If a community hosts a high volume of tourists or bus tours, this may be a good approach. Distinctive dance, dress, music and theatre can be incorporated into this type of performance to give the viewers a sense of the unique performing arts of a community. It can, however, be difficult to interpret this type of living heritage as it is out of context and not necessarily authentic.

### New York City, USA

The Little Old New York show portrays New York in the 1890's. The theatre features an antique amusement arcade with silent films, cotton candy and pretzels. Special effects of the production includes lightening and fog as the actors sing and dance and present a musical interpretation of what life in New York was like at the turn of the century.

## Light and Sound Displays

This display incorporates a sound and light show in an exterior location after dark. An open area with a good panorama allows the audience to see certain features, either buildings or details, emphasised by spotlight. Little commentary need accompany this presentation, as music will probably be more appropriate. Even though no direct message may be communicated, there is a value in seeing the urban features in a new light. It may simply heighten the awareness of the town. Spectacular effects have been achieved with the use of laser lights to highlight buildings, streetscapes and ruins. This type of presentation is probably only effective as a unique extravaganza to celebrate a centennial or the beginning of a large festival.

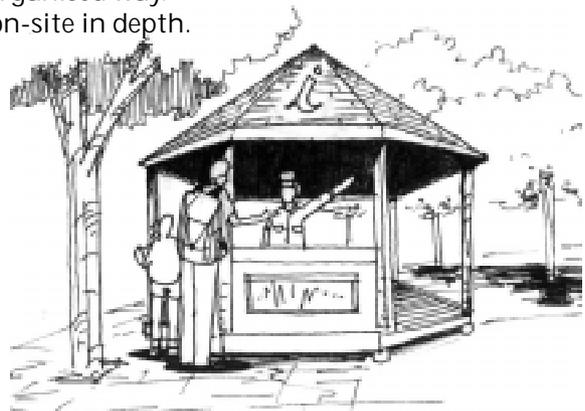
## VIII. INTERPRETATIVE CENTERS

A good interpretive centre can provide valuable services to both a community and its visitors. It can offer the content of a museum, the entertainment of a themed attraction and the services of a tourism information centre. There is no doubt that visitors want to learn about the stories of a community and an interpretive centre can be an effective way to present this information.

An interpretive centre does not need to be expensive. It can be an open-air shelter with a few wall-mounted display panels and maps. It can be a multi-level air-conditioned museum, or something in between, depending on the resources of the community.

Reasons to have an interpretive centre:

- To tell the story of the community in an organised way.
- To illustrate a story that cannot be told on-site in depth.
- To bring artifacts and stories to where the people are.
- To display and protect valuable artifacts.
- To bring extremes into human scale.
- To allow visitors to discover the story at their own pace.
- To encourage visitors to further explore the community.
- To meet the information needs of tourists.
- To serve as a “home base” for tourists.



There are as many different ways of illustrating themes as there are existing interpretive centres. An interpretive centre takes the themes and objectives discussed earlier in the manual and concentrates them in one place. An interpretive centre can be combined with a museum or information centre that distributes maps, guides and brochures about local accommodation and restaurants. It can house commercial ventures, retail space for tour operators or a cafe. It can serve as the starting point for a heritage trail and window space can give a taste of the story inside or even illustrate a local planning issue.

### Planning an Interpretive Centre

It is important to note that an interpretive centre does not have to be implemented all at one time. In fact, it can be developed over a period of time as budgets and human resources become available. Specialist(s) may need to be consulted about the content and design of exhibits—nearby colleges and universities may be able to help.

When planning for a centre, objectives will need to be set for the centre as they were for the community's interpretive plan. The following are some examples of goals for a centre:

- All visitors will be encouraged to participate in the heritage tour leaving from the interpretive centre.
- All visitors will be made aware of the museum's programs and special community events.
- The majority of visitors will understand the main interpretive theme for the interpretive centre exhibits.
- There will also be specific learning, behavioural and emotional goals.

If managers take the time to find out who the visitors will be, the centre's displays and programs will relate to their background and experience. It will also be possible to determine if different presentation levels (e.g. different languages, interpretation for children) need to be developed to target the main visitor groups.

#### Steps to planning an interpretive centre

1. Establish the main theme (from the interpretive plan).
2. Establish the budget.
3. Prioritise topics within the exhibit (how much space and money will be spent on each exhibit topic or sub-theme?)
4. Conduct research based on stated themes and topics.
5. Review artifact collection, graphic materials and other potential exhibit elements.
6. Write the exhibit outline.
7. Create a schematic plan for the physical layout of the exhibits.
8. Write a story line (done in exhibit interpretive plan).
9. Develop exhibit concept designs (based on objectives).
10. Continue research based on the story and exhibit concept (from objectives stated on interpretive exhibit planning forms).
11. Locate all artifacts and graphic originals and create a data sheet file.
12. Write the final exhibit label copy.
13. Complete exhibit details and graphic design.
14. Obtain graphic originals and artifacts for each exhibit.
15. Produce engineering and construction drawings.
16. Fabricate exhibit: casework, models, audio-visual programs, and graphic material.
17. Install the exhibit.
18. Mount artifacts.
19. Open to the public.
20. Evaluate (are general objectives being met? Are there flow problems, design problems, etc.?)
21. Make necessary modifications and revisions.

(From Veverka, 1994)

## Possibilities: The Building

An interpretive visitor's centre need not be large or costly. Many are housed in small spaces which, through creativity and hard work, have been turned into interesting interpretive centres. The more space the centre has, however, the more exhibit display options can be considered.

After contemplating what type of building to use, managers may decide not to use a building at all! A series of old railway cars, a simple thatched pavilion or underground cave can all be used as interpretive centres.

The centre should be located in a suitable location in your community, in keeping with the transportation pattern of the tourists.

### Basic Interpretive Centre

A simple visitors centre can be created with little funding and construction. It can be staffed by volunteers or even be unstaffed. Several centres only use staff on weekends or when a bus or boat of tourists or school group arrives.

A roofed-over open space with series of display panels, maps and/or outdoor display cases with non-valuable artifacts can become a visitors centre. The displays and interpretation will need to be planned as with any other type of centre. This option also allows for future development as funds become available.



An interpretive centre can be very simple.

#### Vancouver, Canada

An outdoor covered space "Ocean Art Works" was established at Granville Island Market and sponsored by a nearby concrete company. This site is both a produce market for locals and a tourist attraction because of its vibrant market and artistic community.

This artists space is roofed but open on three sides. First Nations carvers have used the space to craft totem poles, wooden canoes or other sculpture. One pole may take several months to complete. The carving process is an attraction to the hundreds of people that walk past every day. The advantage of this type of space is that the carving process is accessibly displayed instead of being hidden away in a studio.

The art and designs of First Nations culture are featured all over Vancouver, and even figure prominently at the international airport. This Granville Island space allows for demonstrations of living culture of an important cultural group in Vancouver whose symbols are everywhere but whose living culture is not often accessible to residents or visitors.

#### Multi-use Space

An existing space can be shared between an interpretive centre and other uses, such as private businesses or government offices. In this way, rent and maintenance costs are not born by the centre alone, and in many cases, the other users of the space can cover the centre's costs. When a space is shared, it is important to ensure that the interpretative centre is well advertised since commercial interests may want top billing.

#### Penang, Malaysia

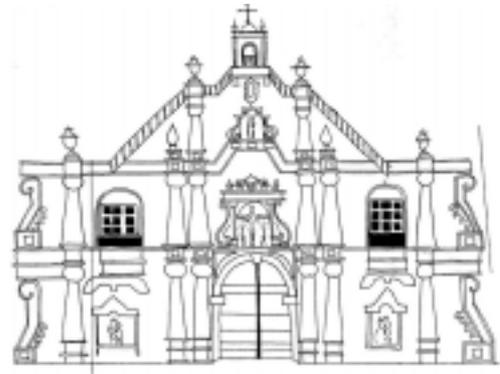
A private folk museum in Penang is located on the top floor of a restored heritage house. The two lower floors house quality antique shops, stalls for hand-woven tapestries, Chinese arts and crafts and refreshments outlets set out in an open arcade style. The rent of the shops can finance the museum, which is an added draw to the shopping centre and lends more authenticity and legitimacy to the shops.

## Museum

Converting an existing heritage building into a visitor's centre creates a historical ambience. Often an old building such as town hall, post office or railway building can be converted into a museum or interpretive centre. The cost of purchasing a building may be avoided if the property is not currently a viable commercial building and the owner will agree to a long-term lease at a low rent or will sell it for a nominal fee. Local governments often own some of these properties. If the building is declared a historic site some funding may be available from national governments.

Division of the display space using existing rooms instead of one large area presents a story in a series of displays and will maintain the spatial integrity of the building. As well as providing offices for the centre's management, space should be provided for toilets, storage, workshop, a staff room, meeting rooms, and retail space.

A new building can be designed for better security, proper lighting, and to satisfy the standards of museum display. It should, however, incorporate or refer to local building styles in its design to reflect the character of the established buildings. This is the most expensive option and is dependent on a consistent and substantial source of funds for construction, maintenance and operation.



Villa Escudero, Phillipines

### Macao, China

The Museum of Macao incorporates the past and present throughout the building. The entrance foyer displays an excavated wall which makes up part of the 20th century structure. Outdoor escalators take advantage of Macao's pleasant climate. Inside, the facades of old buildings, both in Western and Chinese style, are reconstructed on an almost full-size scale. The museum is also built so that upon leaving the visitors are able to see a view of modern Macao and place the museum within its broader context.

## Funding and Organisation

Many communities think that they do not have the money to develop any sort of interpretive centre. However, by looking beyond municipal and other public coffers, a broad array of funding sources may be found. One of the most lucrative partnerships can be made between public and private sectors.

There are two major components to the financing of an interpretive facility: capital and day to day operating costs (and costs for updating exhibits).

### Capital

When raising capital, it is interesting to look at the list of benefactors that is usually displayed in an entrance to a large museum. This lists the names of private and corporate donors as well as government agencies. Donating to a 'good cause' such as an interpretive centre provides a public relations opportunity for large companies that are seeking to develop a positive public reputation. Individual donors may receive tax benefits for giving money to establish a new public institution.

Foreign funders which are involved in partnerships with your country may also be sources of capital. Funding *may* be available from a town or provincial government if it is interested in (and able to) contribute to a valuable cultural and tourist resource.

### Day to Day Costs

By sharing interpretive centre space with private enterprises, the centre can continue to generate funds. There are different ways to accomplish this such as sponsorship and advertising, as with sporting events. Particular care must be taken to display sponsors in a responsible manner consistent with the attraction. Shops, restaurants, and tour companies can be housed in the same building as the centre. The non-profit cultural attraction is a key and inseparable component. The interpretive aspects become the honest, non-commercial thematic draw and the businesses pay the overhead.

Operations would be paid for out of earned income, primarily rents charged to tourism booking offices, small craft retail shops, maybe a weekly/monthly market day, and other tourism related services and government departments. It may be possible to also charge an admission to the interpretive component, but this depends on scale and quality: there has to be sufficient perceived value to get visitors to part with more than a symbolic fee.

Other potential sources of funds include local industry, community initiatives such as market fundraisers or special events and local tourism taxes. A retail space may be operated by the

interpretive centre itself. The sale of promotional material can supplement an entrance fee. The curiosity of the visitor which has been aroused by a visit to the area can be satisfied by providing more information on related themes. In a smaller centre, care will have to be taken not to compete with existing booksellers and retailers, especially if they are housed within the same building or complex as the interpretive centre.

If such an arrangement is carefully established, and assuming there are enough tourists/ local visitors around to populate the centre, it should be possible to break even on operations. It can be a beneficial situation for both the local businesses who receive more bookings, small craftspeople and vendors who increase sales, and the visitors who get a place to learn about the region.

Consider maintenance and day-to-day costs. Before installing air conditioning in a building, for example, calculate the expense of running it daily. There are concerns of maintenance, gardens, replacing old displays and damaged or faded panels. Staffing costs will also vary widely depending on whether volunteers are available to serve as staff.

### Organisation

The project should be set up to succeed as an entire entity, or the for-profit businesses will not see the value of maintaining and staffing the non-profit aspects. In many circumstances a public entity (municipal, provincial or national) owns the land and building and pays for the capital cost of the set-up. A governing board can be set up as a dependent of the establishing government agency, with members from the community and tenants of the building as well.

### Displays

This section is intended to demonstrate the significant range of possibilities that creativity and effort can produce. Many different forms of presentation are available for use in exhibits such as three-dimensional artifacts, panels, maps, photos, recreations of interiors and exteriors, computers, and audio visual displays. Keep in mind that hundreds of entire books have been written about interpretive centre exhibit design. These books and ideally, professionals in the field should be consulted.

Interpretation at the centre should be straightforward and avoid overloading the visitors with too much information before they have had a chance to look around a community. An exhibit is interpretive if it makes the topic come to life through visitor involvement and relevance to the everyday life of the viewer. The same principles that applied to a self-guiding trail or festival apply to exhibits. These exhibits should provoke interest or curiosity, relate to the visitor's everyday life and reveal the story through a unique viewpoint. They should also reflect the community's themes and objectives and lead the visitors to further exploration.

### Exhibit design tips

- Keep exhibit labels short—less than 50 words.
- Interesting and provocative headlines and graphics will draw visitors.
- Keep slide shows or videos to about 3 minutes.
- Be careful of high-tech exhibits that cannot be fixed by staff or require difficult to find parts.
- Keep in mind the reading levels/languages of the visitors.
- Judge whether objectives will be met before money is spent.

Exhibit design can start with a workshop of everyone involved in the exhibit display to determine what the subject areas of the interpretive centre will be. What will be the main theme and subthemes? All exhibits should support these themes.

Consider the visitor as you plan your exhibits—why would a visitor want to know this? How should the visitor use the information being shared or interpreted? This is also relevant when planning the life span of the displays; if they are expected to attract many locals, displays will need to be rotated more often than if the tourists are annual visitors.

The following principles may need to be considered when deciding how and what to present in the exhibits:

- We all bring our pasts to the present.
- First impressions are especially important.
- Different people have different perceptions of the same thing.
- Simplicity and organisation clarify messages.
- A picture can be worth a thousand words.
- Many people learn better when they are actively involved in the learning process.

### Artifacts

Designers may have to resist the temptation to automatically display local artifacts which have been donated. The artifacts may have some historic value but can confuse the presentation unless they are pertinent to the theme. On the other hand, artifacts do not have to be ancient. Interesting displays can be created, for example, with everyday cooking instruments. Tourists rarely have an opportunity to see into local kitchens and interpretation of these items can be used to discuss topics such as women's roles, religious festivals and ceremonial foods.

Artifacts can be displayed in glass cases or in recreated rooms or shops. The Museum of Macao even features a cross-section of a trading ship full of spices. Artifacts placed in their context have more relevance to the visitors than if they are displayed as individual pieces in distinct cases, as they would be in an art gallery. In an interpretive exhibit, the piece may be very fine, but its presence serves a larger purpose—to encourage a deeper understanding of the community's heritage. Individual cases can be used to highlight a particularly impressive piece of workmanship or a very valuable artifact.

Architectural artifacts can be interpreted by using scale models alongside pieces of old buildings so that visitors get the effect of the original scale.

Valuable artifacts will require adequate security and have to be protected from handling and sunlight. In an older building it will be more difficult to provide modern museum standards of lighting and security without compromising the authentic qualities of the building. While display cases and lighting systems must be attractive and well-designed, they must not overwhelm the message they are attempting to relate. A complicated display system may attract attention to itself rather than to the story it is trying to present. Provision should be made for a combination of two-dimensional displays as well as cases to accommodate actual artifacts or three-dimensional models.



#### Port Arthur, Australia

On purchasing an entrance ticket at this former convict settlement, each visitor is assigned a "convict identity" in the form of a playing card. He or she then follows this character through a life as a convict, beginning with a courtroom sentencing scene. The following exhibits are made up of sounds and artifacts (or reproductions) displayed in diorama form. Each exhibit is accompanied by interpretive texts, one of which will apply specifically to the visitor's identity. In this interactive exhibit, artifacts and reproductions become relevant in terms of the visitors' characters as they get caught up in the life of their temporary identities.

### Interactive Exhibits

Interactive displays are also very good at engaging visitors, children and adults alike. Giving visitors an opportunity to try their hand at a traditional instrument, board game, cooking or artistic technique often leaves them with a strong impression. Reproductions of old artifacts or contemporary artifacts can be used, depending on the type and amount of use. This type of display can be part of a guided tour of the interpretive centre or can exist in an adjoining space. Demonstrations of the same types of activities can also be valuable. School programs can be developed based on supervised interaction with artifacts, or may include instructors who interpret dance and music with the children.

#### National Museum of the American Indian, New York City

This museum offers year-round interpretive public programs including a children's festival, plays, and craft workshops. Visitors have an opportunity to try Sioux bead design, paint Hopi gourd rattles and learn children's dances.

According to museum literature, teachers from several different Native groups lead these programs in order to "...portray their ancient beliefs and share their contemporary experiences. Music, dance, painting, film-making, literature, storytelling, games and other creative activities that are a part of everyday life in many Native homes tell something of what it means to be Indian."

### Computer-based interpretation

The main advantage of computer programs is that they offer a wide range of material to the audience. Their large storage capacity allows users to access more detailed interpretation if they are interested in a deeper analysis of the site's story.

The terminals can be set up so that even people with little computer knowledge can use them to call up text, slides or motion picture presentations while more details can be asked for by simply touching definitions on the screen. Even one computer can become an interactive display. If computer-based interpretation is used, there should be a locally available technician to help with any problems that may arise.



### Phimai, Thailand

This historic town is developing an interactive computer program for the visitors centre at the sanctuary which houses Khmer ruins from the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The CUC UEM Project designed a video program that recreates the way Phimai looked when its historic buildings, now partially restored ruins, were part of a thriving temple complex. The designer used a computer program to animate a series of drawings. This interpretive video will be especially appealing to children; the story of Phimai is told from the point of view of a child talking to his hand-held video game. This video aims to stimulate children's imaginations by relating ancient ruins to children's familiarity with video games and computer graphics.

### Audio Visual Displays

An audio-visual display can provide an imaginative presentation and in some cases it may be more appropriate to devote most of the budget to one very sophisticated audio-visual presentation than to an assortment of different media. It can also be used as one element in multi-media display. A description of various audio-visual media follows.

### Film and Video

We all understand the story-telling capacity of film—it keeps an audience's attention, it is a familiar medium to most people and it is dynamic, featuring moving pictures and sounds. An interpretive film can capture the historic and dramatic qualities of a community. Remember to contact local colleges and universities for assistance. Film students may be looking for an opportunity to produce a film.

Historic film footage or stills can come alive with skilful editing. Visual images should be allowed to speak for themselves and the spoken portion should be concise and broken up by music and sound. A detailed audio description of the pictures should not be required. For example, a voice from the past can describe how the main street flooded every year, while the picture demonstrates how the street looked during everyday commerce.

The audio portion includes music, sound effects, narration and historical voices from the past. Usually a community group will have some of the images which will be used in the film. If the community has prepared an inventory of their resources, much of this material will have been found. The producer will probably need more images, comprised of new and historic photos. He or she should be sensitive to the quality of the historical interpretation and avoid a commercial approach.

If comfortable seating is provided in a viewing area the audience will tolerate a presentation of up to twenty minutes. A ten minute show is usually an ideal length while four minutes is the maximum for a standing audience. The noise from audio-visual presentations sometimes intrudes on the rest of the display. If possible, a separate room should be set aside for the show.

A film can be transferred to video tape. Advantages of this medium include easier maintenance since several copies of the tape can be made as replacements. Copies can be sent out to television stations for promotions or sold at retail shops. Video only requires a television type of monitor which can be part of the main display area if ambient light is expected. Video tape can also be transferred to video projection for use on a wide screen to allow for a larger audience.

#### Napier, New Zealand

This town is world-renowned for its well-preserved Art Deco architecture. Along with guided tours, the Art Deco Trust visitor's centre presents a video documentary. The video incorporates old photographs and contemporary film footage to interpret the town's history in a local and global context.

The narrator explains how Napier's architecture reflects social history e.g. how simplified lines were seen to symbolise the progress and streamlining that accompanied the 1930's vision of modernity. The video also discusses how preservation in the town has depended on economic and social forces and the important role that tourism has played in preserving historic buildings. This video is sold in the visitor's centre gift shop.

#### Slide Presentations

A slide presentation is similar in most considerations to video and film. It is also one of the least expensive audio visual presentations. A minimum of three projectors is required to present a dynamic show. Two projectors can work together while a third is cued up and ready to go. The various techniques which can expand the range of the material include multiple images, dissolves and wind down images. Sound is provided by a cassette player which is synchronised to the slides. A slide show can also be transferred to video.

### Power Point

This computer-based presentation program is inexpensive and easy to use. It allows the producer to combine text and pictures in a smooth, linear fashion. A Power Point presentation will need to be accompanied by audio which can be part of the computer program.

### Audio Presentation

An audio component can be used instead of or alongside text to explain a display or series of artifacts. In fact even a recording of a song, poem or instrument can be as evocative and go farther in interpreting an object than text.

### Volunteers

Some cultures have a history of volunteerism where it is acceptable to work for free for a good cause. Often students and seniors make up the bulk of the volunteer force. Volunteers can be used in many capacities in an interpretive centre: as tour guides, staff in retail shops and information booths and to catalogue artifacts and perform other administrative tasks. If volunteers are to be used as interpreters to conduct guided tours, they should be given the proper training to ensure that they are familiar with the material and can speak comfortably in public.

Some incentive may be necessary to ensure that the volunteers are reliable and committed to the project. More responsibility will result in greater job satisfaction and a professional attitude about the task they have been given.

## CONCLUSION

In this manual, many different formats for presenting a community's heritage have been discussed. There are other options, limited only by a community's resourcefulness and imagination. A well-planned and appealing interpretation program can have far-reaching implications for a community's sustainable tourism. The essence of good interpretation however, insists that the community itself, in all its complexity, defines the themes and resources of interpretation and decides how its people and heritage are represented.

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