

Cultural Tourism and Historic Hudson Valley (HHV)

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In the draft of his "Tourism at Cultural World Heritage Sites," Robertson Collins, chairman of the ICOMOS International scientific Committee on Cultural Tourism, tries to define "cultural tourism" and comments:

Cultural tourism is good tourism involving music and arts and dance and ethnic evidences, as compared to bad tourism which is only interested in sun and sand and discos. There emerges the claim that Cultural Tourism is sincere, real, honest, intellectual, thoughtful and is somehow a learning and caring experience.

I think that I might go beyond Mr. Collins' rather jokey distinctions and say that when we travel away from home, geographically or intellectually, "good tourism" makes us aware of cultural differences and similarities. One would hope that travelers are pleasantly surprised to discover the humanity and the aspirations that they share with others. One would hope equally that travelers will become increasingly aware of and even sympathetic toward the differences between their own culture and others. When travelling closer to home one hopes that travellers become more aware of their own history and culture. Under the best of circumstances "good tourism" increases one's understanding of the similarities and differences within the traveler's own culture that might exist over time.

"Good tourism" or cultural tourism, if you prefer, broadens one's perception of his or her own past as well as the past of others.

The American author, John Steinbeck, tells us of a child of the Oklahoma Dust Bowl during the 1930's

Great Depression who must leave behind all his belongings, the evidences of his own and his family's past, as his family moves to California in search of a better life. He asks, "Without our past, how will we know its us?"

The answer to his question is that he probably won't. Those in our own time who travel have learned the importance of artefacts and the need for context in understanding culture. And they have learned that with a better knowledge of the past of our own and other cultures, we will better know who we are and who all those others are, too.

I would like to tell you about Historic Hudson Valley, one complex of historic properties and its efforts to achieve "good tourism" by helping its visitors to broaden their perceptions in order to understand what the visitor shares with the cultures that these properties represent and how and where today's visitors are different from those who have gone before them at those properties.

Historic Hudson Valley (HHV) has recently celebrated its 40th anniversary as a private charitable and educational organization that operates a series of house museums made up of historic properties of local, national and international significance. Historic Hudson Valley' properties are located in New York State's Hudson River Valley; four are located just north of Manhattan and New York City and a fifth property is an hour to the north.

The scenery of the region has been compared to the Rhine; the variety of visitor offerings are as different as folk music and music festivals, art and sculpture collections, all kinds of outdoor

sports and wineries. Most important, perhaps, in attracting visitors—cultural tourists—to the region is history and the attraction offered by historic houses and sites, public and private, grand and modest, dating from the time of early European travelers who went up the Hudson River in their search for passageways to the East.

Established in 1951 as Sleepy Hollow Restorations, the Historic Hudson Valley complex originally consisted of three Westchester County (NY) properties ranging in period from Philipsburg Manor—Upper mills (the mercantile centre of an 18th century trading empire that once spanned the globe), Van Cortlandt Manor (for 250 years the home of a single family—originally Dutch—whose members included a Mayor of New York City and a Lieutenant Governor of New York during the British colonial period just prior to the American Revolution), Sunnyside (a rare surviving example of American Romanticism and the home of Washington Irving, an important American writer of the early 19th century and author of “Tales of Sleepy Hollow”). All of these properties are National Historic Landmarks.

In 1984 the organization broadened its focus beyond Sleepy Hollow and Westchester County to include the history and culture of the entire Hudson River valley, more than 100 miles along the river. In 1985 Sleepy Hollow began tours to the nearby Union Church of Pocantico Hills which features 20th century stained glass windows by Marc Chagall and Henri Matisse, gifts of the Rockefeller family. In 1986 the organization acquired Montgomery Place (distinguished for its architecture, its setting and its residents) and changed its name to today’s Historic Hudson Valley in recognition of its wider geographic focus.

Beginning in 1994, HHV will operate Kykuit (the home of the Rockefeller Family, leaders in American business and philanthropy and long concerned with the significance of historic properties as educational resources and

with the conservation of natural and manmade landscapes). Both Montgomery Place and Kykuit are National Historic Landmarks, as well.

Historic Hudson Valley, like Colonial Williamsburg, Inc., was founded at the initiative and through the generosity of John D. Rockefeller Jr although there is no institutional connection between the two organizations.

Historic Hudson Valley operates a comprehensive historic house museum program with public visitation and educational activities based on research, archaeology, and curatorial activities. It conducts a variety of public, relations and promotional activities, operates a system of museum shops, conducts an extensive marketing program and is engaged in public and private fundraising designed to support its programs and its operations.

Historic Hudson Valley seeks to serve the communities in which the historic properties are located and to attract a wide audience of local visitors as well as domestic and international tourists, especially those who are visiting nearby New York City.

Historic Hudson Valley’s mission, as set forth by its trustees, is to restore, preserve, interpret and promote for public benefit and enjoyment sites in the Valley that possess historic significance, architectural distinction, excellence in decorative or fine arts collections or extraordinary beauty in terms of landscape and natural setting. HHV’s objectives include the creation of programs designed to maximize the educational, cultural and recreational opportunities of the properties it owns and, under certain circumstances, of properties owned by others but managed or operated by HHV (as in the case of Kykuit which is owned by the US National Trust for Historic Preservation). HHV continues to be a private non-profit organization and it continues to raise funds through the generous support of private foundations and individuals and through admissions and its own marketing operations.

As with any complex of historic buildings used as museums – facilities for cultural tourism, if you will – Historic Hudson Valley is involved in the usual professional concerns including architectural conservation, archaeological investigation and curatorial activities, but for purposes of this discussion, my focus will be on education and marketing and will touch on fundraising, all from an American perspective.

Education

Educational programming is considered central to Historic Hudson Valley's mission of fostering knowledge and appreciation of the region's history and culture. Educational offerings include both school and public programs reflecting the interpretive themes of each site, all based on exhaustive historic research as well as architectural and archaeological investigation.

In addition to its interest in expanding on the teaching of regional, state and American history, in recent years, the State of New York has called for the development of a new school curriculum that includes information about the state's significant multi-cultural history.

Like Sri Lanka, New York State has a significant Dutch and English history. But unlike Sri Lanka, New York has also had 150 years of Jewish immigration primarily from Germany and Eastern Europe, as well as significant immigration from Latin America. And from within the US, New York has also seen a major influx of Spanish-speaking Puerto Ricans and of African Americans, many of them from the American South. Historic Hudson Valley has developed a wide ranging educational program to support the state's endeavors and to respond to the multi-cultural needs of the state's newer residents and their families.

For its adult visitors, HHV offers concerts and a lecture series and adult tours that focus on subjects such as architecture, decorative arts and

horticulture. It also offers a number of popular special events (some of which are detailed under **MARKETING**, below).

In-depth school workshops emphasizing interactive learning are offered. Among these are:

“African-Americans in search of Freedom,” which explores the African American experience in the Hudson Valley during the 18th century;

“Labor and Leisure,” explores the relationships between estate families and their servants during the 19th century through the use of artefacts and role playing;

“The Train is a Comin” is a guided tour-workshop which looks at agricultural technology of the colonial period at the 18th century Philips Manor and compares it with the next century's industrial advances as observed at Sunnyside, a 19th century property.

Marketing

Historic Hudson Valley has explored and will explore a variety of marketing approaches designed to attract visitors to the sites. Current marketing goals include:

- (1) Targeting “the volume buyer category,” including school tour groups, group tour operators, corporate memberships and individual and family memberships, families in the area where the properties are situated, and tourists travelling to and through the area, other than those who are part of organized tours and groups;
- (2) Growth in current attendance through the use of persuasive marketing materials; maximum visibility among group tour operators, travel planners and teachers; and successful promotion of events at the sites;

- (3) Development of museum shops located at the historic properties includes efforts to refine and expand offerings of fast-moving materials along with improvement in the presentation and display of shop merchandise. Improvements in management and accounting systems for shops is also an objective;
- (4) Development of a strategic public relations work plan to include promotion through effective editorial coverage and support for the various events scheduled at is also an objective;

Another aspect of marketing is the possibility for joint action. In addition to offering a "Sleepy Hollow Passport" for admission to its own properties, HHV offers a joint ticket which gives admission to Lyndhurst. Lyndhurst is a property owned by the National Trust for Historic preservation and with the opening of Kykuit nearby (also owned by the National Trust), HHV expects to enjoy a spin-off benefit of increased numbers of visitors to HHV properties as a result of visitation growing out of the wide public interest in and curiosity about the Rockefeller family home.

Obviously, the link between or among activities is not always precise. Just as promotion and public relations are a part of marketing, special events and publications can be linked to education. Let's look at some of the special events scheduled over a year which are part of the HHV program of events.

At Sunnyside "Tall Tales, Short Tales," was a 1992 storytelling festival that included African and African American Storytelling, Washington Irving and Dutch Storytelling, Irish Storytelling, Native American and Hispanic Storytelling, along with Punch and Judy and other puppet shows.

A benefit for HHV African American programs featured a play reenacting an 1857 debate on the subject of the abolition of slavery. The program also included and gospel music and spirituals in the African American tradition.

"Animals and Acrobats" at Van Cortlandt Manor, HHV's best attended special event in 1992 recreated an 18th century travelling troupe with magic and puppet shows which also offered rides on a camel and an elephant.

"A Soldier's Life," featured uniformed marchers dressed in the period of the American Revolution. It offered military drills, exhibits and demonstrations on camp life and civilian trades during that period, together with martial music dating from the Revolutionary period.

A very popular Spring ritual at Historic Hudson Valley's Philipsburg Manor is the annual celebration of "Pinkster," a 17th and 18th century holiday observed by the Dutch and African Americans at Philipsburg Manor and in other parts of New York settled by the Dutch. "Pinkster's" name is believed to have come from Pentecost. During festivities that mark the celebration, coloured eggs are featured much as Easter eggs are a part of that religious celebration in the US today.

Over the Christmas holidays, HHV properties offer candlelight tours of historic properties to the public and to corporate and other sponsors who are offered a private evening in the historic houses. These corporate candlelight events have proven to be very successful in attracting and keeping the interest of local corporations in Historic Hudson Valley as an entity and as a local cultural resource.

Another marketing/educational activity is the publication of brochures and very targeted advertising/marketing/educational efforts. HHV has developed Spanish-language brochures on its properties and advertises in the Spanish-language local press. HHV also advertises in area Japanese publications, provides the local Japanese-language media with articles tailored to the community which they serve and has even recruited a Japanese-speaker-writer who serves as a volunteer guide.

HHV has recently expanded its marketing efforts directed at group tours, including international visitor group tours originating in New York City. Research has indicated that HHV might well explore the market for group tours of German visitors and groups from the UK. Both domestic and international visitors who have had at least one previous visit to the US are considered a likely audience for the approach to cultural tourism that is offered at Historic Hudson Valley. Kykuit is expected to be particularly attractive to tours of both domestic and international travelers especially because it is a "new site" and because of its proximity to Manhattan (from Kykuit's front steps one can see the Empire State building 25 miles away).

On a different marketing front, HHV has considered the need for additional "hospitality training" for its staff and those with whom visitors will come in contact. Interestingly, training for historic site visitor-handling goes beyond travel and tourism to fields such as retail merchandising and the "hospitality training" offered to employees of some particularly successful department stores.

HHV marketing of its properties and its programmes is key to the success of maintaining a high level of visitation in a very competitive area. Hudson Valley's attendance rose 15% in 1992 over 1991, quite remarkable when one considers that during that period attendance at Williamsburg dropped by 1% and that at Monticello dropped by 7%.

Fundraising and Sponsorships

Anyone in the cultural tourism business, in whatever guise, knows that historic properties require funding well beyond that gained through the sale of admission tickets. In some countries that funding role is played by a Minister of Culture and some properties have their own Mycaenaes. In those countries where there is a pattern of private and corporate giving the cultural institution must seek out and persuade potential givers that their institution is worthy of financial support.

In the US in recent years abolition or reduction of many of the former tax incentives offered to donors has meant major reductions in contributions forcing the boards of trustees of all kinds of charitable educational non-profit organizations to seek out new possible sources of income. Government grants—when they are available—frequently take the form of 2:1 or 3:1 challenge grants calling for the development of financial support from foundations, corporate grants and major private donors. Corporate sponsorships, particularly of components of educational programs, have made it possible for many organizations including HHV to offer new or innovative educational programmes, some of them targeted at specific audiences.

In working with potential sponsors, either individual or corporate, one effort of the HHV Development Office has been to identify a menu of needs and to attach a price tag to these specific projects or activities that it would like to undertake in the hope of attracting a donor or a sponsor to those projects. At HHV for example, under Education, \$25,000 could provide camp scholarships to 50 children from low-income households to join with 250 other children in participating for a week in the three week "Summerweek Day Camp" programme at the various HHV sites. \$4000 would contribute to the Fall Conference for Teachers designed to give 100 participants an opportunity to improve their teacher skills and knowledge in social studies. \$80,000 would support the year-long tercentenary celebration of Philipsburg manor which will include special exhibits, a research colloquium and the publication of papers presented there and a tercentennial "kermis" or community fair and celebration. \$15,000 would underwrite a series of 12 concerts by local groups at Union Church, an HHV administered property. Historic garden workshops are offered on weekends throughout the year and could be underwritten at a total cost of \$5,000, and so on.

Historic Hudson Valley has had enviable if not total success in

fundraising, due to support from a generous and committed Board of Trustees but also due in part to the energy of those Trustees in identifying and securing funds from others who share their interest in HHV including individual donors, foundation trustees and corporate executives. HHV and its supporters have established several special interest support groups including a Friends group, a young leadership group interested in identifying new and young supporters and a group particularly interested in supporting the decorative arts and curatorial projects.

Major fundraising events (in the case of HHV an annual ball at Rockefeller Center's Rainbow Room) have been successful and seem on their way to establishing a tradition of support for the organization.

Historic Hudson Valley offers an American paradigm for educational,

marketing and fund raising activities. Its educational activities have been creative in their use of continuing research and new techniques designed to meet the needs of a changing society. HHV has been entrepreneurial in marketing its cultural resources and in trying to identify new audiences for the message those resources convey. In a time of diminishing public funding for cultural programmes, the HHV leadership has been energetic in its efforts to identify new sources of financial support for its operations and for its long-term stability.

The educational, marketing and fund raising techniques and programmes of Historic Hudson Valley may not be transferable in *in toto* to other cultural programs but components of the HHV efforts may well serve to stimulate new thinking about culture and cultural tourism as expressed through the medium of historic properties.



Montenery Place, Annandale on Hudson, NY



Sunnyside, Tarrytown, NY





Special events (HHV) Handbill advertisements



Special events Garden guides for HHV properties