

A. SHAPING RECREATION DESTINATIONS

Shaping SLV Communities into Recreation Destinations

Great trails and recreation opportunities don't just satisfy local athletes, they can also attract tourists, boost local economies and help bolster the San Luis Valley as a recreation "hot spot". In addition to the Colorado ski resort towns, places like Fruita, Salida and Durango are benefitting economically because they have embraced their recreation resources and promoted themselves as recreation destinations. As multiple communities in the San Luis Valley emerge as recreation destinations for different types of outdoor recreation pursuits, the entire region will grow as a popular destination to recreate and enjoy an incredibly scenic environment.

The following best practices are applicable to individual communities and counties looking to distinguish themselves as a recreation destination and also support the SLVGO Coalition's vision of shaping the entire Valley into a travel destination for recreationalists.

BEST PRACTICES

Build Great Trails & Offer a Varied Trails Experience. Well designed, fun and scenic trails are an instrumental starting point for a recreation destination. If possible, design a variety of types of trail from wide dirt paths to remote single track to challenging, bike-specific features like pump tracks and downhill lines.

- Recruit the help of trail experts to help in planning and designing trails (see Trail System Tool Kit for more best practices related to trail development).
- Advertise a whole system of trails, not just one or that route will be over used.
- Take advantage of the views, historic sites, and stories of the land that make a destination unique. Design and recommend trail experiences that take advantage of the SLV's heritage sites.
- Be prepared to tweak your trails and recreation opportunities as needed to meet changing trends.

Map it! Great maps make it easy for visitors and are a worthwhile investment that locals will benefit from, too. Invest in a Valley-wide recreation map. A physical, hard-copy version of the map could double as a brochure for the SLV. A digital version of the map (accessible online and via mobile devices) would be less expensive to produce and also a valuable trip planning tool for locals and visitors.

- When featuring trails on maps, provide elevation profiles, concise descriptions, a gauge of difficulty and safety considerations. Maps should include also include trailhead, parking and facility information.
- Make maps available for free or use them as a fundraiser with revenue allocated for trails and recreation projects.
- Consider a series of maps/brochures that feature different recreation uses (e.g., SLV birding map or a SLV mountain biking map).

Partner with Neighboring and Nearby Recreation Destinations.

Work with communities throughout the SLV to collectively promote the region's recreation resources. Tourists will be more likely to visit (and return) to a destination if there is a collection of activities, trail networks and experiences awaiting them. Work together to figure out how you could promote a long weekend or, better, a week's work of outdoor recreation in the SLV.

Be Targeted & Digitally Connected. When marketing sports tourism, it is best to focus on a specific activity. If a community offers a nearby and fun singletrack trail system, promote mountain biking. If a community neighbors a National Wildlife Refuge and/or state wildlife area, push the wildlife observation and birding opportunities. Use social media and shared links, to connect your destination and website to local, state, national recreation groups such as the International Mountain Bike Association (IMBA) as well as stewardship organizations like Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado, Get Outdoors Colorado, Trout Unlimited, and Wildland Restoration Volunteers.

- Take advantage of sport-specific publications and websites (e.g. Audubon, Fly Fishing) when targeting a specific user group. On a regional scale, the SLV can offer a wide variety of recreation destinations from BMX and fly-fishing to off-road motorcycling and yoga retreats.
- Reach out to user groups such as bike, trail running, Nordic, fishing, mountaineering, and birding clubs in communities outside the SLV (e.g., Colorado Springs, Denver-Boulder, Albuquerque, Mountain resort towns) and encourage them to come see what the SLV has to offer.

Offer a Range of Lodging Including Camping. Recreationalists look for convenient places to stay that complement their lifestyle including campgrounds near trailheads, bed and breakfasts, motels and hotels, as well as rental units. Recreation “pioneers” are the more adventuresome set who will venture farther to check out new and emerging destinations and they are likely to seek out camping and/or relatively inexpensive lodging.

- Make information about lodging and camping easily accessible online.
- Offer a range of camping experiences from in-town, full-service camping to primitive, backcountry camping.
- A few tips on campground design:
 - Provide parking for a range of vehicle sizes.
 - Separate camping types as appropriate (e.g. primitive sites, RV sites). Plan for accessibility.
 - Create an intuitive and recognizable entrance and vehicular circulation route.
 - Establish a sense of privacy by using buffers (e.g. natural rock formations, vegetation), varying site placement along the road and providing appropriate distances between campsites.

Provide recreation support facilities and desired amenities. While the focus should be on providing a high quality recreation experiences, a community and its partners should also ensure that visitors are comfortable and their basic needs are met. This means providing shade, clean restrooms, picnic tables, garbage cans, maps at trailheads.

Address Après-Recreation Needs.

Recreationalists will be looking for places to eat and drink after their activity or to stock up on groceries and gear prior to an outing. Promote and advertise local coffee shops, restaurants, gear shops, and breweries so visitors know where to go to fuel up before and after their adventures.

Partner with Local Shops. Tourists will typically turn to local gear shops and sporting good stores to get information on recreation opportunities in a community. Make sure these outlets are well stocked with local maps and tour guides and that staff are familiar with the area’s recreation resources (e.g., trails, programs, facilities) as well as SLVGO’s informational resources (e.g., www.slvgo.com).



Interpretive signs at Russell Lakes State Wildlife Area (courtesy of Root House Studio)

SHAPING RECREATION DESTINATIONS

Foster a Culture of Hospitality. Assist sporting good shops and other local business by training staff to be SLV ambassadors and recreation promoters. Through workshops or printed materials (e.g., lists, brochures talking points) ensure business owners and locals are informed about the SLV's recreational resources. Helpful, informed staff will improve the visitor experience and the stellar customer service will likely win the store a repeat visitor. Locals can also help spread an ethic of responsible use and encourage visitors to recreate responsibly.

Install Effective Signage. Sign your trails and recreation areas well. You don't want people getting lost, as that will sour their experience. Plus roadside signs can be a very cost-effective form of advertising since they build awareness of recreation resources 24/7. Use roadside signage to make it easy for people to find your communities trails and other recreation resources. No one likes sign pollution, but simple attractive markers and well-placed road signs greatly improve navigability.



Penitente Canyon trails (courtesy of Root House Studio)

Tell a Story. Part of what distinguishes the SLV from other recreation destinations in Colorado, is its unique and robust cultural heritage. Promote and interpret the SLV's historic trails and corridors (e.g. Old Spanish Trail, Pikes Route) as well as its layered culture and natural history. Interpretation could take the form of signed and interpreted trails, online information, printed media (e.g. brochures), workshops and classes, art, film, or mobile apps.



Valley View Hotsprings (courtesy of Root House Studio)

Overlooks. Overlooks provide outstanding opportunities to share stories about the natural and cultural history of public lands. For many visitors traveling through the SLV by automobile a scenic overlook serves as an introduction to the region and its landscape. At the overlooks, visitors can develop a deeper connection to public lands, an important step in strengthening connections to the SLV. Locate overlooks to capture great views and, if possible, utilize existing road pull offs.

Orient Visitors. Identify a number of "orientation hubs" in the San Luis Valley. Either kiosks, information centers, or local businesses that provide information on the region's recreation resources. Keep these information outlets updated with the most current offerings and opportunities.

Website. Recreation-oriented travelers are a niche market with different needs and interests than mass-market travelers. Create or link to a website that offers SLV maps, updated trail conditions, weather, trip planning tips, photos and videos. This online information resource will draw visitors and assist them with trip preparations.

Consider crowd-sourcing recreation

content. Allow for posting of user generated content (e.g. pictures, trail conditions, local beta) on the SLVGO website and/or encourage people to use social media accounts and specific hashtags (e.g., #SLVGO) to can share information about their experiences and/or trail conditions.

Host a Recreation Event. Consider hosting a race that utilizes the community's trails systems (e.g., trail run, mountain bike race, adventure race), screen ski/bike/adventure films or organize a large community-scale outing (e.g., hike-athon, fundraiser bike ride, fitness challenge). Recreation events will help foster a culture of recreation, draw media attention, and make more people aware of

the community's recreation resources (for more on events, please refer to Recreation Events Tool Kit).

Track the Numbers. To ensure continued community support and investment in recreation infrastructure improvements, it's essential to quantify your success. Work with partners, to track changes in sales tax, lodging and traffic counts over several years in order to measure the effect of more promotion and investment in recreation.

RECREATION DESTINATION CHECKLIST

SLV communities should consider the following ten steps to solidifying its position as an SLV recreation destination:

- ☐ Develop a recreation map/brochure or guide.
- ☐ Develop and promote camping options.
- ☐ Ensure visitors can easily find trailheads and other recreation destinations. Evaluate existing signs and improve way finding as needed.
- ☐ Build an amenities list for visitors (e.g., a list of local shops, eateries, watering holes and lodging options). Share it online and/or as a printed piece
- ☐ Inform local business owners about the community's recreation facilities and opportunities and encourage hospitality and friendliness to keep visitors coming back.
- ☐ Keep local business and all information centers and tourism outlets well-stocked with maps and guides
- ☐ Direct visitors to SLVGO's website (www.slvgo.com) as a resource for potential recreation opportunities.
- ☐ Post images/video/local beta/stories of your communities recreation resources on SLVGO's social media (Facebook and Instagram) and/or tag them with #SLVGO so they can be re-posted, shared and more widely distributed.
- ☐ Host and promote an annual recreation event. Start small with a community run or ride or recreation film screening (e.g., ski movie).
- ☐ Keep building trail and maintaining existing recreation facilities so that they are safe, inviting and appealing to both visitors and locals.

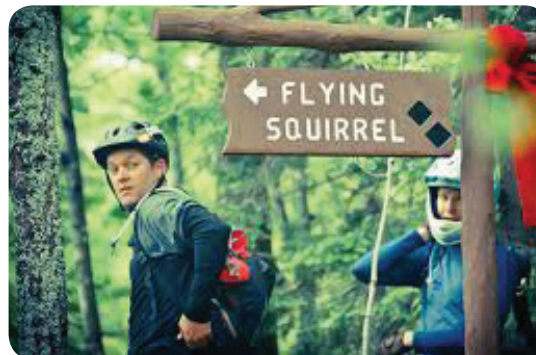
CASE STUDIES: Recreation Destinations



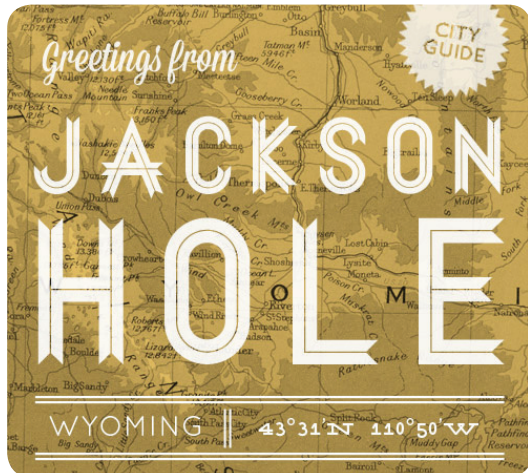
Salida, Colorado uses striking photographs to entice recreation tourists. With an emphasis on trails and bikes this advertising campaign targets mountain bikers.



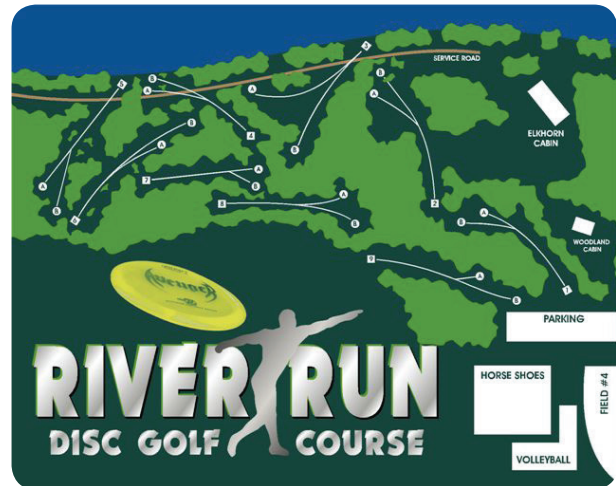
Fun maps that are easy to reach and employ colorful graphic like this one of the Southwest and Rocky Mountain region can effectively summarize all there is to see and do in a region. Maps like this can be "cartoony" and don't need to be precise in scale. Their purpose is to showcase an area and begin to tell its stories and to share its potential for exploration.



Located in Michigan's remote Upper Peninsula, Copper Harbor is a recreation destination that has become increasingly popular with mountain bikers due to its investment in trails. In 2012, the International Mountain Bicycling Association designated Copper Harbor a "silver-level ride destination".



Attractive guides make for useful orientation tools as well and souvenirs that continue to promote the location when they've been taken home.



Mapping recreation opportunities is key to inviting participation and ensuring visitors and locals can locate recreation sites.



Recreation destinations like Salida and Fruita embrace recreation and promote it as part of their community's culture.



Vail, Colorado's system of road and trail signs orient visitors and raise the visibility of recreation opportunities.