

Bar Harbor Sustainable Tourism Management Strategy

Phase 5: Strategic Goals & Actionable Policies



Sustainable Tourism Management Strategy: Project Phases



Define

Design

Deliver

1

Comprehensive Situation & Carrying Capacity Analysis

2

Define Sustainable Tourism

3

Desired Resident and Visitor Experience

4

Shared Vision & Principles

5

Strategic Goals & Actionable Policies

6

Implementation Roadmap, Financing Plan

7

Standards & Benchmarks

8

Monitoring System

9

Final Report

Feedback Integration



Issues Parking Lot: These issues are being considered in Phase 5

- Cell phone service
- STR's / impact on affordability of residential real estate
- Traffic
- Parking/transportation
- Housing
- Infrastructure
- 'Amenity Trap' concept
- Year-round economy/sectors
- Carbon footprint of travel
- Traffic considerations relative to emergency planning/preparedness
- Safety of visitors and emergency preparedness
- Need for a business survey
- Affordability for residents
- Consideration of car-free Acadia National Park in July/August
- Interest from individuals in participating/providing input in Phase 5



Sustainable Tourism in Bar Harbor means protecting resident quality of life, cultural heritage, and the natural environment, while strengthening the local economy and providing quality experiences for visitors now and in the future.



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ASSOCIATES, INC.

Phase 1: Situation and Carrying Capacity Analysis



Key Takeaways:

- The data story reveals that tourism to Bar Harbor is profoundly 'peaky' (20x). Demand continues to grow despite restrictions put in place over the past 5 years. By a large and growing proportion, restaurants and lodging are the chief beneficiaries of this growth.
- Three dynamics – spatial concentration, seasonal compression and systemic constraints – are resulting in an economic model which is now approaching structural limits.
- A recurrent public finance question raised by residents is whether visitors and tourism-related activity are contributing a “fair share” toward the public costs associated with peak-season demand.

What this means for the strategy:

- Pursue a higher yield / lower volume strategy
- Focus on travelers best aligned to Bar Harbor's experiences and ethos
- Disperse demand both spatially and seasonally
- Address systemic constraints
- Address how infrastructure and services for visitors are funded.

Consultation: Three Key Problems



Managing growth: Tourism to Bar Harbor is growing organically. Initiatives already undertaken to manage the growth are bold and significant but reactive, ad hoc, and in some cases divisive.

Quality of life: Residents recognize the value of tourism to the local economy but are concerned that Bar Harbor is becoming less ‘livable’.

Governance and funding: There is no mechanism to lead sustainable tourism initiatives which require public private collaboration and destination stewardship.

Managing Growth



Initiatives in place:

- Acadia National Park reservation system for vehicles accessing Cadillac Mountain
- The Island Explorer free transit around the Island in the high season
- The Gateway Center opened in 2025 to serve as a transit hub/provide free parking to visitors and workers
- Restrictions as to where large cruise ships can moor and the number of cruise passengers who can disembark in Bar Harbor on a single day
- Restrictions for STR VR2's
- Parking meters

Key pain points:

- Congestion – vehicular traffic and footfall – in key areas during certain months
- Access to parking is a frustration for residents during high season
- There is general agreement that shoulder seasons are an opportunity, but some resident exhaustion

What this means for the strategy:

- Optimize existing initiatives
- Focus on addressing congestion
- Explore mechanisms to proactively drive demand e.g., collectively pursuing off-season meetings business

Resident Quality of Life



This is the hardest pain point for the Sustainable Tourism Management Strategy to address, because it is so broad. It includes major concerns such as housing availability/affordability and emergency management, to daily life concerns such as access to parking for daily activities, cell service availability, congestion on particular hiking trails, and availability of certain grocery items.

At the same time, residents recognize that because of tourism, they enjoy a disproportionate level of services and amenities for a 'town this size' and they recognize that Acadia National Park is a treasure for all Americans.

The Sustainable Tourism Management Strategy will not be able to address all quality-of-life concerns. Ultimately, multiple aspects of implementing the Bar Harbor Comprehensive Plan will be at play.

What this means for the strategy:

Quality of Life concerns can be best addressed by the Sustainable Tourism Management Strategy by protecting Bar Harbor's small-town essence.

Key initiatives should focus on:

- Addressing congestion, and
- Guarding against over-commercialization of residential real estate.

Governance & Funding



Tourism governance and funding was a key theme of consultations. We observed that:

- All concerns regarding how tourism is developing in Bar Harbor are directed to the municipal government, whether or not the municipal government has the relevant jurisdiction.
- The business community is divided.
- Residents lack trust in the system the way it is working.
- Many costs associated with servicing visitors are born by the municipal government, and thus rely on municipal revenues such as property tax, parking, cruise fees, etc. There is no destination levy/tax which is a common mechanism used elsewhere.

What this means for the strategy:

- Building trust is a top priority
- Consider alternate governance and funding models to implement the key aspects of the sustainable tourism management strategy and lead destination stewardship

Proposed Strategic Framework



Sustainable Tourism Management Strategy

Definition: Sustainable Tourism in Bar Harbor means protecting resident quality of life, cultural heritage, and the natural environment, while strengthening the local economy and providing quality experiences for visitors now and in the future

Goals

1

Optimize Long-Term Economic Impact

2

Sustain Bar Harbor’s Small Town Essence

3

Be Stewards of the Destination

Objectives



1. Target travelers aligned to Bar Harbor’s community values



2. Reduce number of vehicles



3. Improve the small-town experience for residents and visitors



4. Focus on resident quality of life



5. Adopt a sustainable business model



6. Align public policy

Foundation: Safety, Crisis Response & Recovery

Goal #1: Pursue a High Value / Low Impact Tourism Future

Objective 1: Target High Yield Visitor Segments

- Consider:
 - **Prioritizing overnight visitors**
 - Attracting new visitor segments in the shoulder season leveraging Bar Harbor's research/scientific capacity and strong outdoor brand



Goal #1: Pursue a High Value / Low Impact Tourism Future

Objective 2: Reduce the Number of Vehicles

- Consider:
 - Significantly increasing hourly parking rates at meters for non-residents
 - Stricter requirements for all accommodations to provide overnight parking for guests
 - Proactively encouraging/incentivizing use of Gateway Center parking/Island Explorer for day trip visitors
 - **Introducing a trolley/tram system**



Goal #2: Sustain Bar Harbor's Small Town Essence

Objective 3: Improve the small-town experience for residents and visitors

- Consider:
 - Developing an alternative disembarkation site for cruise ships
 - Improving infrastructure for biking and walking in the downtown area
 - Developing a code of conduct for visitors
 - e.g., *B Like Breckenridge*, *Lake Tahoe Pledge*, *Haida Gwaii Pledge*, *San Juan Islands Pledge* - *"Love it Like a Local"*



Goal #2: Sustain Bar Harbor's Small Town Essence

Objective 4: Focus on Quality of Life

- Consider:
 - Decreasing the cap on STR VR2's
 - Continuing to find new solutions for staff housing



Goal #3: Be Stewards of the Destination

Objective 5: Adopt a Sustainable Business Model

- Consider:
 - Alternate governance and funding models to implement the key aspects of the sustainable tourism management strategy and lead destination stewardship
 - Pursue options to shift some of the burden of local infrastructure from the property tax base to the visitor



Goal #3: Be Stewards of the Destination

Objective 6: Align Public Policy

- TBD depending on the final Sustainable Tourism Management Strategy Implementation Road Map
- Examples from other destinations:
 - Increase planning restrictions for new accommodations



Case Study: Sedona Sustainable Tourism Plan

- Population 10,300 + 6,400 in Village of Oak Creek, 2017. Approximately 38% of Sedona workers live within the city limits.
- Average annual visitation 3 million visits (est 1.4 million unique visitors, about 870k of whom are non-local visitors). 37% of visitors do not stay overnight.
- 1600 hotel and B&B rooms + 870 in surrounding area = 2,470 not including time shares (1,030 units in Sedona and 470 in the Village of Oak Creek). Most of this base has been in place for many years – only 7.5% added in the previous decade.
- Average annual occupancy rate 69% in 2017 / 623,000 room nights sold 2017 (base 2,470).
- No STRs allowed before 2017; 825 units were added by 2019 increasing the base of hotel and timeshares by 20% in two years. There are 1,100+ units now.

Case Study: Sedona Sustainable Tourism Plan

- The City of Sedona relies on sales and bed taxes as its main sources of revenue. The City of Sedona does not levy a property tax.
- The bed tax rate is 3.5%.
- Sedona's sales tax, or Transaction Privilege Tax (TPT) is 3.5%. Sedona does not charge sales tax on groceries, including ingredients used for preparation and consumption at home. Sedona does not handle sales tax collection. This is managed by the Arizona Department of Revenue (ADOR).
- Sedona sales tax collections \$33.5M FY24. Sedona bed tax collections \$9.3M FY 24. Total \$42.8M.

Case Study: Sedona Sustainable Tourism Plan

- Sedona had a destination management organization that functioned in concert with its chamber of commerce: Sedona Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Bureau (SCC&TB).
- The SCC&TB was funded through two distinct functions:
 - The Chamber of Commerce was funded entirely by fees paid by local businesses and organizations that belong to the Chamber, meaning it does not receive taxpayer funds.
 - The Tourism Bureau, was funded by approximately 55% of the city's bed tax revenues, which are paid by guests staying at lodging facilities within the city limits.
- In April 2017, the City entered a 7-year agreement whereby the SCC&TB receives 55% of the city bed tax to operate as the official destination management organization. \$2.3M FY18 (\$933K marketing, \$573k programs to manage visitor flow and create experiences for visitors and residents, \$794k personnel and administration). The agreement was not renewed in 2023 due to a disagreement regarding marketing.

Case Study: Sedona Sustainable Tourism Plan

Sedona Sustainable Tourism Plan (2019) was developed by the City of Sedona and the SCC&TB. Constituency based Task Force – about 20 people.

Mission: To lead the Sedona tourism industry in embracing sustainability practices that enable the long-term health of Sedona – its environment, an excellent quality of life, long-term economic strength, and a positive visitor experience.

Pillars:

1. *Environment:* Lead the tourism industry in implementing sustainability principles, positioning Sedona as a national and international leader in destination stewardship
2. *Resident Quality of Life:* Protect and enhance the quality of life by mitigating impacts of tourism
3. *Quality of the Economy:* Shape the Sedona economy in ways that balance its long-term sustainability and vibrancy
4. *Visitor Experience:* Continue to provide an excellent visitor experience that highlights Sedona's sustainability values and keeps visitors coming back

Case Study:
Sedona
Sustainable
Tourism Plan



A word cloud of tourism-related terms is displayed on a pink background with a floral pattern. The words are in white and vary in size. The largest word is 'traffic-congestion'. Other prominent words include 'short-term-rentals', 'overtourism', 'public-green-transportation', 'road-construction', and 'pollution'. Smaller words include 'art-culture', 'local-businesses', 'crowding', 'city-budget', 'noise', 'medical-care', 'airport', 'taxes', 'affordable-housing', 'fire-danger', and 'job-salary'.

art-culture
local-businesses crowding
medical-care short-term-rentals
city-budget overtourism noise
airport traffic-congestion
public-green-transportation
taxes road-construction pollution
affordable-housing fire-danger
job-salary

Case Study: Sedona Sustainable Tourism Plan

Quality of Life

Goal Statement: Protect and enhance the quality of life by mitigating impacts of tourism.

Pillar Objectives

B1

Implement new infrastructure and multi-modal solutions to facilitate visitor traffic flows and enhance access to key destinations

B2

Expand use of technology to help solve transportation challenges

B3

Deepen engagement with Sedona residents, expanding their knowledge of tourism and efforts to manage it to an effective balance

B4

Develop new sustainability-focused experiences that resonate with both Sedona residents and visitors

B5

Manage current and future accommodations in ways that increase their balance with long-term sustainability

B6

Launch initiatives that lessen tourism impacts to residents (including noise, air, and light pollution) to strengthen resident quality of life

Case Study: Sedona Sustainable Tourism Plan

APPENDIX: RESIDENT QUALITY OF LIFE PILLAR

Goal Statement	Protect and enhance the quality of life by mitigating impacts of tourism.										
		Pillars				Timeframe					
Objective B1	Implement new infrastructure and multi-modal solutions to facilitate visitor traffic flows and enhance access to key destinations	Envir	RQOL	GOE	Vis Exp	Short 12-18 mos	Mid 2-3 yrs	Long 4-5 yrs	Lead Partner(s)	Supporting Partners	Prospective Metrics for Consideration
Tactic B1.1	Build business support around SIM implementation steps and the Phase One initiatives					✓			City of Sedona, SCC&TB	Sedona Businesses	1. Number of industry outreach efforts 2. Benchmark through business surveys
Tactic B1.2	Develop programs and resources that enhance the walkability of Sedona and encourage visitors to leave their cars					✓			City of Sedona	SCC&TB, Sedona Businesses, Local Media, Land Managers, Verde Valley Cyclists Coalition, Sedona Mountain Bike Coalition, Sedona Red Rock Trail Fund	1. WalkSedona.com utilization 2. Number of outreach efforts 3. Benchmark through visitor surveys 4. Estimates of trail and sidewalk uses
Tactic B1.3	Explore new parking facilities where appropriate, while moderating parking demand at high-visitation areas					✓			City of Sedona	Counties, USFS, SCC&TB	1. Average occupancy of available spaces 2. Benchmark through visitor surveys 3. Benchmark through business surveys
Tactic B1.4	Promote alternative visitor destinations, routes, and times to moderate areas of greatest congestion – monitor congestion and communicate both real-time conditions and alternative routes					✓			City of Sedona	ADOT, SCC&TB	1. Number of traffic days when wait times exceed standard averages 2. Benchmark traffic volumes 3. Benchmark through visitor surveys
Tactic B1.5	Build business support and visitor utilization of Sedona Transit to help enhance effectiveness						✓		SCC&TB	City of Sedona, Sedona Businesses	1. Number of businesses engaged in project 2. Number of industry outreach efforts 3. Transit utilization figures 4. Benchmark business surveys
Tactic B1.6	Promote a full range of multi-modal transportation options, actively promoting their use among visitors							✓	SCC&TB	City of Sedona, Land Managers, State Parks, Private Business Rental Operations and Hotels with Bike Share Programs	1. Number of industry outreach efforts 2. Benchmark through visitor surveys 3. Benchmark through business surveys 4. Utilization numbers

Case Study: Sedona Sustainable Tourism Plan

In July of 2023, the City became the official DMMO for Sedona, as recognized by the Arizona Office of Tourism.



Case Study: Sedona Sustainable Tourism Plan

Total Visitor Estimates

	2019	2021	2022
Estimate	3.16 million	3.28 million	3.22 million
Range	2.5 – 3.5 million	2.5 – 3.7 million	2.5 – 3.6 million
<i>Unique Visitors*</i>	1.36 million	1.42 million	1.39 million

Estimated Visitors per Month



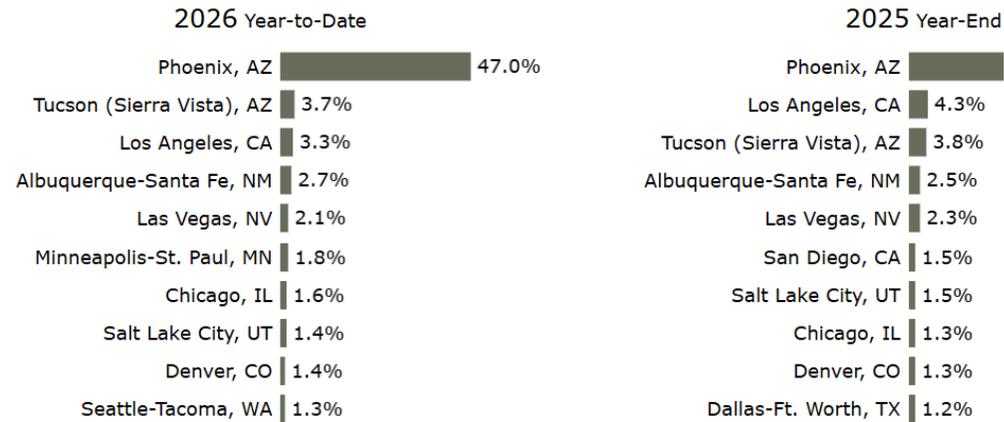
Case Study: Sedona Sustainable Tourism Plan

Transparency Hub

State of Sedona Tourism | As of January 2026

Visitor Origin Markets

Top 10 Designated Market Areas (DMAs) by Share of Total Trips to Sedona



Data through January 2026

Source: City of Sedona

Lodging Performance

Hotel Performance (Sedona+)

Source: STR

	Occupancy	ADR	Revenue
Jan 2026	57.1%	\$294.76	\$11.5M
YOY % Change	+4.4%	+6.3%	+7.7%
CYTD 2026	57.1%	\$294.76	\$11.5M
CYTD YOY % Change	+4.4%	+6.3%	+7.7%

Short Term Vacation Rental Performance - AirBnB

Source: KeyData

	Occupancy	ADR	Revenue
Jan 2026	43.4%	\$441.69	\$7.2M
YOY % Change	+3.5%	+3.4%	+9.1%
CYTD 2026	43.4%	\$441.69	\$7.2M
CYTD YOY % Change	+3.5%	+3.4%	+9.1%

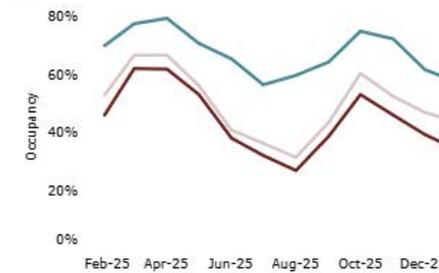
Short Term Vacation Rental Performance - VRBO

Source: KeyData

	Occupancy	ADR	Revenue
Jan 2026	33.8%	\$489.63	\$3.3M
YOY % Change	-8.8%	-0.1%	-16.2%
CYTD 2026	33.8%	\$489.63	\$3.3M
CYTD YOY % Change	-8.8%	-0.1%	-16.2%

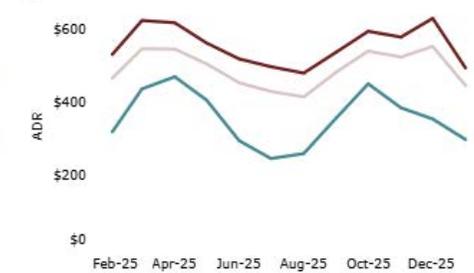
Occupancy by Month

Legend: Hotels (Blue), Short Term Vacation Rentals - VRBO Data (Red), Short Term Vacation Rentals - AirBnB Data (Grey)



ADR by Month

Legend: Hotels (Blue), Short Term Vacation Rentals - VRBO Data (Red), Short Term Vacation Rentals - AirBnB Data (Grey)



Note: Room demand refers to the total number of rooms occupied at hotels or short-term rental properties
Sources: STR and KeyData (as of 2/24/2026)

Community Engagement



TOWN OF BAR HARBOR
COUNTY OF HANCOCK • STATE OF MAINE
INCORPORATED 1796

Sustainable TOURISM OPEN HOUSE

Your voice matters. Join us to help shape the future of tourism in our community.

WHAT'S HAPPENING?
The Town of Bar Harbor is hosting a community "open house" to hear directly from residents. Through voting on priority solutions and discussing our biggest challenges, your feedback will guide the Town's **Sustainable Tourism Strategy**.

WHY SHOULD YOU CARE?
This impacts YOU if you are...
1 Frustrated by congestion in Bar Harbor
2 Concerned about the housing shortage
3 Worried about the lack of young families
4 Dedicated to improving our town for today and future generations

FOOD WILL BE PROVIDED!

WHEN?
Thursday
March 26th
12-2 PM & 6-8 PM

...with drinks available for purchase at the Side Street Cafe bar!

Choose between a lunch and evening session!

Consultants will be on hand to answer questions.
Let's work together toward a shared vision of Sustainable Tourism.

Have questions or comments? Call the Planning Office at 207-288-3329

WHERE?
Bar Harbor Municipal Building, Town Council Chambers (12-2PM session)
The Annex by Side Street Cafe (6-8PM session)

Upcoming:

- Community Organizations Workshop, March 25, 2026
- Public Open Houses, March 26, 2026
- One-on-One Interviews, Ongoing Through Phase 5