

Finger Lakes Visitors Connection

Comprehensive Destination Research Tourism Market Analysis Marketing Recommendations

Study Period: December, 2011 – September, 2012

Young Strategies, Inc., a Charlotte, NC based destination research and planning firm, conducted scientific research, which strategically analyzed the travel market in Ontario County, New York. The Young Strategies team has used this methodology in developing strategic plans for many similar destinations and has participated in prior research studies for Ontario County and the Finger Lakes region. It is proven to work by driving increased visitation and economic impact for the community.

The market analysis and recommendations in this report will:

- Address the very unique aspects of Ontario County as a destination for leisure, business and group travel.
- Evaluate the current Finger Lakes Visitors Connection program of work and overall marketing efforts for the destination.
- Determine the effectiveness and conversion of FLVC advertising and inquiry fulfillment.
- Establish a current FLVC inquirer and Ontario County visitor profile including key demographics, behavior and spending patterns.
- Identify by market segment those attraction features/amenities within the destination, which drive travel and generate both overnight and repeat visitors to Ontario County.

Ontario County Destination Research Project Methodology

1. Client Meeting, Destination Review:

- Site Visit and Meetings – YSI representatives visited Ontario County to tour the area, gain market knowledge first hand and meet key travel industry leader/partners.
- Meetings with FLVC staff included a detailed review of project objectives, inquiry databases and questionnaires for research study.

2. Lodging Research and Analysis:

- YSI survey of all lodging properties in the Ontario County market area to determine visitor market segmentation, primary feeder markets, walk-in occupancy, primary drivers of visitation, room nights sold annually, average daily rate, primary visitor activities and other metrics identified by client as critical for analysis.
- Smith Travel Research (6-year trend report for Ontario County)- analysis of market statistics and trends including ADR, RevPAR, Supply & Demand as well as occupancy analysis.
- Comprehensive segmented lodging market analysis for the Ontario County visitor market.

3. Visitor Profile Research (online survey):

- To document the profile of visitors to Ontario County by segment.
- Survey request cards collected at Ontario County hotels & attractions Feb. – Aug., 2012.
- 1,705 email addresses collected and surveys sent.
- 409 - completed surveys received (29.9% response)

4. FLVC Inquiry Conversion Survey

- Inquiry contacts collected during prior one year period
- Survey sent Aug. 7, 14, and 21, 2012 to 1,873 inquirers from FLVC database.
- Survey ended September 5, 2012.
- 405 responses received (21.6% response rate).

5. Meeting Planner Survey (Online survey):

- Survey invitation emailed to 300 meeting planners in the FLVC database
- Response: Meeting planners (46, 15.3%)

6. Group Tour Planner Survey (Online survey):

- Survey invitation emailed to 152 meeting planners in the FLVC database
- Response: Group tour planners (28, 19.3%)

7. Ontario County Community Leader Survey (Online survey):

- Survey invitation emailed to 127 Ontario County leaders in the FLVC database
- Response: Community Leaders (59, 47.2%)

8. Planning Workshop and Final Strategic Plan

- Young Strategies presented the research data and conducted a planning workshop with community leaders and FLVC Board and staff on Wednesday, September 19, 2012.
- A final report with research data, conclusions and recommendations was submitted to FLVC.

Summary of Ontario County Market Research

1. Ontario County Lodging Market Survey & Analysis

- Ontario County, New York currently has 28 hotel/motel properties (1,540 rooms) and 36 Bed & Breakfast Inns (146 rooms) actively collecting the local lodging tax year-round. Hotel/motel properties account for 91.3% of the Ontario County lodging inventory. Bed & Breakfast inns account for the remaining 8.7%. (This number fluctuates regularly as lodging properties add and delete rooms from their inventory). Fifteen hotel/motel properties representing 979 rooms participated in the survey representing an overall 63.6% response rate, while 16 Bed & Breakfast inns representing 72 rooms participated in the survey for an overall 49.3% response rate.
- Slightly more than one-third of the Ontario County hotel/motel lodging inventory (33.1%) was built prior to 1980. During the 1980's, two hotel properties were added to lodging inventory (81 rooms) accounting for 5.3% of current inventory. Four additional hotel properties were added in the 1990's adding an additional 420 rooms (27.3%) to room inventory. New development in the 2000's added eight additional chain-affiliated properties and the Vinifera Inn at Belhurst Castle with a total of 530 rooms (34.4% of current inventory). A Holiday Inn Express - Canandaigua is currently under construction which will add an additional 75 rooms to lodging inventory. It is scheduled to open in late 2012.
- Ontario County's hotel/motel lodging inventory can also be analyzed geographically. Nearly one-third of the county's hotel/motel lodging inventory is located in Victor, 6 properties (30.9% of inventory). The next highest segmentation is found in Geneva, 8 properties, (28.1%) and Canandaigua, 9 properties (20.9%). The other remaining properties (11.4%) are located in various towns throughout the county such as, Phelps, Farmington and Manchester. Victor is the fastest growth area in the County.
- Ontario County's occupancy has slightly under-performed national averages for the five-year period 2007 – 2011. However, Ontario County's 2011 lodging occupancy was up +10.6% from 2009, while the United States occupancy increased +10.0% over the same two-year period.
- Overall, business travelers account for the highest percentage of lodging occupancy (37.5%) in 2011. Conference/meeting/group was second highest overall at 33.2%. Leisure was reported third highest at 28.3% and "Other" at a total of 1.0%. This is a healthy ratio among the segments.
- The data reveals that December and January are typically the slowest months of the year. Highest occupancy has been in the summer month of August, followed closely by July. Late spring and early fall are also strong months for Ontario County lodging occupancy.
- 2011 STR data shows Friday and Saturday nights are the busiest. This is followed by Tuesday and Wednesday nights. Sunday nights are the slowest nights of the week for the Ontario County, New York lodging properties.

2. Ontario County Visitor Survey – N = 501

The following data points summarize the typical profile of visitors Ontario County.

- The demographic profile of overall visitors is nearly identical to that of FLVC Inquirers found in report section 4 with primarily adults-only couples averaging 50 years-of-age, well-educated travelers, who come primarily from a drive market within NY, PA, ON.
- Repeat visitors – 39% were making their first overnight trip to Ontario County while 61% had visited before.
- Last minute planning – 54% book their travel within 30 days of arrival!
- Summer months were most popular for weekend getaways followed by autumn and spring.
- Average length of stay – 2.5 nights indicating an opportunity to drive longer lengths of stay in future promotions.

- Activities – shopping, dining, visit a winery/brewery, driving/sightseeing, walking downtown, visited a park, sleep late/take a nap, visit a historic site/museum.
- Ontario County visit satisfaction – 4.58 on a 5 point scale which is very good.
- Desired new experiences include – more lakeside dining, lakefront hotel/resort, cheese shops, artisan galleries at wineries, increased public access onto lakes, unique locally made items.
- Average trip expenditures per travel party = overnight - \$1,044.15; Daytrip - \$296.49
- Half of the respondents indicated using a smart-phone device while traveling while one-third use a tablet while traveling or for pre-trip planning. The laptop is used most often for pre-trip planning.
- Spending per travel party while in Ontario County:

Spending Data	Overnight Trip	Daytrip
How much did your party spend WHILE IN Ontario County? Provide TOTAL costs for your stay, <u>not daily expenditures</u>.	<i>n</i> = 351	<i>n</i> = 98
Lodging	\$430.67	\$0
Food/Meals	\$203.27	\$73.17
Attractions/Events	\$82.46	\$48.54
Shopping	\$132.01	\$74.92
Auto Fuel	\$81.74	\$29.92
Wineries/Breweries	\$114.00	\$69.94
TOTAL	\$1,044.15	\$296.49
Average Length of Stay	2.5 nights	0 nights
AVG. Daily Spend per Travel Party	\$417.66	\$296.49

3. Finger Lakes Visitors Connection Inquiry Conversion Survey – N = 405

The following data points summarize the typical profile of those visitors who make a pre-travel information inquiry to Ontario County through the Finger Lakes Visitors Connection:

- The demographic profile of inquirers is very similar to that of overall travelers to Ontario County found in the previous report sections (3a, 3b) with primarily adults-only couples averaging 52 years-of-age, well-educated travelers, who come primarily from NY, PA, NJ, OH and ON.
- Inquirers rate the FLVC info packet highly and the Internet is vastly the primary planning source.
- Repeat visitors – 42% of those inquiring had been to Ontario County before Indicating that nearly two-thirds of those who inquire to FLVC are potential first time visitors which is excellent!
- Conversion rate – 62% of those who made an inquiry to FLVC converted to an actual visit to Ontario County which is slightly high with a desired conversion in the range of 35% - 45%. This indicates the need to advertise to a wider audience, cast a wider net!
- Last minute planning – nearly 64% book their travel within 30 days of arrival.
- Summer months were most popular for weekend getaways followed by autumn and spring.
- Average length of stay – 3.3 nights indicating that those who receive information from FLVC stay one night more than the typical visitor to Ontario County. 25% were day-trippers which is typical.
- Activities – shopping, visit a winery/brewery, driving/sightseeing, visited a park, fine/unique dining, walking downtown, and lake activities.
- Ontario County visit satisfaction – 4.41 on a 5 point scale which is very good.
- Needed improvements – lakeside dining, lakeside hotel/resort, cheese/artisan shop at wineries, unique local shopping, trolley service, public lake access, outdoor outfitter (bikes, kayaks...).

- Average trip expenditures per travel party = Overnight -\$1,126 per trip, \$341 per day; Daytrip - \$316.
- Economic Impact of FLVC Inquiry Fulfillment
 - 2011/12 Inquiries tested = 1,873
 - 62% conversion = 1,161 travel parties
 - Daytrip (25%) = 290 x \$316 = \$91,640
 - Overnight (75%) = 871 X \$1,126 = \$980,746
 - Total spending from Inquiry fulfillment = \$1,072,386

4. Meeting Planner Survey - N = 62

The following data points reflect the 62 group tour planners that responded to the Ontario County Group Tour Planner survey. This data is not a reflection of the total mix of group tours held in Ontario County.

- Point-of-origin – Majority of meeting planners survey respondents were from New York (91%). The other 9% were (1 each) from Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, and Tennessee.
- Majority of respondents are with an Association (58%), followed by Corporate (21%), and Education (19%) markets.
- Meetings are most often held – Quarterly (42%), annually (40%) and semi-annually (31%).
- Site selection – Nearly two-thirds (64%) of respondents select their site for their largest meeting/event at least a 7 to 23 months in advance.
- Average number of participants – Lowest (85.88) to Highest (183.78).
- Number of room nights booked – Lowest (35.84) and Highest (95.63).
- Ability to meet in Ontario County – Annually (39%), every three years (39%), bi-annually (13%), monthly (4%) and semi-annually (4%).
- Perception of Ontario County as a meeting destination – Ontario County earns lower than desired ratings on a five point scale where typically anything below a 4.0 is considered something that requires attention. The following ratings are reported by the 52% of meeting planners that had held a meeting in Ontario County. Quality of lodging – 3.71; Quantity of meeting/event venues – 3.71; Restaurants that appeal – 3.63; Lodging value compared to cost – 3.54; Convenient destination – 3.50; Shopping – 3.43; Attractions – 3.35; and Lodging near event venues/dining/entertainment – 3.25; Quality of meeting/event venues – 3.13; Evening entertainment – 3.00. Safety – 4.04 was the only category that rated at a 4.0 or above.
- Likelihood of planning a future meeting – Overall this was reported as, Maybe (60%), Very likely (27%), Unlikely (11%), Will not (2%). Those respondents that had held meetings in Ontario County reported a slightly higher likelihood of holding a future meeting in Ontario.
- Finger Lakes Visitors Connection was rated well by those that had held meetings in Ontario County. The following categories (on a five point scale where 1 is poor, 3 is average and 5 is excellent), ratings were: CVB staff assistance/service – 4.31; Online meeting/event website – 4.08; Printed meeting/event planner materials – 4.00.
- Activities that rated highest if offered in Ontario County –Lakefront hotel/resort, lakeside dining, upscale lodge with spa services, evening transportation, cheese shops and artisan galleries, trolley service between attractions, and unique boutique shopping featuring local products.

5. Group Tour Planner Survey – N = 28

The following data points reflect the 28 group tour planners that responded to the FLVC Group Tour Planner survey. This data is not a reflection of the total mix of group tours held in Ontario County.

- Point-of-origin –Planners were from many states; PA, MI, ON, MA, NY, VA, IL, IN, NH, OH, RI.
- Respondents were primarily tour operators (64%), senior planners (21%).
- 85% of respondents have taken a group tour to Ontario County.
- Planning is typically 13-23 months prior to visit (32%), 7-12 months (50%) and 4-6 months (11%).
- Majority of participants – Seniors (65+) and adult groups. Some youth and college.
- Approximately half (52%) listed Ontario County as their primary destination (daytrip) and 19% indicated that Ontario County was a day trip.
- 70% typically spend the night in Ontario County when they visit.
- Overall appeal as a group tour destination – 3.9 on a five point scale.
- Perception of Ontario County as a group tour destination from those that had brought a group to Ontario County are as follows: Ontario County rated well in three categories: Overall attraction appeal – 4.26; Quality of lodging – 4.11; Quality of dining – 4.00. Ontario County earns lower than desired ratings on a five point scale where typically anything below a 4.0 is considered something that requires attention in the following categories: Dining options – 3.89; Proximity of lodging to attractions – 3.88; Availability of needed parking – 3.88; Services for motorcoach groups – 3.84; Cost of lodging – 3.74; Level of service/training – 3.73; Signage/wayfinding – 3.71; Shopping – 3.63; and Evening entertainment – 3.36.
- Group tour operators were highly likely to have brought multiple groups to Ontario County and were most familiar with the following aspects of Ontario as a destination: Museums & Historic Sites - 80.8%; New York Wine & Culinary Center - 73.1%; Wineries/Wine Trails - 69.2%; Boat Cruises - 69.2%; Shopping - 53.8%; Sonnenberg Gardens & Mansion - 53.8%
- Aspects of lodging that are considered critical to group tour planners include: Interior corridor - 90.5%; Complimentary continental breakfast - 81.0%; Assistance with luggage - 81.0%; Swimming pool - 71.4%; Walking distance to shopping - 61.9%; Full service restaurant - 57.1%; Complimentary WiFi - 52.4%..
- Activities that rated highest if offered in Ontario County – Lakeside dining, lakefront hotel/resort, farming related tours or events, behind the scenes tours, trolley service between attractions, hands on or make it yourself, more microbreweries (tasting and tours), and cheese shops and artisan galleries at wine shops.
- 100% of the respondents said they would consider Ontario County for future group trips.

6. Ontario County Community Leader Survey – N = 59

Following is a summary of the data collected from Ontario County community leaders who responded to the YSI Community Leader Survey. Respondents represent a broad range of community leaders from elected office, business, the arts and the travel industry.

- **Ontario County is rated well by leaders** as; 1) a place to live and work; 2) an overall leisure destination; 3) as a place to retire. Ontario County needs to improve its appeal as: 1) a place to go to college; 2) a place for business travelers. Respondents also indicated they do not perceive Ontario County as a bedroom community of Rochester.
- The following areas of visitor interest were identified by leaders as the best **targets to appeal to travelers over the next 5 years**. 1) Winery tours; 2) Autumn getaways; 3) Summer family getaways; 4) Culinary tourism.

Executive Summary

- Business leaders were asked to consider what they do or where they go when out-of-town friends, family or business associates visit them. They were then asked to rate Ontario County on a number of categories on a scale of 1 – 5, where 1 = needs improvement, 3 = average and 5 = excellent. **Ontario County's best assets as a destination include: 1) wine and culinary activities; 2) public safety; 3) festivals and events; 4) summer sports and outdoor activities and 5) casual dining. Ontario County's assets needing improvement or expansion include: 1) tourist friendly transportation; and 2) night-time entertainment.** The remaining categories were all rated as average.
- Respondents listed the following as what they liked most about Ontario County as a travel destination: **1) wineries; 2) natural beauty; 3) lakes; 4) ease of navigation and 4) variety of activities.** Most often listed dislikes included the lack of: 1) public access to lakes; 2) public transportation; 3) fine dining; 4) variety of activities and 5) traffic.
- Business leaders listed the following destinations they felt Ontario County should be more like: **1) Saratoga Springs, NY; 2) Cooperstown, NY; 3) Skaneateles, NY; 4) Burlington, VT; 5) Niagara on the Lake.** Reasons listed were varied, ranging from uniqueness, waterfront development, lively downtowns, to better choices of dining and lodging.

