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BEST

Community Profile

The Shaw Heritage Tours

Category	Walking and Bus Tours
Ownership	Manna Community Development Corporation and the DC Heritage Tourism Coalition
Location	Washington, D.C.
Highlights	<p>Stimulates community economic development</p> <p>Stresses community involvement in planning and execution</p> <p>Provides tour participants with a unique view of the city beyond the monuments and access to sites usually closed to the public</p>
Practice Keywords	Community and cultural heritage tourism; community economic development; neighborhood participation; cultural equity

The Shaw Heritage Tours

A Vibrant Community Shares a Rich Historical Legacy

The U Street/Shaw neighborhood of northwest Washington, D.C.—just 10 minutes by subway from the White House—was once the crown jewel of Washington’s African-American neighborhoods. Named for the Union general and ardent abolitionist Robert Gould Shaw, the Shaw neighborhood was the center of Washington’s black community and the largest urban African-American community in the nation until it was surpassed by Harlem in the 1920s. Paul Laurence Dunbar, Duke Ellington, and Dr. Charles Drew were among the many luminaries of this tightknit community during the days of segregation. The area was badly scarred years later by the upheavals following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King.

The neighborhood is now undergoing a renaissance. Many of its beautiful historic buildings have been restored and renovated, entertainers are returning to its clubs and theaters, and local businesses are growing and thriving. Thanks to a grassroots community tourism initiative, visitors can explore this neighborhood on a guided bus tour, “Duke Ellington’s DC,” and a walking tour, “Before Harlem, There Was U Street.”

A Partnership to Promote the City Beyond the Monuments

The U Street/Shaw Heritage Tours were the brainchild of the DC Heritage Tourism Coalition (Coalition). Its 125 members include nearly every museum and cultural organization from every ward in the city, neighborhood groups, community development corporations, faith-based organizations, the Washington Metropolitan Transit Authority (Metro), the National Capital Region of the National Park Service, professional tour guides, and the city’s official marketing entities. The Coalition’s current projects include:

- creating a citywide system of marked Heritage Trails in collaboration with the Downtown DC Business Improvement District, DC Department of Housing and Community Development, District Division of Transportation, U.S. Department of Transportation, The Historical Society of Washington, D.C., and neighborhood partners;



- developing themed cultural promotions with its members, hotels, and restaurants;
- creating new DC Heritage walking and bus tours to connect visitors with the authentic places and voices of Washington;
- sponsoring www.dcheritage.org, a cultural heritage tourism Web site;
- carrying out a marketing campaign with Metro, the Washington Convention Center, and area hotels to focus on neighborhoods as destinations; and
- conducting base line visitor and audience research.

A key goal has been to make the U Street/Shaw area a national model for linking heritage tourism and neighborhood economic development. Toward this end, the Coalition has developed a major outdoor exhibit to raise awareness of the rich history of the area, inspired “Duke Ellington’s Washington,” a nationally televised documentary on the neighborhood, and created a marked heritage trail. The projects have been created in collaboration with current and former residents through interviews and workshops.

In 1998, as part of this initiative, the Coalition approached one of its members, Manna Community Development Corporation (Manna CDC), a division of Manna, Inc., with a partnership proposal to create guided tours as part of a cultural heritage tourism program. The Coalition chose Manna CDC because of its mission and longstanding reputation in its community. Since its inception, Manna CDC has developed affordable housing in the Shaw neighborhood and operated business assistance, youth education, homebuyers’ clubs, and job placement programs for neighborhood residents. Manna CDC chose to work on the heritage tours because the neighborhood has a compelling story to tell and

because the buildings and institutions that help tell the story—many of them built by African-American architects and visionaries—are still in place.

The Coalition also brought in the DC Chamber of Commerce (Chamber) as a marketing and sales partner. Manna CDC entered into an agreement with both the Chamber and the Coalition to operate the Shaw Heritage Tours and established four overall goals:

- position heritage tourism as a vehicle for community economic development in the Shaw neighborhood;
- create new jobs for Shaw residents, in particular as tour guides;
- attract some of Washington’s nearly 20 million visitors to their neighborhood; and
- celebrate the rich African-American history and cultural heritage of the neighborhood.

Kathryn S. Smith, historian, scholar, and president of the Coalition, wrote the scripts for both tours based on her own research and interviews and focus groups with current and former residents. The Coalition then recruited and trained the first four tour guides. The first bus tour was held in 1999 and the first walking tour in 2000.

Main Street, a program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation involved in commercial revitalization—preserving historic buildings, making streets cleaner and safer, and improving local business practices—is a new partner in the initiative. It started out in small towns and has only recently begun to help revive neighborhoods in larger cities such as Baltimore and Boston. In 2002, the District government funded the 14th and U Street area as one of five city-sponsored Main Street programs. The Coalition and Main Street are now working together to make U Street/Shaw a complete tourist destination, with cultural programming, shopping, and dining in a safe and appealing environment.

Community Tourism

Community tourism initiatives are travel related offerings created and operated by local, traditional, or indigenous populations to enhance their quality of life, protect and restore their environmental and cultural assets, and engage visitors on terms defined by the area’s inhabitants.

Examples include walking tours, home and farm stays, store-front museums, recreational offerings, craft cooperatives, language schools, dance studios, and nature and wildlife treks.

In urban neighborhoods, rural communities, and wilderness areas, community tourism efforts can provide a powerful economic development strategy, promote cultural diversity and an understanding of tolerance, and generate more revenues for local businesses.

Getting the Word Out

All three partners in the initiative—Manna CDC, the Coalition, and the Chamber—describe and market the tours on their Web sites. The Chamber has heavily publicized the tours at trade shows and similar events. Radio and print advertising has turned out to be costly, although many free publications in the city willingly provide advance information about the tours.

Some of the best marketing targets are churches, universities, alumni associations (an especially responsive group), public schools, retirement homes, libraries, youth hostels, and local hotels. However, for some of these

groups, even the modest cost of the tours is a strain on their resources. Manna CDC sells a stylish, colorful poster of the Shaw neighborhood, created in collaboration with the Coalition and the Local Initiatives Support Corporation, to help subsidize tours for public school students and seniors.

The initiative also offers free “familiarization tours” to representatives from civic organizations, meeting planners, and tour operators. After attending these tours, many of the representatives have promoted the tours to their groups and the number of bookings has increased.

Following Up

Manna CDC distributes evaluation forms to the tour participants, which capture their names, where they are from, how they heard about the tour, and their opinion of the tour’s various offerings. The participants have been willing to fill out the forms on both tours but the process is easier on the bus tour.

Some 1,800 participants have submitted forms over the tours’ first three years and about a third were Washington residents. Others came from different parts of the United States and a significant number were from other nations, including Sweden, South Africa, and Japan. Manna CDC saves the information about tour participants in a database and sends mailings to them about other tours and community tourism opportunities, including “DC Open House,” a weekend of free walking tours and free museum admissions presented by members of the Coalition. Many former tour participants have taken advantage of this offer and often invite friends and family to join them. In 2002, this celebration drew more than 12,000 people to 12 neighborhoods across the city.

Current Obstacles to Development

The tours, while well received, have encountered some obstacles. In general, the bus tours have been more difficult to coordinate and manage than the walking tours. Some residents have been concerned about buses idling in the streets. Renting a bus for four hours is very expensive and buses need to be scheduled far in advance during the tourist season. The production of the entertainment portion of the bus tour was not as simple as first imagined. The task of providing lunch to groups on the bus tour with diverse tastes, requirements, and allergies also turned out to be more complicated than expected. Manna CDC is considering offering vouchers to local restaurants instead.

Tour guide licensing in Washington is an onerous process and many applicants have difficulty passing the certifying exam. The lack of qualified residents has put on hold the

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Benefits

To the Local Community

- Builds community pride and a sense of cultural equity
- Improves the quality of life
- Provides more goods in the shops for visitors and residents
- Develops tourism related job opportunities and training
- Promotes an appreciation of diversity
- Helps the bottom line of local restaurants and shops, keeping revenues in the neighborhood

To Community Organizations

- Creates both an earned income venture and a model for other communities
- Enhances current tourism offerings
- Helps build a critical mass of heritage tourism in the neighborhood
- Establishes partnerships with for profit tourism enterprises
- Fosters a deeper understanding of the residents’ and their hopes for their community

To Visitors

- Opens their eyes and changes their minds about the city’s neighborhoods
- Helps them celebrate diversity and other cultures
- Offers them exciting new shopping and dining experiences
- Enriches their aesthetic experience of the city
- Expands their understanding of the city’s past

goal of recruiting tour guides from the local population and Manna CDC is petitioning the licensing authority to revise their requirements. But that has not stopped some of the Shaw residents from participating informally in the tours, sharing their enthusiasm and experiences with the tour participants. John "Butch" Snipes, a retired U Street businessman, regularly shares his stories with groups outside the popular Ben's Chili Bowl restaurant.

The walking tour and the bus tour currently cover their costs. In the future, there is every reason to believe they could generate more revenue. The Chamber initially subsidized the bus tours so they could run on a regular schedule. Manna CDC and the Coalition are currently seeking corporate sponsorship to replace those funds. They are also looking to recruit and train a local resident as a tourism entrepreneur to manage the tours under the supervision of the founding organizations.

Looking to the Future

- The new City Museum, scheduled to open in April 2003, and the new Convention Center, opening in March 2003, will entice visitors to new areas of the city.
- Manna CDC will expand its efforts to tap the local market, reach out to schools and universities, and tie the Shaw Heritage Tours to larger neighborhood initiatives.
- The Coalition and Manna CDC plan to present the tours as a unique neighborhood experience rather than merely sightseeing.
- Manna CDC will continue to build relationships with other local organizations and groups through such projects as the U Street Streetscape project.

About The Conference Board

The Conference Board creates and disseminates knowledge about management and the marketplace to help businesses strengthen their performance and better serve society. As a global, independent, public-purpose membership organization, we conduct research, bring executives together to learn from one another, convene conferences, publish information and analyses, make forecasts, and assess trends.

About BEST

Business Enterprises for Sustainable Travel (BEST) is an initiative of The Conference Board, in association with the World Travel and Tourism Council. Several foundations, including the Ford and Charles Stewart Mott Foundations, provide support.

BEST serves as a leading source of knowledge on innovative travel and tourism practices that advance business, community, and travelers' interests. BEST profiles cutting-edge businesses, community organizations, and travelers in the growing field of sustainable travel and tourism.

You are invited to submit other examples for consideration for future BEST profiles.

Community Tourism Fosters Cultural Equity

Neighborhood residents have not only helped shape the tours but they have also spontaneously become part of the tours, coming out of their homes and businesses to engage the participants in conversations about growing up in the neighborhood. By bringing their warmth and insight to the walking tours, these residents refresh the notion of culture itself. They help to restore what could be called cultural equity. Culture is too often narrowly defined and associated with the economic elites of a community. To really understand the culture of a neighborhood, one needs to listen to the rich and layered story of its inhabitants surviving and thriving in turbulent times.

Of course, communities constantly change. The gentrification of the Shaw neighborhood continues apace and many of the homeowners and small local businesses are struggling with the rise in real estate and property taxes. Manna CDC strives to address these very concrete problems with the help of other organizations.

The cultural past of a community resides in its streets, its buildings, and, above all, in the hearts and minds of its residents. It is part of the fabric of the neighborhood and must be nurtured so it can enrich and shape the future of the community.

About the author

Virginia Peckham lives in Camden, Maine. She has written articles and reports for the Council on Foundations, the Ford Foundation, and the New York Regional Association of Grantmakers, as well as for several business and art publications. She is the author of *Grantmaking With a Purpose: Mission and Guidelines* (National Center for Family Philanthropy, 2000).

About the World Travel & Tourism Council

The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) is the global business leaders' forum for travel and tourism. Its 112 members are chief executives from all sectors of the industry, including accommodation, catering, entertainment, recreation, transportation, and other travel-related services. Its central goal is to work with governments to realize the full economic impact of the world's largest generator of wealth and jobs—travel and tourism.

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