FARGO VISITORS
FOCUS GROUPS
REPORT OF FINDINGS

Kevin Hanstad and Bill Deef
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BACKGROUND

Meet Minneapolis is developing a tourism master plan for the city of Minneapolis. The plan is currently in the “Grounding” phase of development. The grounding consists primarily of data collection and information gathering to assess Minneapolis as a tourist destination. One of the key constituent groups to be included in the assessment are tourists. The markets from which the greatest percentage of tourists originate are Fargo, Sioux Falls, Des Moines and Madison, each contributing approximately 5% of the 32 million visitors to the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area in 2015. Thus, Fargo was selected as the first site of an envisioned series of tourist focus groups.

OBJECTIVE

To gain an understanding of Fargo visitors’:

- Reasons for visiting Minneapolis.
- Trip planning.
- Perceptions of Minneapolis.
- Activities engaged in while visiting.
- Strengths and weaknesses of Minneapolis as a tourist destination.
- Opportunities for making Minneapolis a better destination.

METHODOLGY

- Two two-hour focus groups were conducted on Monday, April 11, 2016 in Fargo, North Dakota.
- The groups were moderated by Kevin Hanstad and observed by Bill Deef, both of Meet Minneapolis, and video-recorded.
- Each groups’ participants were recruited according to the following criteria:
  - 50/50 Female to Male
  - 21 to 65 years of age
  - Annual household income of $25,000 +
  - Graduated high school
  - At least one non-Caucasian
  - Children under 18 years of age living in some of the participants’ households
  - No focus group participation in the past six months
  - Articulateness
- The two groups were differentiated on past visits to the city of Minneapolis:
  - Group One: Visited and stayed overnight in the city within the past 12 months (12 participants)
  - Group Two: Visited and stayed overnight in the city three or more years ago (12 participants)
## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### VISITED WITHIN PAST 12 MONTHS VS. VISITED 3+ YEARS AGO

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<th>Visited Within Past 12 Months</th>
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<td>Sports, Concerts (First Avenue to Orchestra Hall) &amp; Restaurants</td>
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<td><strong>“Splurge”</strong></td>
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<td>Hotel Proximate to Event</td>
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<td><strong>“Party”</strong></td>
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<td><strong>“City Experience”</strong></td>
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<td>Safety Concerns</td>
<td>Very Little Awareness of Arts &amp; Culture and Events</td>
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<td>Wayfinding &amp; Driving is Challenging</td>
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<td>Parks &amp; Lakes Available in Fargo</td>
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<td>Midwestern &amp; Friendly but Not Kid-Friendly</td>
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<td>They Refer to “the Cities” Not Minneapolis</td>
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## IMPLICATIONS

- Lack of awareness of all that Minneapolis offers visitors.
- Wayfinding and driving present challenges.
- Safety concerns have the potential to become an impediment.
- Lack of activities appealing to children.
- The identity of Minneapolis gets lost in that of “The Cities”.

## DETAILED FINDINGS

### Group One: Visited Within the Past 12 Months

- **When you think of Minneapolis what words come to mind?**
  - Green, artsy, heavy traffic, cosmopolitan, Mall of America.
  - Parking issues: lack of parking and expensive.
  - Fun and exciting; Easy to get around; Variety of things to do; something for everyone including families.
  - Lots of activities; “if you get bored, something is wrong”.

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• Sometimes secretive, hard to find the new "in" places, “hidden gems”, cool shops; only learn about these things from word of mouth after the fact.
• How do you find the cool, new things? Big stuff is advertised; the little stuff isn’t.
• Updated and clean, historical (old buildings).
• Road construction, more than in Fargo. Construction made it very inconvenient to get around. Too many one-ways make it “tough”.
• Stay at the Hilton all the time because they know how to get there and out again.
• There are scary parts of town after dark; parts to avoid. Used to feel safe on LRT. Now we don’t feel safe on the LRT.
• Need to be mindful of where you are. Downtown and Hennepin Avenue especially. Feel a little unsafe in Uptown.
• Transportation system does not feel safe. Going from MOA to downtown.
• Go the MOA only in the morning. Don’t want to go at night.
• No incidents. Just fear of unknown. A friend was stabbed.
• Homeless people bother them. Asking for money. Not too threatening.
• Likes technology for traffic reporting. I-phone maps. Easy access traffic information.
• Skyways are nice and convenient. Can be scary at night; few people in the skyways. Skyways are confusing! Hilton to Target Center took a long time.
• People sitting in the skyway. Not sure of what they wanted.
• No shopping. Main reason to go there. Albertville!!! MOA, Minneapolis.
• Seems more expensive in Minneapolis.
• Buses go from the colleges once a month for students and faculty to the Cities.

➢ Have you ever visited Minneapolis?
• Everyone.
• Many very recent. All within the last year.

➢ Day trip or overnight?
• Stay overnight.
• Sometimes a day trip.
  o Concerts may be a day trip.
  o Airport pick-up may be a day trip; picking-up or dropping-off family and friends at MSP Airport.
  o Vikings game may be a day trip. Sports events.
  o Business meeting.
  o Concerts
  o Sometimes simply something to do.

➢ How often do you make daytrips? For what purposes?
• Doctor appointments, shopping, events.
Daytrips allow for managing time and money.

Hotel rates fluctuate wildly. Lack of hotel rooms if you want something close to the venue. Have to plan in advance.

Often stay overnight for concerts and sporting events. Would like to stay downtown. Want to be able to drink, and don’t want to drive.

Finding reasonable rates are difficult. Last minute deals are hard to find. Can find the rate in the suburbs, but don’t want to drive; want to be able to drink. Suburbs also provide free parking.

Cheaper price rooms can be found far away. Overnight parking is HIGH downtown.

What resources, if any, did you use in planning your last trip?

- Stay with family. Family gives them ideas. Sometimes stays with them, sometimes don’t.
- Have favorite hotels: Radisson Waterpark, W Foshay; talk to hotel
- Call your favorite hotel first, then may look on-line. One woman likes to try different places each time.
- Like bars and nightclubs
- Compare prices. Trivago, Expedia, other aggregate sites.

Use Meet Minneapolis website?

- One person knew Meet Minneapolis. Uses Vegas web site. Ones uses DMO websites. Most do
  NOT.
- Google “things to do in...” May take you to your site, but don’t look for it directly.
- Some DMO websites are overwhelming.
- Need to search for family things. Hard to find adult stuff in Minneapolis when you normally go for kids and family things.
- Sometimes to Albertville and Maple Grove. Not into the city. Maybe a day trip. Shorter distance.
- They all like Arbor Lakes. One step closer to home. Free parking. Nice and clean. New and
  upcoming. Popular. Nice hotels and restaurants. Safety comes into play as well. Suburban
  feeling. Different experience. Shopping trip and dinner. Family fun with kid. Offers a lot that
  Minneapolis does, but one step closer to home.
  - Hotels, shopping and restaurants equal to downtown Minneapolis
- Minneapolis is drinking, concerts, Dakota, walk back to a hotel, party, variety, Friday night.
  - A place to party and let your hair down; a variety of venues.

Did you consider visiting other cities as an alternative to Minneapolis? Which ones?

- Cheap flights to Vegas. Duluth, Chicago, Winnipeg, Madison, Milwaukee, Rapid City, and Black
  Hills. Bismarck. Las Vegas
- Sioux Falls is the same distance as MSP. Alexandria for a weekend getaway.
- Maple Grove: really nice shipping area; suburban.
How often do you visit Minneapolis?
- Over nights number in past year per participant: 3, 8-9, 1, 12 for business, 3-4, 1-2, 3-4
- Day trips 2, 6, 2, 2
- Year round. One person goes in winter, some never go in the summer. Some year-round. They go to the nearby lake country in the summer.
- Concerts are a big draw; live music.

Where did you stay on your last visit?
- Downtown is not kid friendly.

What criteria did you use to select that lodging?
- Some people want a good rate. Pool is not always important.
- For two people price is not important. It’s location that matters to him. Wants to stay near the venue. Wants to stay close to where I want to be. Bite the bullet and pay the price.
- Price is a factor for one. Some want a deal. Spontaneous trip.
- Bloomington or Maple Grove. Kids just want a pool and water slides.
- Embassy Suites have the two-hour happy hour. Love this.

Where did you eat? What was your experience?
- Seven. Fogo de Chao, Hell's Kitchen, seems to be a variety. More unique restaurants downtown. Less chains. One of a kind.
- Arbor Lakes has more family-oriented restaurants.
- More unique restaurants in Minneapolis; more variety.
  - Special weekends warrant special restaurants. I am going to “splurge” a bit. Treat myself.
  - It seems expensive downtown.

Were there enough dining options to choose from?
- Yes.

What did you do while in Minneapolis?
- Sports events
- Concerts
- A good time, partying
- Shopping
- Eating,
- Theater events, small theaters, Guthrie, the Guthrie Lab, Bryant Lake Bowl
- Stone Arch Bridge
• Shopping, science museums.
• Where to eat - hard to find information; would like a “food guide app”
• Can’t find info about festivals
• MOA, bridal stores, weekend trip
• Waterparks,
• Clubs, restaurants, by the riverfront
• Comedy club
• Sex World
• Zoos. Como and MN
• Shopping or event. MOA

➢ What else did you do while visiting Minneapolis?
• St. Paul is not a destination.
• Saint Paul is not promoted enough. Don't know what's there. Never think about it. Never hear about St. Paul.
• Saint Paul is Como Zoo and the Minnesota State Fair.
• Dinkytown. Sports events at the U. The Bank.
• Everything is happening in Minneapolis.
• Minneapolis is promoted better. They are looking on line for tickets. Seems to hear more about Minneapolis.
• Bloomington. Is all MOA. Shopping, family attractions. Nice clean safe area. Pool is a morning activity. Waterpark for kids.

➢ Why aren’t more of you going to museums? Parks?
• Not into cultural stuff – boring
• Sometimes with family. But with friends is an adult weekend.
• Exhibits don’t change.
• Sevilles Club
• Jon - Once for the Vikings game. Hated the Metrodome. Haven’t heard enough to make him want to visit. Franchise games. Would have to know a specific thing to make him go there. May try the US Bank stadium
• Hates the traffic.
• Don't need to go to the parks. Or the lakes. We are in lakes country.
• Come for the urban experience, big city experience!
• Don't hear any advertising about Minneapolis. Or small things to do.
• Used to think of Minneapolis as an arts and culture destination. Now feels it's all about sports and MOA!
See more advertising for NDSU in Minneapolis. We see nothing. Need to know about changing exhibits in museums. Only hear big things: Body World, Titanic. See more advertising is from Vegas.

What events do you attend?
- When is the Jazz festival?
- Only one person goes to the State Fair. Another goes to the Ren festival
- Fireworks. LGBT Pride. Susan Komen run at MOA.
- Holidazzle! Winter Carnival. MSP is like Fargo Moorhead.
- Two go to casinos. Have them within an hour of FM. Don’t stay at Mystic Lake. Hard to get a room.
- They say they are going to “the Cities”; they don’t say they are going to Minneapolis.

If stayed with friends or family, did they act as guides or recommend things to do?
- Usually family and friends go with them. Family and friends can be promoters or detractors for our city. Some of them hate to come downtown. To them it is just everyday.

What’s missing?
- Advertising; promotion; awareness of events
- Weekend packages
- Hotel room discounts
- Wayfinding is difficult, thank god for GPS. Airlines at the airport. I-phone or GPS is helpful to get around. Signage in the city is bad. Not early enough or big enough. Hard to find gas stations in downtown.
- Skyways. Most stay on the streets because skyways are difficult to navigate. Some like to window shop. Maps in the skyway are not helpful. What happens when you get inside a department store? Which way to go then?
- Used them in the skyway.
- Even in the winter they tend to stay on the street.
- LRT. A few people have used them: 5; not all were even aware of its existence.
  - Downtown to MOA or to a game
- Marketing what is going on?? Guthrie, Stone Arch Bridge. Aquatennial. Festivals and events.
  - Weekly reader. Had everything you can imagine in Chicago. Need a location for what to do, where to find things.
How does Minneapolis compare to other tourist destinations?
- Not intimidating. Easy mini vacation. Not going to cost a fortune. Only competitors are Winnipeg and Sioux Falls. Winnipeg is good for festivals, hockey, great restaurants; no shopping.
- Minneapolis is friendly. Midwestern. Familiar.
- “Big Fargo”: clean, suburban
- Can decide to go on a Wednesday; doesn’t take a lot of planning.
- ~ ½ are aware of Spoon Bridge & Cherry; a couple have visited.
- Biking.
- Minneapolis is friendly.

Group Two: Visited 3+ Years Ago

When you think of Minneapolis what words come to mind?
- Twins, MOA, traffic, Target Center, crime, MSP Airport, public transportation - hard to find accessible, limited options; train to MOA is quite nice.
- Como Zoo. MN State Fair: 3. Ren Fest: Several. Kids sports, soccer, hockey, etc. BMX bikes. Family events.

When was the last time you visited Minneapolis?
- 3 years. Easter this year. Last fall. Last July. 7 years. 5 years. 3 years. June, 2014. 2 years. Week ago. 2 years. 2 years. [TOTALS: Past Year = 4; Two Years Ago = 4; Three Years Ago = 2; Five Years Ago = 1; Seven Years Ago = 1.

Did you consider visiting other cities as an alternative to Minneapolis? Which ones?
- Winnipeg, same distance. Duluth, Rochester, Sioux Falls,
- Winnipeg used to be popular. Hassle factor at the border now. For some people impossible due to DUI.
- Minneapolis pro sports is the difference from these.
- Dollar exchange rate
- Minneapolis has nicer hotels and accommodations and shopping
Family vacation
• Duluth = outdoors

Why did you visit Minneapolis?
• Twins games. Family. Friends. Flying out of MSP. Leaving MSP. Some stay at hotels near the airport and then remain parked at the hotel while traveling in another city or country. Hotel parking is much cheaper than airport parking.
• Shopping at MOA! Southdale, Ridgedale, No retail shopping. Not much to do during the day. Good walking and accessibility. Lack of shopping. Lack of things to do. Nice target and Macy’s. But otherwise, no one is shopping in downtown Minneapolis. Nightclubs. Used to go to clubs often. The tenor of downtown changes dramatically. Daytime is business. Then nightlife begins. Warehouse district is fun. Lots of fun bars. Live music. Many live music venues. This is a purpose to go to Minneapolis. FIRST AVENUE draws acts that can’t see in Fargo. Live acoustic shows are nice. Bachelor and bachelorette parties.
• Family vacations. Medical.
• Conventions. Specific events. Home and Garden show. Travel show.
• Police presence does not deter crime. Squad cars are ignored. Lots of prostitutes in downtown. Squads, bike patrol, horses, and foot patrol. There to have fun, but it raises a question why there are so many police there. Seems unsafe. Seems to be no way to clean up the city over the last several years. There seems to be problems in downtown Minneapolis. One person feels more confident by the police presence. One person was tried to sell pot on the street. Police didn’t come to “rescue”.
• This was a big topic. Wouldn’t bring my kids to downtown Minneapolis. One says I am okay with it. Hear and watch the news from MSP. Not sure where the good and bad parts of the city are located. Worried about Black Lives Matter. Blocking streets. Not comfortable on Lake Street. Usually downtown is enjoyable.

Adult weekend getaways?
• For a few; family and friends. For younger people.
• Parenthood changes your perspective

Daytrips?
• Business reason or shopping. Save on hotel expense. Rather sleep at home. Major purchase. Boat, car, etc., specialty shopping. Hockey games, Twins games. Vikings trip are always day trips. Sunday afternoon Twins games – then drive home. Drop-off or pick-up friends and family at MSP Airport.
Overnight? Three years ago is a long time; why do you not visit more often?
- Takes time to get there. Three to four hours’ drive. Can’t get away. Parent with young child. Kids. Nothing drawing you there. Difficult parking as sports venues. Expensive parking. Twins. What if you drive all the way and then it rains at Target Field? One person goes to at least one pro sports event per year. Teams are expensive; and their not winning. Expensive. Spend too much money when I go. Shopping is expensive.
- Kids, don’t have the time right now.
- Lack of kids’ stuff downtown. What can they do? No kid stuff. No water parks. All kid activities are on 494.
- Hates traffic and road construction.

- Driving – not influenced by gas prices. Will still make the trip anyway.

Where do you stay?
- Want a place close to what they are doing. Orbitz. Hotel chains.

What is your planning process?
- Online; Orbitz
- Wants budget travel. Don’t care about amenities. Just a place to sleep.
- Stay downtown for fun. Minneapolis is a splurge. Don’t mind spending the money if it really nice. Will pay more for a hotel in a comfortable area of town.
- Pay for parking. Don’t want your car broken into. Don’t want to worry about the walking to the car from the hotel to parking lot.
- Like the renovated hotels. Adults is okay, but not for kids. Suburban waterparks.
- Sometimes difficult to find a reasonable hotel room downtown. Hard to find a hotel during specific times or around a big event. Have to book way early.
- No economy hotels.
- A few have used an Airbnb or shared home and would consider doing it again. Locals give them good ideas for what to do. Hotel staff are not good at giving you ideas.
- Some like to stay downtown and park the car. Use cabs or public transportation then rest of the time.

Where do you eat? What has your experience been?
- Restaurants we can’t find in Fargo. Chains are there if you need them.
• Prices are a little high, but it’s great. It’s an experience! Comparable to other larger cities. Seems spendy, but not a show-stopper.
• Hell's Kitchen.

➢ Were there enough dining options to choose from?
  • YES

➢ What did you do while visiting Minneapolis? (Created a list on tear sheet.)
  • Pro sports, shopping, live theater, concerts (classical and popular), music and comedy, relax and getaway, celebration, First avenue, Broadway theater, parks, lakes

➢ Why do you not participate in these activities? (Provided examples on tear sheet.)
  • Museums: no marketing; been there/done that; no awareness
  • Mississippi River
  • Nightclubbing
  • Art shows or galleries
  • Don't know what is going on at museums.
  • Used to go to the Guthrie Theater.
  • No one is promoting to Fargo.
  • Winnipeg advertises on TV and billboards. Minneapolis does not.
  • Body Worlds.
  • Museums are boring.
  • Don't know or hear about street fairs and festivals, art shows, art galleries
  • Don't run on the river – not safe for women; what is there to do at the river?
  • Breweries and distilleries. Could be a big thing but no knowledge.
  • Midtown Global Market. Not aware of this. But sounds fun.
  • Not going to make a trip for biking.
  • Have rollerbladed. Daughter had her rollerblades stolen.
  • BMX Bikes. There is a “Nice Ride” equivalent in Fargo.
  • Breweries? Not aware of.
  • Fargo-Moorhead has a lot going on: High Plains Reader and the “news” generate awareness.
  • Biking? Suburbs better for biking.
  • Midtown Global Market? No awareness.
  • Explore Minnesota advertising shows bike trails.

➢ If stay with friends or family, do they act as guides or recommend things to do?
  • Visits are coordinated with family and friends.
  • First Avenue, shopping, MOA, restaurants, neighborhoods, Uptown
How do they talk about Minneapolis to you as a visitor?
- Hosts talk about lots to do. Will take them to a Viking games. Usually talk positively. One friend gripes about cost, traffic, etc. in Minneapolis

What is good about Minneapolis as a tourist destination? What works?
- Variety, satisfy everyone at some point of the trip, uniqueness, more of everything relative to Duluth, Winnipeg, etc., history relates to F-M area, a step above other Midwestern destinations
- Better than Chicago. Chicago has better public transportation. Walking downtown Chicago feels safe both day and night. Does not feel safe in downtown Minneapolis. Chicago River is nice; incorporated into the city.

What does not work so well?
- Traffic. Safety and crime. Public transportation. LRT is okay. Buses are not. LRT not everywhere; takes a long time to go from MOA to Target Field. Sometimes feel safe. Sometimes not. Transit cops are needed. Too many stops.

What can we do better?
- Need things for the kids. Little kids.
- Advertising. We need to make you aware and timely.
- Parking is too expensive and not enough.
- More LRT options.
- Need Deals. Package deals. Include parking!!
- Casino package. We need a casino downtown. A couple of people go to Mystic Lake.
- Use deals for the winter time period.
- Make it easy to plan a trip.
- Make aware.