



REAL POTENTIAL

The Power of Authenticity to Reposition Your Destination

{ Presented by PGAV**DESTINATIONS** }

The current PGAV study explores authenticity, a challenging concept and rather hard nut to crack. We all think we know what the word means, but the truth is, it means different things to different people. Authenticity is context-dependent, and can be perceived differently by visitors to different places or settings. In the recent national survey of attractions visitors performed by Jerry Henry and Associates, one thing is crystal clear: the trend toward authenticity is indisputable and pervasive.

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Attractions visitors say the best examples of authenticity are places where something real happened in history (68%), natural places untouched by human hands (53%) and something you cannot do anywhere else (34%). Natural attractions like the Grand Canyon (86%) and living history museums like Conner Prairie and Colonial Williamsburg (73%) rank the highest.

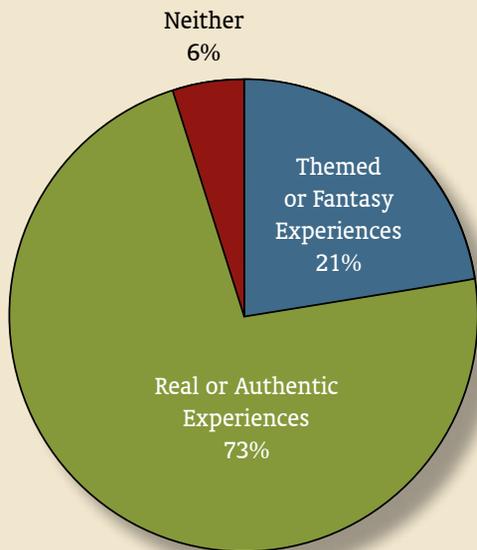
While travelers like authentic places, the study shows that travelers also visit all kinds of attractions. People who value authenticity are just as likely to choose a theme park for their family vacation. Over half of those who say they prefer real/authentic experiences have recently visited theme parks (54%) or casinos (50%), and other destinations such as museums (61%), zoos (61%) and aquaria (58%).

In fact, the data leads us to a compelling conclusion: there are specific ways to categorize authenticity. Authentic experiences can be described by five distinct attributes: Unique, Real, Human, Non-Commercial and Social/Emotional. Every one of these attributes applies across the board to *all* attractions. In other words, regardless of the destination, a meaningful authentic experience can occur for visitors.

A vast majority (81%) of attractions visitors who indicated their last trip had real/authentic characteristics said these attributes caused them to view the destination more favorably (25%) or much more favorably (56%). Importantly, destinations considered to be authentic tend to enjoy better brand perception, higher satisfaction and greater intent-to-return than do those destinations described as not having authentic characteristics.

The key point is for every destination to carefully consider how to incorporate these survey findings. Natural sites like the Grand Canyon or living history museums such as Conner Prairie or Williamsburg are inherently authentic, and do not need to work too hard to hone their Authenticity Attributes. However, their challenge is to ensure they continue to appeal to the mainstream traveler as well as the much smaller group of authenticity purists (19%).

Attributes of Authenticity	
Category	Attributes
Unique	Original, Artistic, Inventive, Spontaneous
Real	Historical, Natural, Landmarks
Human	Genuine, Trustworthy, Caring
Non-Commercial	Simple, Not fake, Not glitzy, Not “out to make a buck”
Social/Emotional	Bonding, Feeling closer to family/friends



Preferences for Real vs. Fantasy

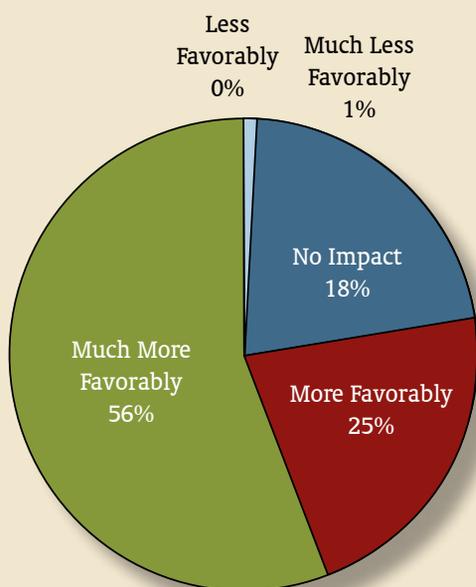
Between the two, attractions visitors overwhelmingly prefer authentic experiences to things they consider “fantasy.”

Attractions like theme parks and gaming casinos, offering fantasy and entertainment experiences, have the greatest opportunity for growth by evolving their brands to include some of the Authenticity Attributes. Beware that crafting a new brand, message or product in response to a trend is not an easy task. Efforts intended to be authentic but instead come across as commercial tricks will certainly flop. Authenticity is a hot trend, similar to the Green movement; like the risk of “green washing,” any incremental “authenticity adjustments” in a single element, section or exhibit must be legitimate and transparent to successfully impress your audience.

Emotional connections are important. More than 4 in 10 visitors feel the emotional aspects of the experience make an attraction feel authentic. When emotionally connected, visitors say they are more inclined to return to that place as well as to spend significantly more money. Immersing people in the experience will engage their senses and help to trigger sincere emotion and enjoyment. Tell your story, make it accessible to visitors and capture the moment.

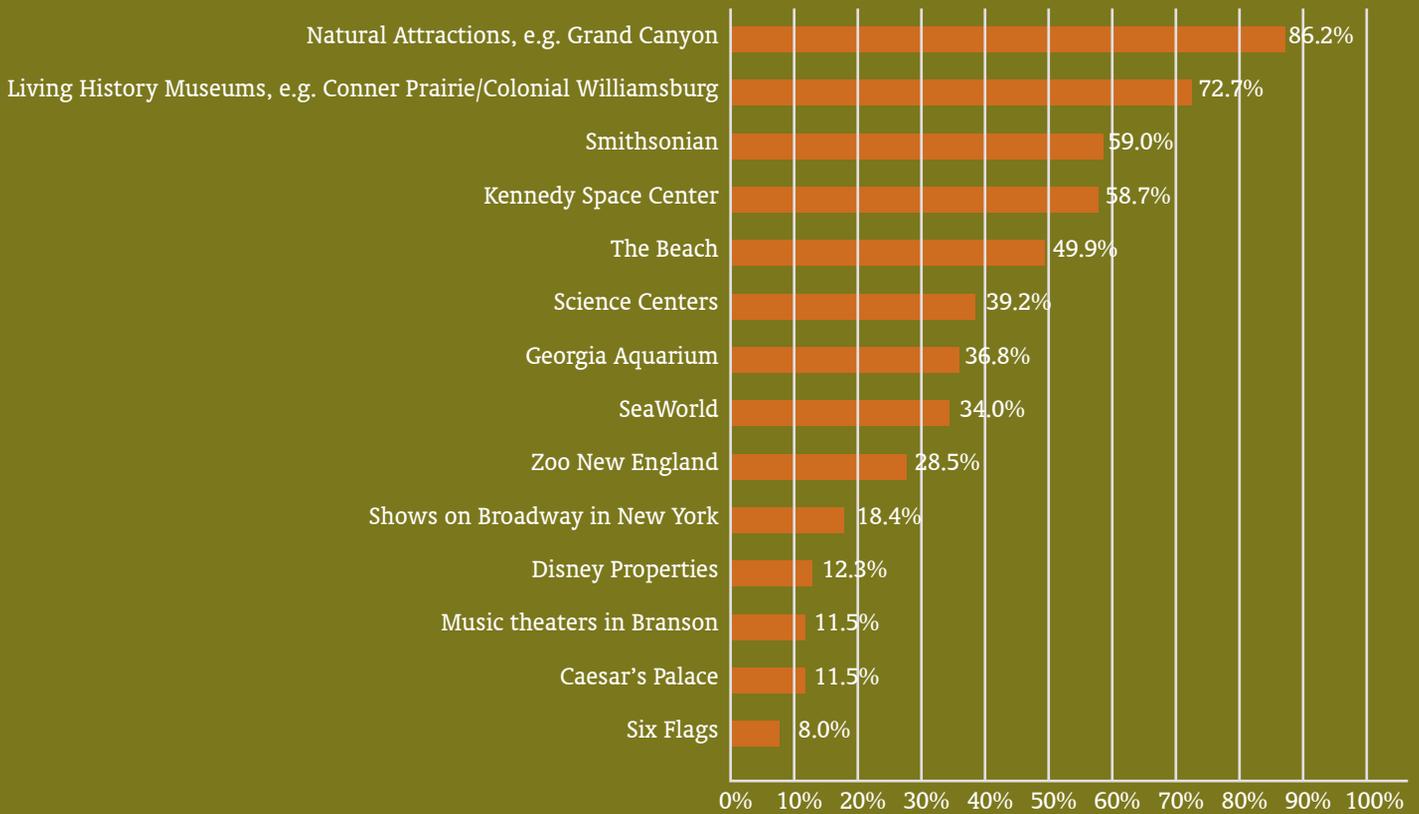
CONCLUSION

Today’s travelers are definitely seeking more authentic experiences. Destinations of all kinds that develop authentic offerings or augment existing Authentic Attributes will have a competitive edge in our fiercely competitive market. The trick is to analyze how authenticity best applies to you and carefully incorporate it. The potential is real.



Brand Perception

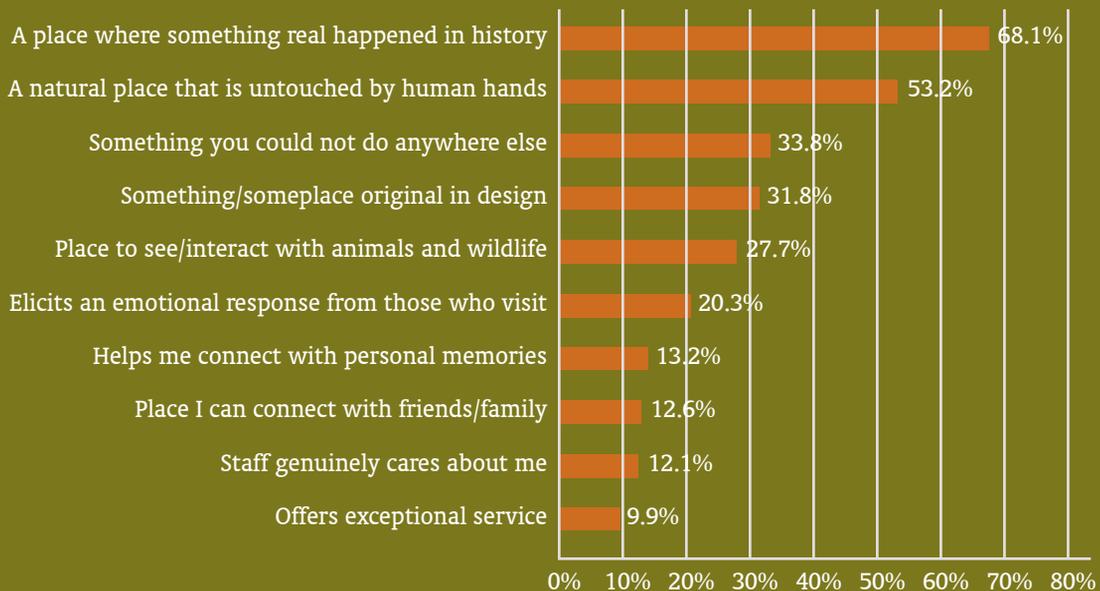
The vast majority (81%) of those who indicated their last trip had real/authentic characteristics said these attributes caused them to view the destination or attraction more/much more favorably.



Specific Attractions Considered "Real or Authentic"

Specifically, natural attractions like the Grand Canyon, Living History museums such as Conner Prairie, the Smithsonian and Kennedy Space Center are considered to be some of the most authentic attractions.

Respondents were asked to check all that apply.



Best Examples of Authenticity

Attraction visitors say the best examples of authenticity include history, natural and unique offerings.

Ratio of attraction visitors who included these in their top 3 choices.