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The Stage Stop Inn: A Case Study on the Impact of Small Hotels on Communities

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Introduction

Located on the east side of the Rocky Mountains, the Stage Stop Inn of Choteau, Montana, is in Teton County. The census shows Choteau had 1,684 people residing within its boundaries in 2010. In 2012, 598,378 non-resident visitors traveled through the city of Choteau while in Montana with almost 68,000 of them spending a night in the community (ITRR, 2012).



The purpose of this study was to understand more about the impact of the Stage Stop Inn on the community of Choteau. Specifically, the objectives were:

1. To learn more about the characteristics of overnight guests to the Stage Stop Inn.
2. To determine reasons why people chose to stay at the Stage Stop Inn.
3. To determine the spending patterns of overnight guests to the Stage Stop Inn in the community of Choteau.

Methods

The data for this project was collected in the third quarter of 2012 (July, August, and September). Guests of the Stage Stop Inn were asked at check-out if they would be willing to complete a survey regarding their stay in Choteau. The survey was provided to them along with a letter explaining the study, a postage-paid envelope in which to return the survey, and a slip of paper explaining that if they returned the survey, their name would be entered in a drawing to win one of two \$100 VISA pre-paid gift cards. Of the 1,500 surveys handed out, 91 were returned.

Limitations

The ability to extrapolate these results to the full sample of overnight guests of the Stage Stop Inn is limited by the small sample size that was obtained.

Results

Table 1 shows that of those who responded (91 people), 45 percent, or 41 people, were from Montana. Nine percent were from Washington, and seven percent from Alberta, Canada. Of the out-of-state respondents, 92 percent had been to Montana before with four percent being first time visitors. Of the Montana residents, the top three counties represented were Missoula, Yellowstone, and Cascade (Table 2).

Table 1: Residences of Respondent

Place of Residence (n=91)	% of Responses	Place of Residence	% of Responses
Montana	45% (41)	Indiana	1% (1)
Washington	9% (8)	Iowa	1% (1)
Alberta, Canada	7% (6)	Kansas	1% (1)
California	6% (5)	Massachusetts	1% (1)
Oregon	3% (3)	Michigan	1% (1)
Arizona	2% (2)	Nevada	1% (1)
Canada	2% (2)	New Mexico	1% (1)
Idaho	2% (2)	Pennsylvania	1% (1)
New York	2% (2)	Saskatchewan, Canada	1% (1)
North Carolina	2% (2)	Tennessee	1% (1)
Arkansas	1% (1)	Texas	1% (1)
Belgium	1% (1)	Virginia	1% (1)
Colorado	1% (1)	Wisconsin	1% (1)

Table 2: Counties of Montana Respondents

Montana County (n=41)	% of Responses	Montana County (n=41)	% of Responses
Missoula	7% (6)	Park	2% (2)
Yellowstone	6% (5)	Toole	2% (2)
Cascade	5% (5)	Judith Basin	1% (1)
Lewis and Clark	4% (4)	Lincoln	1% (1)
Beaverhead	2% (2)	Musselshell	1% (1)
Fergus	2% (2)	Pondera	1% (1)
Flathead	2% (2)	Ravalli	1% (1)
Gallatin	2% (2)	Stillwater	1% (1)
Madison	2% (2)	Teton	1% (1)

Respondents who were not from Montana were asked for what purposes they were in Montana. They were also asked to choose a main purpose for their travels to Montana. Eighty-three percent indicated that one of the reasons they were here was for vacation, recreation, or pleasure. Sixty percent indicated this as their main purpose for being in Montana (Table 3). Twenty-two percent were in Montana to visit friends and relatives with 22 percent indicated this as their main purpose. Business also drove people to Montana. Fifteen percent said they were here for business with nine percent indicating this as their main purpose.

Table 3: Nonresident Purposes of Montana Trip

Purpose of Trip to Montana (n=50)	All Purposes	Main Purpose
Vacation/recreation/pleasure	83% (39)	60% (27)
Visit friends/relatives/family event	38% (18)	22% (10)
Business/convention/meeting	15% (7)	9% (10)
Shopping	13% (6)	--
Just passing through	13% (6)	4% (2)
Other (medical, visit schools, etc.)	6% (3)	4% (2)

All respondents, Montana residents and non-residents, were asked why they were traveling to Choteau. They were asked to indicate all of the purposes of their trip and then a main purpose. A special event in or near Choteau was cited by 38 percent of respondents as one of the reasons they traveled to Choteau with 33 percent of respondents saying that it was their main purpose (Table 4). Thirty-four percent of respondents indicated that staying at the Stage Stop Inn was one of their reasons for coming to Choteau and 11 percent said that was their main purpose.

Table 4: Purposes of Choteau Trip

Purpose of Trip to Choteau (n=91)	All Purposes	Main Purpose
Special event in or near Choteau	38% (34)	33% (29)
Staying at the Stage Stop Inn	34% (31)	11% (10)
Just passing through Choteau	22% (20)	16% (14)
Recreating in or near Choteau	21% (19)	17% (15)
Business in or near Choteau	18% (12)	16% (14)
Spending time in Choteau	14% (13)	1% (1)
Visiting friends or relatives in or near Choteau	14% (13)	7% (6)

Respondents were asked to select a statement that would describe how their visit to Choteau fit in with their travel plans in Montana. Most were attracted to Choteau for other reasons but decided to stay at the Stage Stop Inn (Table 5).

Table 5: Attraction to Choteau

Statements of Attraction to Choteau	
I was attracted to the area for other reasons and decided to stay at the hotel.	66% (57)
I was attracted to other areas of Montana but needed to stay in Choteau on my way.	29% (25)
I was attracted to the area primarily because of the hotel.	6% (5)

Respondents were also asked why they chose to stay at the Stage Stop Inn (Table 6). Most said it was the location of the hotel (43%) followed by “other” reasons (42%) which were written in and can be found in Appendix A. The reputation and convenience of Stage Stop Inn were also indicated at 30 and 24 percent respectively as reasons for staying.

Table 6: Reasons for staying at the Stage Stop Inn

Reasons for Staying at Stage Stop Inn	% of responses
Its location in Montana fits with my travel plans	43% (38)
Other**	42% (37)
Its reputation	30% (26)
Convenience	24% (21)
It had a room available	23% (20)
The small town atmosphere of Choteau	17% (15)
Stayed here for business	11% (10)
Proximity to dinosaur trail sites	3% (3)

** Appendix A

Most respondents made their plans to stay at the Stage Stop Inn more than a month before their stay (42%) or the month (20%) before their stay (Table 7). Twenty-eight percent of respondents heard about the hotel from friends or family (Table 8). Thirty-five percent of people said they used a source that was not listed. A full listing of the sources they responded with can be found in Appendix A.

Table 7: Timing of Reservations at the Stage Stop Inn

Timing of Plans to Stay at Stage Stop Inn	% of responses
The day of our stay	19% (16)
The week before our stay	19% (16)
The month before our stay	20% (17)
More than a month before our stay	42% (36)

Table 8: Information Sources

Source of Information about Stage Stop Inn	% of responses
Other*	35% (30)
Family member of friend	28% (24)
A website	18% (4)
A listing in another travel guide	11% (3)
Montana State Tourism website	9% (8)
Billboard	9% (8)
Social media	2% (2)
Chamber/visitor bureau	2% (2)
A listing in the Montana travel planner	1% (1)
A magazine or newspaper	--
Russell Country website	--
A listing in Russell Country planner	--

* Appendix A

Respondents spent an average of 5.87 nights away from home. Of those nights, nonresidents spent 4.63 of them in Montana and for the full sample, 2.28 nights were spent in Choteau (Table 9). The average size of travel groups was 3.41. Almost half of respondents indicated that they participated in scenic driving (46%) followed by attending festivals or special events (36%) and recreational shopping (33%) (Table 10).

Table 9: Nights spent away from home, in Montana, and in Choteau

# of Nights	Nights spent away from home	Nights spent in Montana*	Nights spent in Choteau
1	11% (10)	10% (9)	51% (45)
2	7% (6)	12% (10)	9% (8)
3	14% (13)	20% (17)	21% (19)
4	14% (13)	20% (17)	12% (11)
5	7% (6)	13% (11)	3% (3)
6	3% (3)	3% (3)	1% (1)
7	6% (5)	5% (4)	--
8	2% (2)	2% (2)	--
9	4% (4)	2% (2)	--
10+	31% (28)	14% (12)	2% (2)
Mean	5.87	4.63	2.28

*This column only represents nonresidents

Table 10: Activities Participated in while Visiting Choteau

Activities while Visiting			
Scenic driving	45% (31)	Road/tour biking	3% (2)
Attended festivals or special events	36% (25)	Fishing/fly fishing	3% (2)
Recreational shopping	33% (23)	Horseback riding	3% (2)
Visited Old Trail Museum	19% (13)	Backpacking	1% (1)
Day hiking	17% (12)	Mountain biking	1% (1)
Wildlife watching	15% (10)	River rafting/floating	--
Visited historical sites	13% (9)	Canoeing/kayaking	--
Nature photography	7% (5)	Sporting event	--
Car/RV camping	6% (4)	OHV/ATV riding	--
Golfing	4% (3)	Gambling	--
Birding	4% (3)		

Another objective of this study was to understand the spending pattern of guests in Choteau. Respondents were asked to report expenditures made by their travel group while in Choteau. For this report, the expenditures were analyzed by both residents and nonresidents of Montana. The following four tables describe expenditures made in Choteau. Table 11 shows the average expenditures made by those nonresident respondents who spent money in each category along with the overall percent of all nonresidents. Table 12 shows the average expenditure across the full sample of nonresidents, not just those who spent money in the category. This table also shows the average total trip expenditure of nonresidents in Choteau. The average total expenditure in Choteau by these nonresident respondents was \$319.19 for the trip. Considering

the average length of stay (1.89 nights) for nonresident guests, this equates to a \$168.88 daily expenditure in Choteau.

Table 11: Average Expenditures of Nonresident Respondents and the Percent of those who spent Money in each Category

Expenditure Category (n=50)	Average expenditure of those who spent money in Choteau by category	Percent of respondents who spent money in Choteau by category
Hotel/Motel	\$191.04	100%
Restaurant and bar	\$74.30	83%
Gas and oil	\$51.78	38%
Groceries and snacks	\$42.33	44%
Retail purchases	\$55.78	38%
Gambling	\$20.00	1%
Licenses or entrance fees	\$4.00	2%
Services	\$157.50	2%
Auto repairs	\$15.00	--
Additional expenses	\$171.33	6%
Vehicle rentals	--	--
Outfitter/Guided activities	--	--

Table 12: Average Expenditures of all Nonresident Respondents

Expenditure Category (n=50)	Average expenditure of all nonresidents in Choteau by category	% of total trip expenditures
Hotel/Motel	\$191.04	60%
Restaurant and bar	\$61.92	19%
Gas and oil	\$19.42	6%
Groceries and snacks	\$18.52	6%
Retail purchases	\$20.92	7%
Gambling	\$0.42	<1%
Licenses or entrance fees	\$.31	<1%
Services	\$.42	<1%
Auto repairs	\$.08	<1%
Additional expenses	\$6.56	6%
Vehicle rentals	--	--
Outfitter/Guided activities	--	--
Average Total Trip Expenditures in Choteau	\$319.61	

Table 13 presents the average expenditures of residents who spent money in the categories. Table 14 shows expenditures across the full sample of residents. The average total spending for

the trip in Choteau for residents was \$409.56 (Table 14). Considering their average length of stay at the Stage Stop Inn (2.75 nights), this equates to an average daily expenditure of \$148.93.

Table 13: Average Expenditures of Resident Respondents and the Percent of those who Spent Money in each Category

Expenditure Category (n=41)	Average Expenditure of those who spent money in Choteau by Category	Percent of Respondents who spent money in Choteau by Category
Hotel/Motel	\$221.53	100%
Restaurant and bar	\$70.44	78%
Gas and oil	\$66.79	59%
Groceries and snacks	\$22.82	42%
Retail purchases	\$124.73	37%
Gambling	--	--
Licenses or entrance fees	\$8.00	2%
Services	\$7.50	5%
Auto repairs	\$100.00	2%
Additional expenses	\$245.00	15%
Vehicle rentals		--
Outfitter/Guided activities	--	--

Table 14: Average Expenditures of all Montana Resident Respondents

Expenditure Category (n=41)	Average expenditure of all MT residents in Choteau by category	% of total trip expenditures
Hotel/Motel	\$221.53	54%
Restaurant and bar	\$54.98	13%
Gas and oil	\$39.10	10%
Groceries and snacks	\$9.46	2%
Retail purchases	\$45.63	11%
Gambling	--	--
Licenses or entrance fees	\$.20	<1%
Services	\$.37	<1%
Auto repairs	\$2.44	1%
Additional expenses	\$35.85	9%
Vehicle rentals	--	--
Outfitter/Guided activities	--	--
Average Total Trip Expenditures in Choteau	\$409.56	

Spending patterns and hotel occupancy rate can provide an estimate of total spending in Choteau by visitors who stayed at the Stage Stop Inn. Table 15 shows the occupancy rates of this 43

room hotel for the months where data was collected. Based on the average daily expenditure of the full sample (\$155.53 per day) the combined potential expenditures of guests of the Stage Stop Inn in Choteau in the third quarter of 2012 is \$602,989.81.

Table 15: Potential Total Expenditures made by guests of the Stage Stop Inn in the 3rd Quarter of 2012

Month	Monthly Occupancy Rate	Potential Expenditures
July	99%	\$202,189.00
August	99%	\$205,144.07
September	98%	\$195,656.74

Conclusions

Generalizations to all quarter three overnight guests of the Stage Stop Inn are made with caution due to a sample of 91 people. However, some conclusions can be drawn from the sample obtained. The Stage Stop Inn is having a positive impact on the community of Choteau and is drawing both resident and non-resident visitors.

Residents spent more money in Choteau per trip but they also stayed in Choteau longer so their average daily expenditures were lower than those not from Montana. Both residents and non-residents spent most of their money on their hotel stay followed by restaurant and gas/oil.

Special events in the community of Choteau are bringing people to the hotel. This symbiotic relationship between events and the hotel is ideal for a rural town like Choteau and should be encouraged. Most people in this sample found out about the hotel from sources other than those we had listed and from friends and family. Perhaps with more advertising, the Stage Stop Inn could grow beyond the third quarter by extending into the other seasons.

Appendix A: Written in Responses

Why did you choose to spend the night at the Stage Stop Inn?

Attended the old time fiddlers contest
Been here before & love it!
Been here before. Nicest place in town
Best place to stay in Choteau
Birding at freezeout lake
Class scheduled at hotel
Elbow pass fire
Family reunion- List of motels given, we chose this one.
Fire assignment in Augusta MT
Have been there before
Indoor pool, laundromat near by price reasonable
MT St. Fiddle contest
Nicest hotel in Choteau
Nicest hotel in Choteau
nicest in Choteau
No rooms in Dupuyer
Pool & breakfast
Previous stay
price & nice room
Quilt retreat
Quilt retreat
Quilt retreat
Quilt retreat
Quilting
Quilting
Quilting retreat
Quilting retreat
Quilting retreat
Sewing cotten capers
sewing retreat
Special event
Stayed before/ dog kennel & nice rooms with pool- spa
tripadvisor.com
Two medicine dinosaur museum
was for a retreat & used many times
We have stayed here before
Where the fire team had made arrangements

Where did you hear about Stage Stop Inn?

AAA
AAA book
AAA Montana guide
Been there before
Business contact recommended
Cotten Capers
Drive by
DRove through town
Fire team
Found it on map- convenient for my travel
From Client in Fairfield
Google
Google "search"
I discovered it while staying at another hotel in Choteau
I stayed here years ago
It was a very nice looking hotel!
Knew about it from when I stayed in Montana
Lived in Choteau some years ago
Local Store
Offer from quilt retreat
Only rooms available
Quilt retreat
Quilt retreat
Quilt retreat location
Quilting retreat
Retreat
Stayed here before
Stayed here before
Stayed here in 2007 (Fire assignment).
Stayed there before
Trip advison- highly rated
tripadvisor.com
Two medicine dinosaur museum
Went online & checked it out.