



TOURISM CASES

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Exploring the Case Blue Ridge Music Trails

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Introduction

This is the story of a project driven by people who are passionately interested in the music and culture of the Blue Ridge Mountains – many of them volunteers. The decisions of the partners and supporters are not always taken rationally; therefore, to explore the case, our recommendation is to apply cultural curiosity and intuition rather than just dry analysis.

Understanding the case

It is impossible to understand the story of the Blue Ridge Music Trails (BRMT) without plunging into this world of musicians, music-lovers and protectors of heritage.

- Readers should start by looking up the different musical styles and influences mentioned and listening to samples online. With a little research, you will be able to find other sources of information about music in and around the Blue Ridge Mountains, such as its history and how it has evolved.
- You will also need to understand the nature of the Blue Ridge Mountains themselves. From the interactive map on the BRMT website, their Facebook page and other sources, note the names of places and look them up to see where they are and what they look like. If you were to describe these towns and their surroundings, how would you summarize them in 10 or 15 lines?
- You should also look up the institutions involved, cited in the summary, to understand why each would get involved in this project, in relation to their mission and role. Consider in particular the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area Partnership. How does it operate, and who are the partners?
- The strategy is to work with 'venues'. What are the different kinds of venues? From the BRMT website, find examples of each.
- How do you imagine the training sessions for the venues? Take the example of a restaurant that hosts musicians. What are the skills they need to master? Draft an agenda for a training session aimed at their management and staff.

Avenues for study

The Blue Ridge Music Trails provide an opportunity to explore the relationship between culture and tourism. In recent decades, they have been brought closer together as interest has grown in local expressions of culture that can be shared with visitors, such as music, food and traditional markets.

1. Learn what you can about tourism in the Blue Ridge Mountains, both in North Carolina and Virginia, including major attractions such as the Blue Ridge Parkway and the Appalachian Trail. Leaving aside the music, how would describe the tourism in this area?
2. How do the BRMT fit into the tourism of the Blue Ridge Mountains? To what extent are they complementary? To what extent are they an effective driver of tourism? Make reasonable assumptions, based on the case and on sources you can find online: What is the profile of visitors? Where do they come from? Where do you think they stay? How much do you think they spend?
3. Compare the BRMT initiative with a 'classic' promotion of a rural and natural area, i.e. giving importance to landscape, outdoor activities and heritage sites. What are the benefits of one as opposed to the other?
4. What do you understand by 'a grass roots marketing initiative'. Find examples and explain them.
5. Read the section 'Advertising and PR'. If you were in charge of promotion of the BRMT, what would your priorities be? Draft an outline of a marketing strategy for the BRMT.
6. Read the section on 'Funding and Business Model'. Imagine you were the financial manager of the BRMT project. Present the ideas mentioned in the case in a more structured way, in the form of a presentation of recommendations and/or a plan for a sustainable financial future.
7. Finally, a question on the management of resources. The Blue Ridge National Heritage Area has only five full-time staff members and other tasks and projects to fulfil. If you were its manager, how would you use these staff members and allocate their time?