



**California Outdoor**  
HOSPITALITY ASSOCIATION

**Nature Tourism,  
A part of the Experience  
Based Economy**

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# Nature Tourism, A part of the Experience Based Economy

By Debbie Sipe

## Your Customers Want to Bring Home Memories

We've talked about agritourism and cultural/heritage tourism, but the most natural connection with camping is nature tourism. Nature Tourism, often referred to as Ecotourism, was introduced to the tourist industry in the early 1980s. Ecotourism was initially connected with outdoor travel to remote, unique, and/or scenic areas. Though early Ecotourism involved an educational aspect, this was not a crucial or required element to the industry or the consumer. Today, nature tourism is a term used to encompass the broad range of natural resource-based recreation and tourism activities.



If you were to create a nature tourism business from scratch, Texas A&M has a great site. Visit <https://naturetourism.tamu.edu/> for more detailed information. The good news is that you don't have to start from scratch.

First off, you already own or manage a nature-based tourism business, a campground. And more than likely, there is at least one, if not several, local nature tourism

sites or events at or near your campground.

## Start by looking around your own park

What nature-based items do you already have that you can execute on? Do you have hiking trails? Do you have native plants? Do you have wildlife? Your job is to help your camper connect with these existing assets.

For example, let's say you are near a forest or woodlands or a meadow and that these features extend into your park. Help your camper identify and connect with these trees and or landscapes. The internet is a vast a wonderful world of information. And many consumers carry smart phones. All you need to do is help your camper connect a specific tree, land feature, or other natural item to more information.



You can do this through QR codes. Here is a QR code that I generated in under 5 minutes for a Wikipedia's page on the California Coast Live Oak. A quick Google search for "QR code generator" turned up a dozen different sites.



Print this QR code, laminate it or place in a sheet protector and post near a California Coast Live Oak. Anyone with a smart phone with a QR app will scan this image and go straight the Wikipedia site for California Coast Live Oaks.



Another way is to bring local naturalist into your park for guided walks or discussions. Do you have lots of birds? Bring in a member of the local Audubon Society to discuss the local birds. Do you live near a fault line? Bring in a geologist to discuss earthquakes. Bring in a local sporting goods vendor to discuss the merits of good binoculars.

The list is endless. Focus on what is unique about your natural area. Look around and see what you already have to offer and then expand on it to make the experience more memorable for your guests.

**Nearby** – Except for a few, very metro RV parks, most of you are near nature sites. There are 270 State Parks; almost all have interpretive information about the natural surroundings. Twenty percent of California is within the boundaries of a National Forest. There are 1000 miles of coastline. Consider the number of lakes, reservoirs, rivers, creeks and streams. The California Delta is over 1,000 square miles of inland river estuary. California has mountains, valleys and deserts. We have Redwood trees and Joshua trees. We have volcanoes and distinctive earthquake fault lines. If you have a campground in California, you are near a natural site.



Start at [www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov) to find local state parks. Next check [www.cawatchablewildlife.org](http://www.cawatchablewildlife.org). Department of Fish and Game has links to wildlife areas, ecological reserves and public lands at <https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/>.

**Events** – Next check your local chamber or visitor bureau to look for Wildlife Events. You probably already know what's going on near your park. Here's just a sample:

- Snow Goose Festival in Chico usually in January
- Mendocino, Little River & Fort Bragg Whale Festivals beginning in March
- Monarch Butterfly Days in Pismo Beach and Pacific Grove, October – March
- Kern River Valley Autumn Nature and Vulture Festival, held in September every year near Lake Isabella
- Desert Wildflower Festival, March and April

Build themed weekends around these events. Bring in guest lecturers to share tips and advice. If you can, package in tickets to the festival with your registration fees. Make it easy & memorable and your guest will come back and bring their friends!

### **Become a Color Spotter**

In 2009, CaliforniaFallColor.com, a weekly blog, began to coordinate the color changes throughout California each fall. Volunteer spotters are staged throughout California and report color changes to this seasonal blog. Each week, beginning in August thru Thanksgiving, founder John Poimiroo\*, contacts California's major newspapers and radio station with the latest color sightings. The Weather Channel even follows John's posts. Travelers watch the weekly blog reports and make their plans to tour California's Fall Colors! Put your campground front and center by becoming a color spotter.



John lists what it takes to become a color spotter. Email the following to [editor@californiafallcolor.com](mailto:editor@californiafallcolor.com)

- Name of person reporting
- Location of report
- Date of report (please current reports and photos only)
- Description of foliage (common names are fine - aspen, birch, bigleaf maple, etc. - but make sure you're accurate)
- Percent change of the forest (not of an individual specimen)
  - 0 - 15% - Very little showing, some liming
  - 15 - 30% - lime to yellow, but still mostly green
  - 30 - 50% - some green, but mostly lime, yellow, orange or red
  - 50 -75% - Approaching Peak - lots of yellow, orange, red, still some green and lime
  - 75 - 100% - Peaking - Almost entirely changed color
  - Past peak - wind has blown leaves from most of the foliage

All foliage is good... not just native trees... vineyards, orchards, nut trees. The attraction is lots of foliage of the same species changing in one place at the same time. If you're reporting landscaped trees (not native), say what specie... chinese pistache, ginkgo, liquidambar, sycamore ... List places with lots of trees, not just one great tree, as people plan to visit areas with great foliage.

Not quite ready to become a color spotter? You can help by re-posting or re-tweeting the weekly color reports. Generate flyers or a webpage for local hikes and drives where color spotting is premium.

John's tips to RV parks... plant boulevards of colorful deciduous trees leading into and along the edges of RV parks... ginkgos, chinese pistache, liquidambar, black oak, aspen, bigleaf maple, eastern red sugar maple... not just one tree, but many of the same species. That's what leaf peepers want to see... big displays of fall color. John also suggests promoting harvest festivals and fall events that celebrate

seasonal color such as pumpkin festivals, wine harvest, harvest festivals, Halloween events, even early Christmas events, since our fall color is so long lasting.

Tim Fesko of Coleville/Walker KOA has been color spotting for a while. Tim's best advice is to keep a camera handy. He also sends John any vacation or camping specials that he offers during the fall. John promotes the KOA's specials along with his color sightings.

***\*Editor's Note:** John Poimiroo has had a long and varied career, having worked at ski areas, amusement attractions, hotel companies, PR agencies, national parks and forests, and destinations, including a stint as the Director of Tourism for California. His El Dorado Hills consultancy, Poimiroo & Partners, specializes in travel and tourism marketing communications. John is a past speaker at CampCalNOW events.*

## **What is the Experience Based Economy?**

James Gilmore and Joseph Pine II explain the science of the Experience Based Economy. They argue that businesses must orchestrate memorable events for their customers, and that memory itself becomes the product - the "experience". More advanced experience businesses can begin charging for the value of the "transformation" that an experience offers. As goods and services become commoditized, the customer experiences that companies create will matter most.

The basics of The Experience Economy can be found on [Wikipedia](#). A summary of Gilmore & Pine's concept was published in the Harvard Business Review. [Click here to read](#). Additionally, videos are available on [YouTube](#). Want even more detail? You can purchase their book [online](#) or at your local book store.



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