

Welcome to
BORREGO
Springs
CHRISTMAS CIRCLE
COMMUNITY PARK



**BORREGO VILLAGE ASSOCIATION
VISITOR EXPERIENCE PLAN**

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SUBMITTED TO

Borrego Village Association
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2022, The Acorn Group began working with the Borrego Village Association (BVA) to develop a visitor experience plan as a strategy to strengthen the connection between the town of Borrego Springs and neighboring Anza-Borrego Desert State Park (ABDSP). The Borrego Village Association is a non-profit citizen stakeholder organization dedicated to creating a thriving and attractive community. Currently, while the town offers amenities that serve the park's visitors, as well as noteworthy installations that complement the park experience, not every visitor recognizes this.



Borrego Springs' natural beauty and mountain backdrop create an attractive respite for visitors.

Results of a visitor survey The Acorn Group conducted in March 2022 reveal that, among an equal number of people, their primary destination was either the town of Borrego-Springs or both the town and ABDSP. More than half of the respondents indicated that they would find suggestions about different types of destinations, activities, and things to do helpful or probably helpful. As it is, respondents tend to come into town to visit a restaurant.

A visitor experience plan identifies strategies to communicate a resource's significance and the audience's connection to it. It differs from an interpretation master plan (a document The Acorn Group created for Anza-Borrego Desert State Park in 2015). This particular visitor experience plan explores ways to enhance a welcoming atmosphere in town and identifies specific information and wayfinding tools and devices that assist the visitor. By calling out nearby park and town resources, the visitor experience plan envisions a more fulfilling experience that takes advantage of both. The town is viewed as the gateway to the park; the park in turn is viewed as an extension to the town.

This visitor experience plan includes the visitor survey report, synopsis of the stakeholder planning session, list of town assets and key takeaways, visitor experience goals, strategies to address environmental issues (e.g., aquifer overdraft, erosion of desert crust) among visitors, limiting factors, and recommendations.

1.0 DESTINATION

1.1 Significance of Borrego Springs

Pioneer homesteaders set down roots in the nascent community of Borego, the early name for Borrego Springs, in the early 1900s. Cattlemen and sheepherders took advantage of the valley for winter grazing; the Homestead Act lured settlers and the prospect of farming. Ample water from deep wells enabled farmers to grow cash crops of alfalfa, grapes, dates, cotton, tomatoes, and citrus in the fields of Borego.

Visions of transforming the valley into a desert resort began in the 1930s; in 1943 those became a reality when A.A. Burnand and partners began designing the “San Diego county rival of Palm Springs.” Borrego Springs was born.

From its early days forward, Borrego Springs has always celebrated the valley’s natural beauty. Although housing tracts sprang up in the 1940s and 1950s and Christmas Circle soon boasted a local business district, Borrego Springs retained its ties to the open desert. It offered beauty, a striking backdrop, and an antidote to the stress of urban life. It still does. Town merchants, resort and tour operators, members of the arts community, and visitors all recognize the beauty and inherent worth of the desert.

1.2 Existing conditions

The purpose of this narrative about Borrego Springs is to share our perspective about the town from the outside objectively. Our

description of existing conditions pertains to access, presence of the park relative to the town, and extant signage.



The approach to Borrego Springs from Montezuma Valley Road SR 322 does little to welcome travelers as they arrive in town.

Visitors can reach Borrego Springs by several roads and its airport. San Diego/Imperial County Sign Route 22 extends from Montezuma Valley Road to the west to the Salton Sea to the east. It takes travelers through Borrego Springs. Highway 79 and 78 converge at Santa Ysabel and Julian and connect with San Diego/Imperial County Sign Route 3 (S3), which drops into Christmas Circle. Highway 78 also continues east to Kane Spring. San

Diego/Imperial County Sign Route 2 (S2) extends from Highway 79 near San Felipe to the west and Ocotillo to the east. Borrego Springs is reachable from S2 by turning onto Highway 78 and then S3.



The sign announcing the ABDSP Visitor Center is easy for tourists to miss despite the fact that the Center is a significant attraction for travelers to the region.

Anza-Borrego Desert State Park surrounds Borrego Springs, but its presence is only softly announced. The same is true for the town. Park monument signage appears on SR 22 and on approach to the Visitor Center. However, it is not present on the valley floor where SR 22 intersects Palm Canyon Drive, the town's main thoroughfare. Neither the town nor the park is prominently announced as visitors arrive on the valley floor from SR 22. This is also the case where S3 connects with Christmas Circle and where Palm Canyon Drive approaches Christmas Circle from the east.

Signage that announces the “gateway” or “geotourism” connection of Borrego Springs to Anza-Borrego Desert State Park is also lacking. This connection is critical to convey the town’s park culture and help establish first impressions.

Interpretive and directional signage is present but limited. A small courtyard at the Anza Borrego Natural History Association store displays several interpretive panels highlighting the desert biota, geology, paleontology, night skies, and trails.

Directional signs along Palm Canyon Drive detail some points of interest and mileage. Still, there are no physical directories in town (outside of municipal or state-level traffic signs) that provide visitors with an overview of park resources, town resources, or other points of interest.

1.3 Assets

Proximity to Anza-Borrego Desert State Park

Borrego Springs is surrounded by 640,000 acres of rugged beauty: Anza-Borrego Desert State Park (ABDSP). The park’s desert landscape attracts approximately 500,000 visitors each year. Known for its mountain backdrop, hills, desert flora and fauna, slot canyons, badlands, and palm oases, ABDSP hugs the town limits of Borrego Springs.

International Dark Sky Community Designation

Borrego Springs is California’s first International Dark-Sky Community. Committed to avoiding light pollution, the town of

Borrego Springs takes darkness seriously. There are no stop lights, and night lighting is minimal. As a result, night skies on the desert floor are spectacular. The lack of artificial light is also beneficial to nocturnal wildlife, migrating birds, and pollinators. Star gazing and night photography are popular activities.



With laws to limit light pollution and its isolation from other urban centers, Borrego Springs enjoys beautiful starlit skies.

Sky Art at Galleta Meadows

Visitors can enjoy the work of sculptor Ricardo Breceda throughout Galleta Meadows, private land owned by the estate of Dennis Avery. Avery commissioned the pieces between 2008-2012, which consist of over 130 massive metal sculptures of desert animals present during the Pleistocene Epoch, as well as whimsical animals and human figures from historical events.

Christmas Circle

This one-acre traffic roundabout is located between the airport and the central part of town. A monument sign welcomes people to Borrego Springs. A pavilion, picnic tables, and a wide expanse of lawns serve the community for special events, farmer's markets, casual picnics, and resting stops during road trips.

Presence of community institutions and organizations

Institutions and storefronts associated with such organizations as Anza Borrego Foundation, Anza Borrego Natural History Association, Borrego Springs Chamber of Commerce, Borrego Art Institute, and Performing Arts Center are located on or adjacent to Palm Canyon Drive. The Steele/Burnand Anza-Borrego Desert Research Center is a short drive from Christmas Circle, and while it is not open to the public on a regular basis, it does occasionally offer outreach and education programs to engage the community.

In addition, retail shops and restaurants are located along Palm Canyon Drive, offering fares for residents and travelers alike, as well as interactions with knowledgeable staff who can help enhance visitor experiences in town and the park.

2.0 RESEARCH

2.1 Putting the visitor first

The foundation of a visitor experience plan is understanding what your visitors need and want. User research helps us empathize with your visitors to identify pain points they face while experiencing Borrego Springs, providing data-driven insights for decision-making. Research reveals information about your visitors and their behavior, how they function in your environment, why they come, and how they perceive and react to Borrego Springs.

Audience research, and continued testing throughout the development process is the foundation of user-centered design, sometimes called UCD. It provides direction and justification for future implementation decisions, producing an end product that aligns closely with verified user needs and behavior. We discuss testing further in section 4.8 Next Steps.

2.2 Visitor survey parameters

Project purpose

In spring 2022, The Acorn Group developed a visitor survey to reveal a profile of typical visitors and factors affecting their visit. Ultimately, the survey further supported our work deepening the connection between the visitor experience in Borrego Springs with the visitor experience in the park.

Problem statement for audience research

Visitors to the town of Borrego Springs know about Anza-Borrego Desert State Park; in fact, many stay there for the express purpose of spending time in the park. Yet, visitors typically consider their experience in Borrego Springs separate from their experience in the park. The Borrego Village Association would like out-of-town visitors to view their time in Borrego Springs as an extension of their Anza-Borrego experience, connecting the two localities to create a richer, fuller experience for both.



Surveying visitors is an excellent way to learn about your audience's motivations and behavior.

Research methodology

Two representatives from The Acorn Group conducted in-person intercept surveys using iPads equipped with QuickTap on Friday, March 4, and Saturday, March 5, 2022.

The weather was unseasonably cold and windy, and there were not many visitors in Borrego Springs during the survey window. We conducted 76 surveys over two days. The most productive survey locations were outside the ABDSP Visitor Center and Christmas Circle. The team collected additional surveys at the Palm Canyon Trailhead and Sky Art installations. We looked for but did not find, visitors to survey at the Mall, outside the Borrego Art Institute, the courtyard or garden outside the Anza-Borrego History Association Store, or Tamarisk Grove campground.

In the weeks after March 4-5, student volunteers from Borrego High School and volunteers with the Anza-Borrego History Association Store collected 53 more surveys.

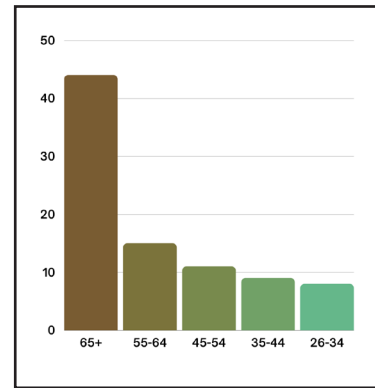
Limitations of the study

This survey reveals exciting and valuable information, but it is not a scientific survey. More than 100,000 people visit ABDSP each year. When winter visitors arrive at Borrego Springs, the town's population of roughly 3,000 people swells to 5,000 seasonal residents. With permanent, seasonal, resort, and vacation rental occupants, the high season population is between 10,000 and 12,000. The survey sample size (129) is small and comprises non-randomly selected respondents.

2.3 Research findings

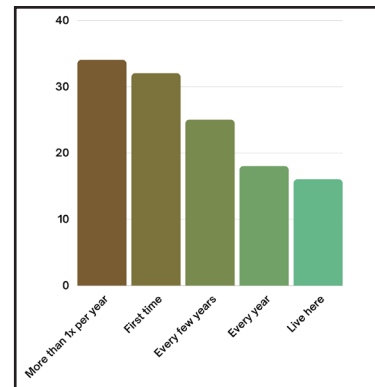
Age

Older visitors: 47% of the audience surveyed were over 65 years old. The next largest group of respondents (16%) were 55-64.



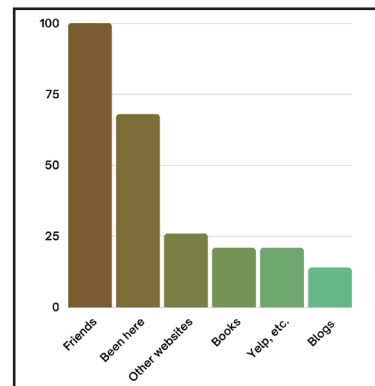
Trip planning

Returning visitors: Excluding residents, 71% of respondents had visited the region before. Only 29% of respondents were visiting for the first time.



Trip planning

Word-of-mouth: 64% of visitors say information they get from friends before their trip was their most valuable planning resource.



Given these limitations, the survey results cannot be considered valid or reliable for extrapolation to the entire population of visitors at either site.

Nevertheless, these survey results can help as we discuss, theorize, and create profiles of those interviewed. The results also add interesting information regarding visitation patterns within the park and the town.

2.4 Visitation correlations

From the research data we were able to find correlations among the interests of visitors.

People who are interested in art are also interested in the desert environment, nature, culture and history, hiking, and relaxing. They want to be in the desert but not exclusively.

People who are interested in hiking are also interested in nature, desert environment, camping, culture and history, and relaxing. They perceive the town as a place to eat or shop, not a destination.

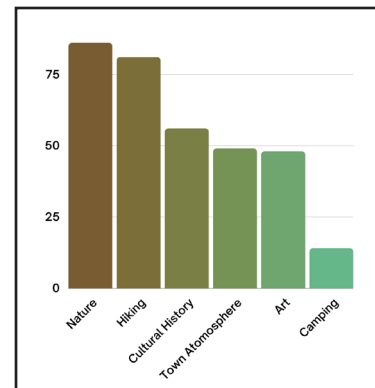
2.5 Visitor profiles & archetypes

Visitor profile

We created a visitor profile using the most popular survey response in each category. This prototypical visitor would be:

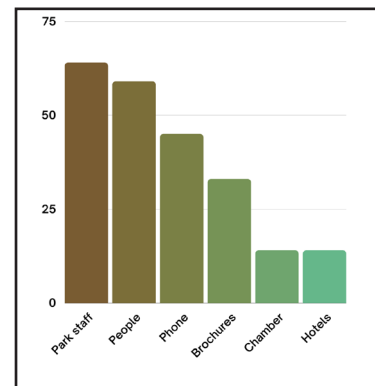
- A 70-year-old couple returning to the area to hike and be in nature.

2.3 Research findings



Behavior while visiting

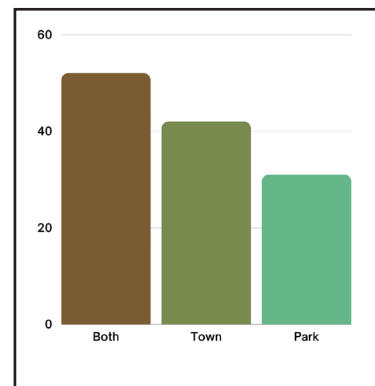
Nature lovers: Nature ranked first in area attractions, followed by hiking, cultural history, enjoying the town atmosphere, art-related activities, and camping.



Behavior while visiting

Interpersonal recommendations: Once in town, visitors find that ABDSP staff provide valuable information about things to do (29%).

Visitors also get recommendations from people in town (22%).



Destination

Town and park: Respondents indicated that they came in fairly equal numbers for the town (34%), the park (25%), or both (41%).

- They don't know much about the history, culture, and people of this region, but they know a lot about the desert, its plants, and its wildlife.
- They are here to visit both the town and the park, have not gotten lost, and while in town, their primary destination is a restaurant.
- They planned their trip by talking to their friends and other people they know.
- Once here, they have found Park staff the most useful for getting information and would be open to suggestions about different types of destinations, activities, and things to do. They'd like to receive those suggestions on signage throughout the town.

Visitor archetype 1: Retired park hopper



Travels as a couple or in groups of couples, often in trailers or camper vans. Often passes through Borrego Springs and Anza-Borrego Desert State Park as a stop on a multi-destination trip.

Visitor archetype 2: Urban escapee



Visits from San Diego, L.A., and Orange County, sometimes as a day trip. Wants to see the Sky Art installations and go on easy hikes (Palm Canyon and the Slot). Also comes for festivals.

Visitor archetype 3: Weekend warrior



Equally likely to come for a day trip, camping trip, or a night at a hotel or Airbnb. Often in a group. Visits for hiking and outdoor activities.

3.0 VISITOR PLANNING

3.1 Overview of visitor planning

Visitor experience planning aims to determine engaging ways to communicate Borrego Springs' significance and your audience's connection to it. We base our planning on user research and thoughtful and creative analysis of the physical site of Borrego Springs, its attractions, and local destinations.

Several elements have guided our work creating this Visitor Experience Plan. They include the park's 2015 Interpretation Master Plan, Borrego Village Association Sustainable Tourism Strategic Plan, Program Action Plan 2019-2020, input received during two site visits and the visitor experience planning session, conversations with members of the Borrego Village Association focus group, and acknowledgment of Borrego Springs' location at the center of a beautiful and expansive desert landscape within one of California's most popular state parks.

Visitor experience planning is purposeful, targeted for specific audiences, influenced by the physical site, shaped by available resources and budgets, and focused on creating seamless connections. This particular visitor experience plan explores two elements in particular: enhancing a welcoming atmosphere in town and identifying those information and wayfinding tools and devices that will assist the visitor.

Visitor experience planning differs from interpretive master planning in several ways. Interpretive master planning focuses on the resources being interpreted, the targeted audiences, recommended interpretive techniques, and interpretive opportunities that involve interpretive media, programming, and facilities. Visitor experience planning identifies key takeaways for the visitor's entire experience from pre-trip planning through departure at the end of the trip. It focuses on the visitor's journey, the capacity of tools that promote dialogue and engagement, and empowerment such that visitors craft their own experience while relying on new information and wayfinding resources, including signage, devices, and informed staff.

3.2 Stakeholder planning session

The BVA focus group and The Acorn Group met on May 13, 2022 for a virtual planning session. The purpose of this session was to:

- 1) Review findings from the recent visitor survey.
- 2) Assess the community's assets.
- 3) Establish visitor experience goals.
- 4) Identify key visitor takeaways, and
- 5) Share feedback on various interpretive, informational, and wayfinding media.

The agenda is provided in the appendix.

Overviews of other “gateway” communities

We also looked at three small towns connected to trails, parks, or both: Williams, Arizona; Moab, Utah; and Damascus, Virginia. Each of these towns has had to respond to challenges and develop ways to become a gateway or a “trail town.” Each has a unique sense of place and character and honors this in its ambiance, experiences, stories, and media. A PDF of the PowerPoint appears in the appendix.

Group input

We then used digital Post-It Notes to record the group’s input regarding Borrego Springs’ community assets and key visitor takeaways (see appendix three for Post-It Notes). Community assets include the tangible and intangible amenities that contribute to Borrego Springs’ “essence of place.”

The list consists of the Performing Arts Center, Borrego Art Institute, International Dark Sky designation, Steele/Burnand Anza-Borrego Desert Research Center, Christmas Circle, novelty shops, community friendliness, restaurants, bighorn sheep, and other wildlife (vertebrates and invertebrates), plants and specifically, wildflowers, programs offered by ABDSP, ABF, and ABDNHA, the state’s largest state park, park publications (magazines and newsletters), the area’s openness, vastness, silence, and viewsheds, and the intentional simplicity of and safety within the town.

In addition, we used these Post-It Notes to record the group’s input regarding the town’s key takeaways. Takeaways constitute a rewarding experience. They include elements of surprise and “indelible moments” at iconic places, such as seeing a bighorn sheep or the night sky, especially the Milky Way; savoring personal photographs; listening to the silence; the first glimpse

Borrego Art Institute	ABDNHA publications	proximity of trailheads to town	Christmas Circle
native plants	UCI center	lecture series & educational programs	state park
mid-century architecture	golf	State Park magazine	trail presence and condition (difficulty finding)

The stakeholder group used digital “sticky notes” to capture thoughts and ideas during our planning session. PDFs of the sticky notes from the planning session are in this document’s appendix.

of Indianhead and the alluvial fans; rainbows; spectacular sunrises and sunsets; changing colors on the mountains; the geology and the cultural landscapes.

We also explored visitor experience goals—what BVA wants to achieve in pre-trip planning, defining access points and gateways, and refining tourism services and amenities.

3.3 Visitor experience goals

The stakeholder group identified experiences that make Borrego Springs memorable—takeaways from their experience in Borrego Springs that they cannot have anywhere else. They include views and vistas, such as the experience of looking out from Font's Point for the first time, the view of Indianhead Peak as you come into town, or watching the changing colors on the mountains; gifts from nature, such as sunrises, the starry night sky, and silence; evidence of the human presence in the region, such as Native American rock art, the Butterfield Stage route, or more recent cultural history; and appreciating the geologic diversity in the region, such as mountains and alluvial fans.

The group identified three categories of visitor experience goals: Pre-trip planning, Gateway goals, and Tourism services.

Pre-trip planning

The group noted that many visitors are often unprepared for their visit to Borrego Springs. They are unprepared that Borrego Springs is not a “regular” town. They are unprepared for the seasonal nature of business in the Valley, including the shortage of hotel rooms at peak season and the fact that some restaurants are not open all year, every day, or late into the evening. Visitors often do not know that the town has only two grocery stores. Physically, visitors are often ill-equipped for the desert heat, wind, and dryness and do not know how to stay safe in desert conditions.

As a way to get information to visitors, the stakeholders acknowledged that Airbnb ownership is untouched—no one appears to be reaching out to Airbnb hosts to find a way to work together.



Visitors do not know where to go once they arrive in Borrego Springs. Many stop at Christmas Circle.

Gateway goals

Stakeholders identified two categories of “gateway goals” for Borrego Springs: The need for signage and the need for a better arrival experience.

Signage

The need for signage along the highways approaching Borrego Springs acknowledges that people drive long distances to come to Borrego Springs, and a little encouragement along their route would help keep excitement for their visit alive.

Better arrival experience

The need for a better arrival experience encompasses the fact that there are four ways into town, and once you cross the threshold into Borrego Springs, visitors don't know they have arrived. In addition, there are no welcome signs.

Tourism service goals

The group of stakeholders identified a broad list of tourism service goals: The need for better orientation, the need for information about the Sky Art installations, and opportunities for tourism services.

Orientation

Once in the town, visitors need an orientation; they do not know where to go or what to do. Visitors face a gap of understanding



The Galetta Meadows Sky Art sculptures in Borrego Valley are a significant area attraction.

because many of the locations they have seen photos of are not immediately apparent: it's hard to connect where they are with resources they have read about online. Visitors could benefit from a gathering point or a place to begin their Borrego Springs experience, such as a free place to stop and get information and maps. Even when visitors know what they would like to see or do, it's not clear how to get to those places because the town lacks consistent wayfinding.

Stakeholders acknowledge that personal contact works well to orient visitors — an opinion that our research supports. Tourists appreciate it when a real person helps them, and that personal connection builds a relationship between the town and the visitor.

Information about the Sky Art installations

The Sky Art collection is a destination for many visitors. Yet these sculptures stand in isolation, and visitors don't know what they represent. The names of the sculptures are also a point of confusion as they are called Galetta Meadows sculptures, Sky Art, and by the subject of individual works, such as "the dragon." Visitors don't understand the connection between the different subjects depicted and would benefit from improved interpretation for each installation as well as information about the works as a whole. In addition, keeping vehicles from driving near the sculptures is difficult. Education about the environmental impact of off-highway vehicles in the desert ecosystem and better enforcement may help influence behavior.

Stakeholders acknowledge that the town currently does not have a lot of tourist services but that there is an opportunity to create select guided or curated experiences in the surrounding areas.

3.4 Limiting factors

As Borrego Springs seeks to improve its visitor experience, there are two significant limiting factors to keep in mind: the harsh weather and inconsistent internet availability (excluding the park).

Other smaller limiting factors include unreliable cell service, capacity to pursue funding opportunities, physical distance from metro areas, lack of weekend access to emergency medical care, and affordability (e.g., price of groceries, gasoline, and electricity for air conditioning).

The group acknowledged that these constraints can be leveraged to become opportunities.

3.5 Water conservation issues to consider

In addition, the group identified conservation issues that affect tourism, sustainability, and the potential impact of visitors on Borrego Springs' limited natural resources: the presence of an aquifer, and water conservation practices that increasingly drive decisions related to town activity, homeowner activity, visitor behavior, and visitor services.

The effects of climate change are evident in the desert, and there is a necessity for water conservation. Borrego Springs identifies as a sustainable community, and stakeholders understand that with a commitment to water reduction will come a change to what the visitor can experience.

3.6 Assessment of existing digital assets

There is not an obvious or definitive place for prospective visitors to find information about Borrego Springs online. Visitors who try often find sparse and confusing information online. The top result

from Google is the Borrego Springs Chamber of Commerce site, followed by Wikipedia, and a 2018 entry on the Visit Greater Palm Springs blog about Borrego Springs.

Sites listed as attractions related to staying in Borrego Springs are predictable locations outside the town limits. They include Anza-Borrego Desert State Park, Galleta Meadows, and Font's Point.

A number of local organizations host websites and social media pages, including Borrego Springs Resort, Borrego Experience, The Anza-Borrego Foundation, Borrego Art Institute, Anza-Borrego Desert Natural History Association, Borrego Valley Stewardship Council, and Borrego Springs Chamber & Visitor's Bureau. Data from the existing BVA website and social media indicated approximately 9,500 digital visitors from mid-February to mid-March 2022 and roughly 80 visits to the BVA Facebook page. These numbers tell us that people are using digital tools to get information about Borrego Springs, but there is room for improvement.

There is also information about Borrego Springs available through local, state and national tourist organizations and blogs, such as Visit California, Visit Greater Palm Springs, and That OC Girl.

A review of Yelp and TripAdvisor lists local restaurants, locations in the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park, and hotels.

4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Branding

We recommend that Borrego Springs work with a branding expert to develop a brand for the town. A municipal branding effort will become the foundation for all other visitor experience work. The resulting Borrego Springs brand will emphasize the unique “power of place” in Borrego Springs, improve the town’s image, increase name recognition, improve economic opportunity in the region, and increase resident pride.

On a practical level, branding will provide established brand colors, fonts, a logotype, and other assets that can be used as Borrego Springs develops assets per The Acorn Group’s recommendations below. Consistency and visual unity among signs, town assets, and visitor collateral will reinforce the town’s positive visitor experience for tourists.

The Acorn Group recommends that branding be initiated as municipal effort, engaging the county or as a joint venture between the county and the visitor bureau. To an outside visitor the town government and tourist bureau of a small community like Borrego Springs can be conflated. For the branding to be effective, it must be universally adopted and applied — a standard best achieved through municipal channels.

We recommend that Borrego Springs research branding agencies experienced with small communities, gateway towns, and municipal branding. Though we do not endorse one specific

company, we suggest talking to representatives from the following three companies: [North Star](#), [Muldrow & Associates](#), and [Bloom Consulting](#).

Promote stewardship in brand messaging

Borrego Springs has adopted the National Geographic Society’s principles for sustainable destination management. Merchants, managers, and community leaders subscribe to these practices, in particular, water conservation and desert crust protection. Continuation of this stewardship messaging in branding collateral will remind visitors that they, too, can subscribe to these practices.

Moab, for example, as the gateway to Arches and Canyonlands National Parks, incorporates the following four pillars in its branding: [discovermoab.com](#):

- 🌀 recreate with respect
- 🌀 be responsible
- 🌀 preserve
- 🌀 protect

4.2 Establishing a sense of place for Borrego Springs

Creating an effective gateway identity involves developing a sense of place. Branding and other media reveal aspects of this sense of place, but full cultivation is something that happens

within the individual. Visitors who are firmly connected to Borrego Springs perceive its character and significance on an emotional level. They view the town and its surroundings as something distinctive and worth caring about. The story of place should be conveyed through websites, at Christmas Circle, Sky Art pieces, roadway intersections—even storefronts, and through food and drink.

Before the BVA creates media to celebrate Borrego Springs' sense of place, there needs to be a more comprehensive inventory of the town's character, assets, and stories. These are the essential ingredients, and the inventory needs to build upon what began at the planning session. The next steps also include identifying the entire set of tangible and intangible elements that make Borrego Springs unique and worth visiting and developing the community narrative.

4.3 Wayfinding and signage

A wayfinding system guides people through the space using a single communication system. Each sign within it serves a specific function, often relying on graphic symbols, as well as images and brief copy that abide by the branding guidelines. Exterior wayfinding signage typically reflects three categories of signs:

- ☞ identification signs, including gateway signage and site entry identification signs
- ☞ directional signs, including off-site directional signs, on-site vehicular directional signs, and pedestrian directional signs
- ☞ regulatory signs, including parking regulations and hours of operation (e.g., Christmas Circle)

Gateway signs

Gateway signs are particularly important because they capture the visitor's attention and set the stage. They welcome travelers, announce arrival, and establish the town's identity as a gateway to the park and a destination unto itself.

We recommend the placement of gateway signs at two locations: S22 at Palm Canyon Drive and Christmas Circle. Gateway signs can be architectural statements with a notable height that commands attention and displays graphic symbols that pique interest and convey meaning. See the next page for examples.

Directional signs

The Acorn Group recommends that Borrego Springs undertake a comprehensive examination of wayfinding in town — both within the town and to destinations in Anza-Borrego Desert State Park outside of the town borders. We suggest the development of directional signage leading motorists and other travelers to various features such as the ABDSP Visitor Center, Sky Art installations, Christmas Circle, and park sites closest to town. Installed along Palm Canyon Drive at appropriate locations, including intersections with Pegleg Road, Borrego Valley Road, Di Giorgio Road, and both sides of Borrego Springs Road, these directional signs identify both the features and their distance. These particular signs must adhere to applicable standards defined by the city, county, and state, per the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices.



Beatty, CA — Gateway to Death Valley



Elk River, MN — Gateway to Elk River



Willits, CA — Gateway to the Redwoods



West Yellowstone, MT — Gateway to Yellowstone National Park

We recommend Borrego Springs research wayfinding consultants experienced with developing wayfinding systems — for application both within the town and to destinations in Anza-Borrego Desert State Park outside of the town borders. As a start we suggest BVA reach out to [Hunt Design](#), [Alta Planning + Design](#), and [Corbin Design](#).



Wayfinding signage in Laguna Beach, CA, designed by San Diego-based Graphic Solutions. The City installed 12 sets of signs throughout the town directing tourists to shopping districts and popular locations. The signs include the time it takes to travel there on foot.

4.4 Visitor orientation

To orient the visitor, we recommend single-topic signs at Christmas Circle set at cardinal points: north, south, east, and west. These signs would be short and informative – offering a teaser and directions to nearby attractions, not detailed information.

New map

We recommend developing a new, comprehensive Borrego Springs map to help visitors orient themselves. One visitor told us, “There’s all kinds of information on trails in the area. However, what you find is that there might be a sheet or two that has two separate trails on it and another sheet or two that has five or ten trails on it, and another sheet that has one, and another sheet that has 20. And a lot of them are duplicate, and if you go through ten different sheets of paper you’ll find that not one of them has all the trails on them.” (Jeff from Minnesota, 3/4/22)

A map that combines attractions and trails would help orient visitors. A laminated version could be displayed at hotel front desks, the ABDSP Visitor Center, and other key locations around town. Copies could be distributed to visitors who inquire about the town, included in Airbnb check-in packets, and made available at both the ABDSP Visitor Center and local restaurants.

4.5 Interpretive signage

Giant metal sculptures dot Borrego Valley. The collection, funded by local philanthropist Dennis Avery and created by artist Ricardo Breceda, was inspired by fossil treasures of the Anza-Borrego Desert, the history and nature of the Anza-Borrego Desert, and whim and fantasy. The Sky Art Collection attracts a constant stream of visitors who reference books, social media, websites, an e-book, and a laminated pamphlet to find them.

However, not everyone retrieves background information before setting out to find the sculptures on private property, collectively

called Galleta Meadows. The installations generally lack signage, though multiple regulatory signs entitled Gallena Meadows LLC identify permissible activity on this estate.

We recommend that an interpretive panel accompany each installation using a Sky Art-specific design template. These should be brief (approximately 50 words) and highlight a single topic each. The panels could explain the vision of the founder and funder and the subject's relationship to the valley, e.g., Columbian mammoth, bighorn sheep, miner, or migrant farm worker. They could also contain a message about the stewardship of the fragile biological desert crust surrounding the Sky Art figures.

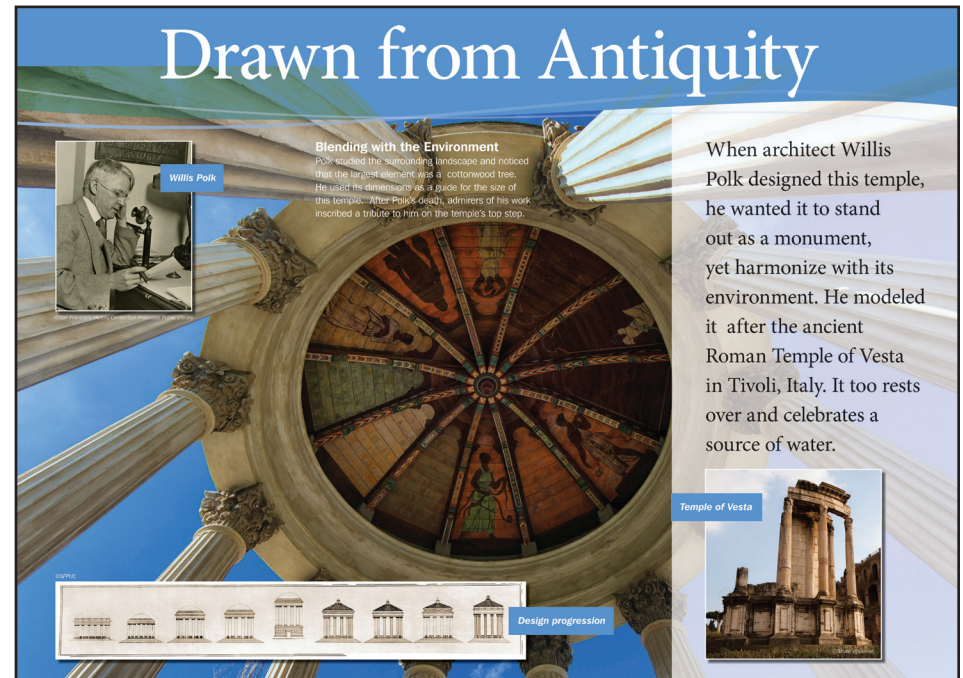
At the more popular pieces, such as the massive serpent, a new boardwalk leading from the road to the installation would help control traffic and protect fragile soil.

Because stewardship messages will be prominent in new branding collateral, these interpretive panels should reinforce that message. The "Leave no trace" ethic applies equally to the illegal presence of off-highway vehicles and problematic trampling of delicate soil crust.

Single-topic signs

BVA should also consider brief, single-topic interpretive signage for other topics worthy of storytelling in town, including celestial splendor and the town's Dark Sky designation, the history of the region beginning with Indigenous People, the town's development and resort legacy, and current sustainable tourism measures, including water conservation practices and night sky protection. As a supplement to ABNHA's interpretive panels,

these new, brief interpretive panels should be placed in strategic locations throughout town and dedicated to helping people develop a sense of place. The Acorn Group strongly recommends prototyping the size, amount of content, and messages for testing with a tourist audience to understand what works best.



Example of a single-topic sign designed by The Acorn Group for an installation in Sunol, CA.

4.6 Digital information

The Acorn Group suggests that Borrego Springs consider digital visitor experience options carefully, given the digital landscape in Borrego Springs that includes cellular service that may not support significant data loads or app downloads. Many areas of

Anza-Borrego Desert State Park lack cell service entirely. WiFi is available at hotels and Airbnbs; however, there are times when WiFi service goes down throughout town.



Reception and cell service are issues in the valley, yet visitors increasingly rely on their phones for location information, operating hours, restaurant availability, and activity recommendations. Finding the sweet spot between available digital connectivity and visitor needs will be key to creating a good visitor experience in Borrego Springs.

If these obstacles can be overcome, there is an opportunity for Borrego Springs to engage with visitors on a digital level, increase visitor understanding of opportunities available and ultimately have an improved visitor experience. More than 25% of respondents to our visitor survey indicated that they use a phone, tablet, or computer as a useful way to get information once in town. With improved digital offerings, that number could increase.

Digital information requires thoughtful planning and an investment of time. Though it does not have the physical footprint of signage or a visitor center, the work that goes into making digital information available to the public requires robust planning and consistent, thoughtful maintenance. In addition, it takes digital marketing expertise for a single app or website to become the definitive source of information for the town. The Acorn Group suggests that if a digital solution becomes viable in Borrego Springs, that the town work with an experienced digital marketing agency to determine what will produce the best results for your budget.

4.7 Anza-Borrego Desert State Park

Personal encounters go a long way in generating interest, cultivating a sense of place, and increasing a traveler's wayfinding confidence. The knowledgeable staff at Borrego Springs' businesses and institutions and the park's visitor center set the tone for the visitor's experience. They work hand in hand. Add exceptional customer service to the equation, and the visitor is genuinely welcomed and inspired by the sense of community.

Staff and volunteers who work in town serve as ambassadors, offering tips about visiting various sites in the surrounding valley, including park sites. The rangers and staff who work in the park's visitor center also serve as ambassadors. They can offer tips about facilities and destinations in Borrego Springs. Both sets of personnel are trusted messengers willing to share their knowledge for the benefit of a guest.

Training for this role is minimal. The same communication

techniques and “host skills” being taught in docent training at Anza-Borrego Desert State Park apply to work at the front desk.

4.8 Next Steps

Phased implementation of the Visitor Experience Plan will be less taxing for time-strapped staff and stakeholders. We recommend addressing the following tasks first:

Year one

- ☞ Retain the BVA logo. Undertake additional branding work by hiring an outside firm.
- ☞ Identify jurisdiction regulations that affect signage along Palm Canyon Drive within the town of Borrego Springs.
- ☞ Consider adopting a land acknowledgment in collaboration with Indigenous People.

Year two

- ☞ Retain a firm to begin development of other signage including gateway signage.
- ☞ Undertake formative evaluation of the branding elements and gateway signage. Evaluation is typically broken into three phases: front-end, formative, and summative.

Year three

- ☞ Refine branding elements and gateway signage if needed.
- ☞ Finalize branding work and gateway signage design. Identify sign vendor and commission gateway signage work.
- ☞ Install two gateway pieces.
- ☞ Undertake formative evaluation.
- ☞ Design town map.
- ☞ Work with ABDSP staff to inform and train docents regarding dispensing information about the town. Supply town map to ABDSP.
- ☞ Develop next steps for years four through six.

APPENDICES