

## **Part One:**

Bob Gilbert (00:08):

Welcome to Tourism Heads and Their Tales, a podcast series that invites travel and tourism leaders and influencers to share their take on key industry issues. My name is Bob Gilbert and I'm the general manager for the tourism and destination marketing practice at the Award-winning strategic marketing agency, Eddy Alexander. My career spans over three decades in the travel and tourism industry where I've had the privilege of working with iconic brands and so many amazing colleagues who in their own ways are pushing the industry forward and using tourism to increase understanding, access and quality of life. For those who work in travel, those that love to travel, and the communities that benefit from travel, I'll be bringing you into the conversation with top professionals who are shaping the industry, all with their unique tales and perspectives that they're ready to share with you.

Bob Gilbert (01:06):

Welcome to another freshly brewed edition of Tourism Heads and Their Tales. Brought to you by the award-winning agency, Eddy Alexander. Today's guest is Timothy Wolfe, director of the Colorado Tourism Office. In addition to his day job, Tim currently serves on the board of directors for the US Travel Association, the National Council of State Tourism Directors, Western State's Tourism Policy Council, Colorado Geographic naming Advisory Board, the Visit Denver board, and is a commissioner for Colorado's 250, 150 for 2026. Tim's background includes managing four diamond hotels and resorts throughout Colorado, including the iconic Brown Palace Hotel and Spa in Denver, which is something we both share in common. So welcome Tim, and please tell us a little bit about yourself, your background, your career journey so far.

Tim Wolfe (02:06):

Sure, Bob, thanks for having me on your show. I'm excited to share a little bit about our beautiful state of Colorado. Yeah, I grew up in Ohio and like many of us decades back, I was in the back of a station wagon with my brothers. There was six kids and we drove from Ohio to Colorado and never forgot the beauty that I saw in Colorado. I never forgot my dad telling me on the way, leaving Colorado, he said, make sure you get a good look at the mountains because we're not sure when we will ever return after that, ironically, we'd stayed closer to home and went to areas in and around Ohio and you know, I went to Ohio State, graduated and got into my car and moved to New York City. My first job was in the Windows on the World in New York City and I got my feet wet. I figured if I could go make it in New York, you can make it anywhere and, I moved around, got a chance to live in Aruba and Key West, but I always had my eye on the prize, which was moving back to Colorado and getting a chance to experience lifestyle there. When that opportunity opened up, I moved there and never looked back.

Bob Gilbert (03:12):

You know, I think that it's really interesting with your background that, you know, with your experience and I'm imagining now and assuming that moving into those different destinations that you mentioned you were in hospitality, is that correct?

Tim Wolfe (03:30):

Yeah, I managed, hotels and resorts. I started out in the food industry at Windows on the World and then managed resorts in and around and, and then, got a chance to come to Colorado.

Bob Gilbert (03:42):

So you have a keen understanding of working in the trenches, you know, that ability to, you know, kind of have dirt under your fingernails. You have that experience and understand the pressures on businesses, you know, not all DMO have, especially from a state travel director. So that kind of gives you a much deeper understanding of the challenges that stakeholders have on a day-to-day basis. Now, as a state tourism leader, what are your main objectives?

Tim Wolfe (04:18):

Well, we have several objectives. Our primary vision is to empower our tourism industry, to inspire the world, to explore Colorado respectfully and responsibly. So our work is kind of done through three pillars to try to inspire the world to travel that way. And our pillars are driving economic vitality, keeping in mind destination stewardship, and then providing our industry and our state leadership the right information to make great decisions on the future of tourism for Colorado.

Bob Gilbert (04:50):

So I want to dig a little deeper into destination stewardship. All destinations seem to be pursuing destination stewardship, but all doing it differently. And I guess it's how they define destination stewardship. So I have two questions on this, and they're all around destination stewardship. So one, how do you define destination stewardship and are there any new initiatives or plans that you'd like to share, for your department?

Tim Wolfe (05:26):

Sure. So you're right, there is a lot of defining how destination stewardship, what looks in different states. And it's interesting, we actually work with other state directors for best practices, leaning into things that work and things that don't work. But for Colorado it's really to support the destination that balances the quality of life for our residents and the quality of experience for our visitors, while also enhancing our environment and our communities. So it's really important to just understand that Colorado and a lot of destinations are completely different and diverse, and for Colorado it's as diverse as our landscape. So when you look at what that means for stewardship, it's different in one area versus another area. So that's where it goes back to really balancing the quality of life but also the quality of experience. So when an area is very well loved, how do we manage those experiences?

Tim Wolfe (06:23):

How do we also take care of our environment? And so there's several kind of aspects of destination stewardship. We'd like to protect the integrity of our natural and cultural resources across the state. And again, that really is defined by our residents in those unique areas. We want to advance inclusiveness and pursue ways that Colorado can share a welcoming experience for all of our travelers. So that's basic communication and making sure that we understand different opportunities of experiences for our different visitors. And we also want to foster regenerative and community-focused approach to travel. And that's really different in different areas like Breckenridge or Vail or Denver or even remote locations. LA Junta or Julesburg or Fruita. All those are a little bit different. We can't go in thinking that one size fits all. Yeah. So one of the cool things that we're doing that I know that we're on the forefront of this is our destination stewardship plan.

Tim Wolfe (07:23):

We have a coalition of stakeholders that are working together and those stakeholders include national parks. They include local leadership, they include other DMO that are doing great work in this space. They include the federal lands. They include even our first gentleman on there where we're working on a strategic stewardship plan by regionality. So that areas that may not have the resources to do that kind of work have access to that work. But at the same time having all the stakeholders there so that everybody understands kind of what we're looking towards. So that it's word of mouth about this plan. So it doesn't sit on the shelf and gather dust, but everybody's has a hand in it and can adapt it to their local or regional communities.

Bob Gilbert (08:12):

What is your outreach to residents and do all residents look at tourism, through the same lens? Or is there different kinds of education that needs to take place or that is taking place within the state?

Tim Wolfe (08:29):

Yeah, Bob, that's a great question and I think that's one of our work that's going to continue to be ongoing forever in this kind of space is to reach out to the residents. We have programs where we have around the state workshops where we involve the DMO in those particular areas of the chambers of commerce and we engage with them in different types of workshops. So we've had several types of workshops. When we gathered these individuals first started up as a recovery workshop and now it's converted into a destination blueprint. But it was a restart and reimagine workshops. And so for example, we would go to Aspen, they set up the meeting and there were stakeholders at that meeting. There was the DMO, there was a national park service, there was residents, there were local businesses there. So all kinds of stakeholders. And you know, we gathered in a room and we talked about what tourism meant for that Aspen Roaring Fork area.

Tim Wolfe (09:34):

And it was interesting because different people had different perspectives of tourism. Certain people said, well we have too much tourism. And ironically, the occupancy actually went down 10 points over that summer when we were visiting them. They're like, well, we still have too many people. And what we come to realize is a lot of second homeowners came back into the Aspen area. Yeah. And they were partaking in those communities and bringing their cars and working remote. And it was interesting because the DMO and some of the tourism people were like, well, with all these people we want to spread them out around Aspen. And the local resident's like, well wait a second. I don't get my trail anymore. I don't get a chance to hike. There's too many people in here. And the national park guy raised Cincinnati. He's like, yeah, I don't like it. People are parking all over the place.

Tim Wolfe (10:19):

They're parking in grass. There's no place to park. And so they all came to the agreement, you know what, the maroon bells are beautiful. There's a reservation system, there's tons of bathrooms, there's bus service to get there. So it's good for the environment. Let's just continue to redirect them instead of spreading them out all over the place. It was kind of an eye-opening thing. Because then the residents got their trails back, the park service guy was happy. And the DMO is the communicator. They're your branding or communication from those destinations. They're the ones that can help redirect the travelers to the best experiences for both the community environment. But you know what's crazy, Bob, Gunnison and Crescent Butte is exactly the opposite. They have 400 miles of trails all over the place and just parking for two in a lot of their trailheads. And they're like, we need to spread them out all over.

Tim Wolfe (11:10):

So that's just a perfect example of getting those residents involved. And what we did, which was cool, is we're like, you know what? We're giving you a hundred hours of follow up. And they're like, what? And we're like, well, you created the to do list in your community, but we're going to give you the technical support right behind that with over a hundred hours of whatever you need to make sure that this momentum continues so that it doesn't stop. And so that's where that work continues. They're like, "oh my gosh, we have a follow-up plan." They're checking back with us. They're making sure we do it do. And now we've done this in almost 64 different areas and different associations all over the state where we're engaging in them and have these action plans. And we're taking those learnings and building them into our overall strategic plan.

Bob Gilbert (11:56):

Wow. So you're right. I mean if you don't live in Colorado, you might assume that Gunnison and Crested Butte is the same as Aspen. You know, it's a ski resort, but they're very, very different. And you can't just paint that picture. I've skied at both in days when I had knees and I could do some of those runs. But you're right, they are different. And the conversation is a different conversation. You don't have that same conversation I was going to ask you how you collaborate with other stakeholders in the industry to promote responsible travel practices. And I think you've just outlined the answer to that question.

Tim Wolfe (12:40):

Yeah. I mean it's an inside out approach, but it's also understanding what's going on in other destinations. So there's a lot of great work around the country and looking at things different ways, but we really took that grassroots efforts and really started building upon that. And that takes a lot of work. It's not easy to get around to set those up or to invest in that type of communication. But you know, the important thing Bob, is even if you do all that work and there's a lot of grassroots efforts, you still have to promote that that work is being done. And that's where we have a Do Colorado Right campaign that helps promote those efforts because you can do all of that, but not everybody knows that's going on in this spot or what's going on over here or what's going on over there. And so we really try to promote some of those efforts through that campaign.

Bob Gilbert (13:32):

Right. Yeah. Because people may think, well, you know what they don't know. They don't know. And you know, once you communicate to them that you are doing these things, they can go, okay, that's good. Check the box. Because I think everybody wants the under an umbrella of responsible travel practices Leave no trace. And clearly what we saw, I guess throughout the pandemic once people could travel a little bit was that people in big cities, I would imagine similar for you, that if you live in Denver you want to get out of a big city and go to somewhere a little bit less crowded, which presents its own challenges at the same time. And I think maybe Colorado is a little different than some other parts of the country where people had never been to more remote places and they didn't really understand what Leave no trace meant. I would assume again that you didn't have a significant problem in that regard or am I wrong?

Tim Wolfe (14:35):

No, I mean I think that's one of our power alleys quite honestly. We were the first to partner with Leave No Trace here in Colorado. They're based out of Boulder. But we're also looking to partner with other types of environmentally friendly groups like Recreate Responsibly and some of these other groups so

that we can learn different views. If you think about Leave No Trace, it is a wonderful platform and it's a home run. But if you also look at accessibility and you talk about wheelchair travel, that's important to us too. And that sometimes could leave a trace. So how do we adjust our resources for accessibility and these types of things. So we look to other partners, like Leave No Trace in these other areas and try to really get the best value because again, one size doesn't fit all in and around Colorado. When you want an overall visitor experience, especially if you want to hit your diverse groups and you want to hit accessibility and you want to make sure that it's inclusive for everyone and everybody has an opportunity, then we are engaging in those and Leave No Trace was on the forefront of that for us, which was fantastic. And it's branching into other opportunities to continue that momentum.

Bob Gilbert (15:42):

So Tim, what other areas or doors does that open up for you? For the state,

Tim Wolfe (15:49):

It opens up learning opportunities for specific regions. We're always looking to make sure that we can advance in these particular areas and how we can communicate those areas. So from a state perspective, that's where the Do Colorado Right campaign is so important for us because communicating those things, what we're really looking for is we're looking for a change of behavior. We want people to do things better for our environment. We want to leave it nicer than what we found it and we want it for our future generations. And so we partner with these groups so that we can learn in our communities how to better do that. And then we elevate that through our messaging through Do Colorado Right. So that we can try to communicate that out as much as possible. We try to do that without a lot of fingers pointing because it can be, it's not the best message.

Tim Wolfe (16:41):

So our Do Colorado Right campaign pokes a little fun into it. Like we actually have partnered with our partners for DO Estes Park Right. They use the same template or Do Gunnison Right or Do Crested Butte Right. All of these things. And there's one interesting campaign in Crested Butte area. It's called Doo Colorado Right DOO. And it's basically picking up after your pets. So it's kind of a fun way to say, you know, this is what you need to do and this is where to put it. So a whole new spin on Do Colorado Right.

Bob Gilbert (17:11):

You know, I think people remember something when it's done with a smile, with a sense of humor. I think they remember it more than something that's kind of stiff and starchy. So that's great. I love that. You mentioned regions. How many regions do you have under the umbrella?

Tim Wolfe (17:29):

Well, we kind of look at it really broad based and more of a way finder is we really have a nine total regions in and around the state that they're loosely defined with Denver being its own region and then the rest of the geographic around the state. So you have your mountains, you have your canyons and plains, you have your great West, North, northwest corner of the states. So they have some commonalities in those particular areas. But again, we don't like to box ourselves into those. That's more of a way finder. Because again, there's complete nuances within the Rocky Mountains in itself. We look at destinations and tourism in the cities in terms of lifecycles. The lifecycle of a tourism destination is extremely important. You can be in your very infancy of the lifecycle where all you're looking to do initially is to drive people to come and visit you.

Tim Wolfe (18:20):

And that can then continue to grow to a point where you have a very advanced lifecycle where you're like, you know what? We're very well loved and we don't, we would rather not, or we need high value traveler. Or that's where the destination stewardship and the destination development comes into play. But the destination development has to happen even when you're first starting your tourism lifecycle, you don't want to forget about it because if you do become popular or if your capacity is only a certain amount, then you're going to have to communicate to your guests and redirect to take care of the environment, the guests experience, and the resident quality of life. So it's really where are you in the lifecycle? And if you don't want to increase your capacity, then how do we better communicate to our visitors so they have great experiences? Or is there a way to increase capacity or how do we take care of it? And so that goes back to the individuality of these destinations within those regions in and around state.

Bob Gilbert (19:21):

So what you're describing really takes a lot of actionable data and there's a lot of data around from different providers with, with the proliferation of these data sources these days, where do you find reliable and actionable state level data?

Tim Wolfe (19:42):

You know, Bob, that's a great question. I actually work on researching the research companies All the time.

Bob Gilbert (19:50):

And there's so many out there. My gosh.

Tim Wolfe (19:53):

Yeah, there is. You know, my basic stance, and again you've mentioned that my feet were close to the ground and my experiences in the to hotel industry. So I was always breaking things down into 15 minute segments or exactly how many people were coming in when, from where in the resort and how many people are on a plane. And so when I got into this role, it was a lot tougher because these things are on macro levels and I enjoy it. But I kind of know how the watch is built, so to speak, and now I got to figure out how to tell time a little better. Now what I've found is I got to try to use the similar watch to just see how much time has changed or a benchmark. And so any data that you have, you got to look at it.

Tim Wolfe (20:35):

But the biggest importance is, is it changing? What is it changing to the benchmark? Rather than getting into the nuances of is it exactly correct and how is this number or whatever. And if it's only a 10% probability, you got to throw it out. You know, you got to kind of weigh those things in. So we have a couple of solid true tested resources that are done and used nationally as we explore some more nuanced type of technologies to really see what's happening with travel behavior and where are they coming from. We use a lot of different sources and we sometimes we'll employ a new source to just double check to see if it still makes sense. The other thing that's interesting about technology is you got to make friends in all the technology world because it's a close knit world and you don't know what company's going to buy another one.

Bob Gilbert (21:20):

As we've seen.

Tim Wolfe (21:22):

Yeah and you throw in AI in the mix, which is super important in a number of aspects. It's pretty interesting. But there's a couple of benchmarks that we rely on.

Bob Gilbert (21:30):

You know, I think it's interesting again, you know, double down on your background. Back in the hotel days we were looking at distribution, try to increase distribution without increasing distribution costs, looking at different channels. What is the acquisition cost per channel? And ultimately, you know, the holy grail was attribution. Is that something that you've carried with you from the hotel and resort days into, you know, the DMO world in terms of trying to figure out attribution? Is it getting any better or is it about the same?

Tim Wolfe (22:07):

You know, I think it's kind of involving, one of the first things that I did was, you know, in the hotel side there's certain research data points like the STR Report. Yeah. You know, and so that I lived and died by that, but when I lived in Aruba, STR Report didn't matter. It was all about airlift and different things than Aruba. And you know, and then you come to Colorado and STR in Denver is super important, but in the mountains, STR is not as important. You have, a town like Steamboat where 85% of that town is short-term rental. It was built on short-term rental before short-term rental or Airbnb or Vrbo or even the thing, they were condo hotels because the seasonality of Steamboat, you know, you can only run a 50, 60% occupancy. So you couldn't really build a brand up there. There's very few brands in the mountains because you know, typically you got to run 70% occupancy for those things to be successful and you just can't do it year round.

Tim Wolfe (23:06):

So you got to rely on different types of data points on those. So you know, we have those short term rentals that can be in the PMS system directly, which, because we have those short-term rentals that have been around for 30, 40 years and those economies were built on those short-term rentals, they're directly dialed in. So we could actually forecast some of the short-term rental. But then there's the new technology with the Airbnb where we have to look at scrapes data, which is a whole different type of data. But all of that's super important because we have to forecast what's going on and if you just look at state numbers overall the story can be lost. It looks like, you know, if you just look at our total numbers, it's like, wow, Colorado's up. But you know, if you look regionally, the story is different that Denver has recovered faster, that inflation's impacting that recovery. But then on the whole southern part of the state last year and even this year, year to date, occupancies are down anywhere from five to 10% of the southern part of the state. But if you look at the grand total, it looks like everything's great.

Bob Gilbert (24:14):

Thanks for listening to part one of this episode. Tune in next time for part two. Please like, subscribe, and leave a review. You can also visit [EddyAlexander.com](http://EddyAlexander.com) to learn more about our tourism, marketing and destination management services and read some of our recent case studies.

## Part Two:

Bob Gilbert (00:08):

Welcome to Tourism Heads and Their Tales, a podcast series that invites travel and tourism leaders and influencers to share their take on key industry issues. My name is Bob Gilbert and I'm the general manager for the tourism and destination marketing practice at the Award-winning strategic marketing agency, Eddy Alexander. My career spans over three decades in the travel and tourism industry where I've had the privilege of working with iconic brands and so many amazing colleagues who in their own ways are pushing the industry forward and using tourism to increase understanding, access and quality of life. For those who work in travel, those that love to travel, and the communities that benefit from travel. I'll be bringing you into the conversation with top professionals who are shaping the industry all with their unique tales and perspectives that they're ready to share with you. So let's rejoin Timothy Wolfe, director of the Colorado Tourism Office, part two on Tourism Heads and Their Tales. Other hotels, let me, let me broaden that. Is lodging with perhaps a slower occupancy demand that the lodging entities are making the most of rate to try and overcome the shortfall in occupancy?

Tim Wolfe (01:30):

I think the answer is yes. Some of them are trying to do that, but then they're also seeing being a hotelier or past hotelier, you always risk, is raising the rate going to hurt your occupancy or are you going to have that rate anyway? Yeah, and you know, Pagosa Springs is an interesting area where two years ago, you know, I went down there when I first got started and they said, well, we're really good with tourism, we don't need it. And I'm like, I understand that, but what kind of tourism do you have here right now? That's the question. And right now, and this was in 2021, that the international tourists were not back yet. In fact, we're still only 80% recovered from international tourism that represents between eight to 10% of Colorado's tourism economy. They stay longer, they spend five times the amount and they're super important to our economy.

Tim Wolfe (02:22):

And so when we talk with Pagosa Springs, they're like, well we, we have enough. And when you look at the data, guess what? They're one, two night stays, there are five, eight people to a room. The group's coming in just trying to, you know, revenge, travel, get out of the state, whatever. It's, you know, there are other states, you know, driving north from New Mexico and all around and now all of a sudden, you know, things have changed and that the recovery is kind of like a series of sequences. It started with outdoor where people want to be outdoor with the social distancing and then all of a sudden, okay, now it's safe to go to a city. We can go back to a city or we can travel around the country. We can go to California now was one of the last states to open and now all of a sudden it's safe to go international.

Tim Wolfe (03:09):

So now we can hop on a plane and direct flights are pretty cheap and you know, inflation is kind of high here so you can get a great value and travel on internationally. My son put off his international travels for two years and all of a sudden he's out on the road. But you know, early on he was skiing twice as much because you know, Colorado's was safe, it was outdoor, you know, and then the last sequence, it's going to open up, it's going to be China and India. And so this sequence of openings is different for every region and every country in Japan, they're still wearing masks and they're just now starting to travel in and around Japan, but they're not going heavily into the United States yet because they're still in those early stages of recovery. And there's some headwinds with inflation. So the hotels back to your original

point, the hotels are like, well you can't look at just those strict numbers you got, there's a story behind the numbers of what type of visitation do you have. And now if it goes to Springs, they're like, okay, we need you to come down and what are we doing about this? Because the international travel is still only 80% and those drive-in travelers are now going elsewhere right now. And so the messaging for the value of tourism has to be consistent so that you can maintain those ebbs and peaks and valleys, especially through that recovery.

Bob Gilbert (04:29):

So we touched there briefly on international. How important is international travel to the Colorado tourism industry? How do you remain competitive? You know, what, what is your relationship like with brand USA as an example? So it's a whole bunch of stuff there, but if you could talk a little bit and share some of your thoughts on international travel, I'd be very interested to hear your thoughts. Yeah,

Tim Wolfe (04:59):

As mentioned, international travel is vital to Colorado. It represents between eight to 10% of our travel economy. It really balances things out. Again, the international traveler spends five times the amount. They're very eco friendly, they're more apt to take public transportation. They spend time and immerse themselves in the cultural experiences of those destinations. And it's really a good balance. It helps the communities, it actually helps the environments when you have extended stays in these types of hotels. And again, being a hotelier, I always love the weekly stay versus in and out every night. You know, there's a lot of wear and tear on that in and out every night and a lot of extra effort with the staff and stuff. So having that good balance is really critical for Colorado. And we're in essentially five countries. We are essentially an island Colorado is not a huge drive-in state, although we get nearly a million visitors in our welcome centers.

Tim Wolfe (06:00):

You really have to fly to get here, you know, the closest city, Kansas City and some of these other cities. You have to drive a full day to these major populations. So we're not like on an I-95 corridor, you're not in Indianapolis where you can come from Cincinnati, Columbus, Chicago, St. Louis to go to Indianapolis. You have to fly to get into Colorado. And that's what makes that international travel even more important. We have direct flights to seven cities in Mexico. We have direct flights to Munich. We have direct flights to UK and London that are daily. We've just added a new flight to Ireland on Aer Lingus. We have direct flights to Tokyo, that just celebrated its 10 year anniversary. So these areas are super important and Australia's an important market for us. So really Australia, UK, France, Germany, Mexico and Canada are primary markets.

Tim Wolfe (06:57):

Australians, when their summer break is out, that is our winter break and that's perfect opportunity for ski experiences. And so it's very important to a lot of our resort communities. So the international side really helps fill the winters, but they also come strong in the summer. The German traveler spends a lot of time in and around the state to have three to four weeks a month vacation, but they'll spend two weeks in our state and we'll literally partner with the number of people to try to keep them in. And it's interesting because the international traveler from Germany doesn't want to see another German traveler, so they disperse themselves all over the state because they don't want to run into anybody. And then the Mexican traveler heavy in the ski area and they have been coming for decades to, our ski resorts a big part of that.

Tim Wolfe (07:50):

Now they're starting to travel in the summer. And one of the interesting things that we did most recently is we added the Michelin Guide Colorado as part of our opportunity for experiences. We all knew that we had great restaurants in Colorado and we knew that we had some of the best all over the state. And so we rallied the communities together to come up with a plan to elevate that program on a statewide basis. So now we have Michelin rated restaurants in Denver, Boulder, Vail, Beaver Creek, and Aspen Snow Mass. It's not to say that we don't have great restaurants in other areas, we're just highlighting these areas as that opportunity to market internationally. And then for those other areas that also have great restaurants. Now we're kind of sailing off of the Michelin program by doing marketing programs for other best kept secrets because not everybody can actually get into a Michelin restaurant when they want to.

Tim Wolfe (08:47):

They're going to experience anything. But it's just that other experience, that culinary experience that our travelers seeks, especially the international traveler. So that's big for us. The other thing that's interesting about Colorado is if you look at our tourism by quarter, meaning Q1, first quarter, fall, spring, winter, and summer, if you look at Colorado overall, it is one of the most balanced states that I think that there is that winter offsets front range being down a little bit softer, then front range really kicks it in. But that international traveler then still seeks those opportunities in Denver before they go up to the mountains. So there's all that interrelationship again, because you have to fly into Denver or one of these others. There's direct connects throughout California and through Texas and Chicago to these other resorts. Some of them are seasonality, some are not. So to our regional airports, super important. Colorado Springs, grand Junction, Durango all have great access. But again, you got to fly in to get here and, and that international traveler and even the domestic traveler have to, to make their way most likely through the airports to experience Colorado.

Bob Gilbert (10:01):

So back in the day when I was more deeply involved on the international, you know, I used to love the Australian visitor because you know, they stayed because it took a much longer time to get here. They made the most of it, stayed longer, spent more. Is that still the case with Australia or any other trends that you're seeing from the international marketplace? Is the, are the Britts coming, you know, you have a daily service. So that's a pretty good barometer of the health of British travel. Are you seeing anything that you'd like to share?

Tim Wolfe (10:37):

Yeah, they, the Australians definitely spend about five times the amount of a domestic traveler and they stay longer. So they're one of our higher spending guests that come. In terms of trends, I think the big trend is a little bit of headwinds and the introduction of the ski passes, the Epic and the Icon, which are just amazing passes for this avid skier that, or the leisure skier. And those are super, super important to, to Colorado and Australians are most likely going to come here to ski. So when we look at those passes, you know, the passes as they market themselves, kind of market themselves somewhat towards the destinations, but really heavy towards the opportunities of those passes to be able to experience different destinations. So we're looking to fill that void of making sure that we brand Colorado as 28 resorts under one umbrella. We are the epicenter for skiing.

Tim Wolfe (11:35):

We have your perfect place to ski. And so that's important too, that UK market, that Australian market to make sure, because the message of some of these products, the Epic and the Icon can then maybe not translate to, did you know this resort may be busy or the rate's not the best that you can go to Purgatory and kids ski free and Purgatory, you know, and people are like, wow, yeah, I've never even heard of Purgatory. Where is that? You know, and it's the southern part of the state outside of Durango, but, it's, we have those opportunities. So we know the Australians love the outdoors. We know they have a huge, huge interest, but also these countries also have interest beyond skiing. I think one of our best kept secrets is the fall. The fall on September the 21st, like clockwork, the leaves change in the mountains.

Tim Wolfe (12:28):

There's no Indian summer here, there's no late summer, there's no okay it's windy or it's rainy and or it's going to change when the fall happens on the 21st of September. The leaves are changing in the mountains and they turn to this beautiful gold and it is just spectacular. And when the snow falls on top of those gold leaves and on the pine trees and you just get out there and you look around, it is, it is just spectacular. You know, I just pull my camera and go, Hey look, here's just a couple shots from last week, you know, it's like I have to not saying anything. Or if you were a golfer and you love to golf, you know you're going to see some natural beauty. You're going to have those crisp mornings, you're not going to have the humidity. You're going to most likely see wildlife and your drive goes 20 yards farther.

Bob Gilbert (13:23):

I love it. I love it. So with the um, you know, the different, um, destinations within Colorado, how do you develop and prioritize co-op programs? What, what is the process and what are the components of a successful co-op program?

Tim Wolfe (13:44):

Yeah, so our co-op programs really strengthen the partnership between us and the DMO. And it goes back to our mission, which is to be empower the tourism industry to inspire the world to travel respectfully and responsibly. And so that partnership or empower comes through those co-ops. So these co-ops we market with our DMO. And what we've done in the last several years is really start to look at how we brand the co-ops a little bit more in line with our messaging and learn from our DMOs as well and realign our messaging so that there's a win-win. But it also sends that consistent message out into the communities that are looking at these things. 75% of our co-op partners are, are actually repeat partners and they are our best sellers. They're the ones going back and like, you could, you should try this or that. And um, and we really look to elevate both our brand and the partner messaging in a true collaborative partnership.

Tim Wolfe (14:43):

We can really see a lot of great examples from that around the state. We have social media co-ops where we look at KPIs such as impressions and engagements and video views and like links. And we always seem to exceed industry benchmarks, which is exciting when you look at those results and the KPIs are greater than the, the normal KPIs. We can see that we did a great job in that partnership. We also have paid media co-ops and those KPIs are impressions and click-through rates and email openings. And again, they always exceed the benchmarks. We've had an example of 13 partners participate in the Do Colorado Rights special offering and those arrange from Do Estes Park Right, which is timed entry

into the national parks to different things in Crested Butte. Denver's is even working on programs with us for how to Do Denver Right. So we're super excited about those co-ops.

Bob Gilbert (15:39):

I know that one of your three pillars you mentioned at the beginning of our conversation was economic vitality. Does that include economic development or how do you as a tourism entity how do you partner with the economic development folks?

Tim Wolfe (15:57):

No, Bob, that is a great question and an evolution in the journey that we continue to be on. We believe that tourism is the starting point of economic development. It is the first step in economic development. If companies like to have the lifestyle of Colorado, then they're more apt to move to Colorado. And so we're looking to align directly with our Office of Economic Development and international trade. In fact, we have been having ongoing discussions and are transitioning some of our collateral pieces so that we can have that inspiring message as a tipping point for the verticals. And what I mean by verticals, I'm talking about bio space and technology or the different industries that are in Colorado. So the lifestyle of Colorado is the same, but the details of those verticals in those industries are different. And so how do we align that better?

Tim Wolfe (16:51):

Tourism is an export and that's super important to our economy. And when we get those messages out in the UK or in Australia or whatever it is, those can encourage that discussion for economic development. We have meetings with different airline partners around the world where we work closely with Denver and the Denver Office of Economic Development as well as the chamber and city and county of Denver. And we partner to talk about these different types of opportunities with airlift. because again, airlift is critical to this state. It's not a drive-in state. So when we look at that, we look at the business partnership and we look at the leisure travel partnership. Those two together are going to have successful, are outcomes when it comes to travel and airlift in and out of Colorado. So when those things align, it's a win-win. And you can see that we've had a lot of wins Reykjavík when we first started there. It's like, okay, how is that really going to be impactful? How is it going to be sustainable even if we offer those incentives? Well, we don't need to offer huge incentives because our lifestyle and our lift and where we are makes us more of a marriage and a partnership, which is sustainable. And we have examples of that all over the place, like with airlift to Tokyo and some of these international destinations. So we partnered again very closely with those and look to align our messaging in a much better and broader type of strategy.

Bob Gilbert (18:19):

Yeah, no it's interesting. I, I agree with you a hundred percent that the very first step in economic development is tourism. If somebody's thinking about moving or relocating or opening a business, first thing you do is you go to the website, the tourism website and you scour that to get your initial in insights to help drive your decision from a business perspective, from an economic development perspective. Let me, let me ask you, you've mentioned some large resorts, large destinations, some smaller destinations. What are the upcoming or lesser-known destinations within Colorado that you feel have untapped potential for tourism growth?

Tim Wolfe (19:08):

Yeah, there is some really unique places in Colorado. I got to experience the Yampa River personally and close and close and impersonal. I got a chance to have a river rafting trip for three nights out in the middle of nowhere on the Yampa River, which is the northern part of Colorado Dinosaur Monument, Craig area outside of Steamboat. And it was phenomenal. You know, you don't think a spring is a time to come to Colorado, but in that area it was just spectacular. The runoff and the river's going through areas that you cannot get to by car and you're just weaving in and out of the in, out of these huge massive canyons where there's carvings in the rocks that are centuries old and things that you have never seen these canyons and confluences where you can just shout out and hear an echo 40 times in the background because of the way the rocks are structured.

Tim Wolfe (20:07):

It's just spectacular. The eastern side of our of Colorado has some amazing things like the La Junta area has the tarantula migration. It's one of the things that's on my bucket list and my wife's like absolutely not. It's an opportunity to see all kinds of unique wildlife in the southeastern part of Colorado. There's the San Luis Valley, there's Leadville where I've had a chance to run. And when you go to Leadville, it's two mile high. It was an old mining town, it reinvented himself into a tourism town. They have these terrific old saloons and theaters that would take you back in time into the old Wild West. And then if you thought you were an athlete, you go and try to run around the block and you realize you're a two mile high, you take a few breaths and then you wonder how.

Tim Wolfe (20:59):

You wonder how they did the lead bill 100 or how they could even imagine doing the lead bill 100. You know, I don't think any belt buckle is more treasured than the Leadville 100 belt buckle, when you bike or you run a hundred miles at two mile high in Leadville. So there's all kinds of places We kind of hit the northern Northwest, the southeast, and then the center with Leadville right there. So a lot of, a lot of cool places.

Bob Gilbert (21:26):

So what is it from your perspective, you know, what keeps you up at night? What are those things that you wish that you could change in tourism? You know, what are those, those niggling things that kind of keep you from having a great night's sleep, which you probably have a great night's sleep, but you know exactly what I mean?

Tim Wolfe (21:47):

Yeah, well I think there's a couple of things that keep me up at night. One of the things is, is one size doesn't fit all. And so when we look at approach from a statewide effort, we need to try to keep in mind that it's not a one size fits all for Colorado. That it's very decentralized in a way. We're much like if you look at the United States in a whole, we have your urban areas, you have your rural areas, you have your agriculture, you have your resort, you have everything here. And so that one size fits all. That keeps me up at night. because sometimes different people bring different points of view up and it's like, well did you ever consider that that might not work in Craig Colorado work? It might be a little different in Vail for that. The other thing is funding. Funding is critical for the messaging to inspire the world to travel respectfully and responsibly.

Tim Wolfe (22:41):

But it also is tourism management, managing experiences, directing people to those opportunities. Some of the biggest things and trends are people regenerating themselves and wanting to have experiences. And if you don't and you can't communicate that if somebody comes to a place that's already busy when there's a better opportunity that they didn't even realize right down the street, that's our work collectively as a tourism industry to communicate that out. What are those opportunities? Example is mountain biking. Moab is beautiful to mountain bike, but it's busy. But you can go down to Trinidad or you can go into Winter Park or you can go out in Grand Junction and do the, the Palisades Plunge and you've got all kinds of mountain biking and if you're coming in from Nebraska, you know, or that eastern side, then you can spend more time in Colorado and getting an unexpected experience that's just as world class as some of these other destinations. So those, those kind of things kind of keep me up.

Bob Gilbert (23:46):

Kind of keeping in that theme. And this isn't necessarily from your perspective, but you sit on some very influential boards. You know, we spoke about US Travel, National Council of State Tourism Directors, the Western States Tourism Policy Group, et cetera. What is that collective thought on the future of destination marketing? We've seen it change over the years from, you know, it used to be heads in beds, and it used to be there was one KPI and it was how many visitor guides were distributed. And so we've seen that evolution in destination marketing. So what are your thoughts or what your peers thoughts on the future of destination marketing?

Tim Wolfe (24:31):

Yeah, I think in terms of just destination marketing, I think we have each have our own unique perspectives of that. And I think those organizations that you mentioned, we really work on how we can make sure that we lift the headwinds or how do we encourage tourism, which is important to so many of our small destinations and economies. And some of those include national parks and US Forest Service and how, what are they doing in the sustainable world? But they've also inserted themselves into tourism unexpectedly with timed entry. So, they didn't use to have that. So now timed entry can impact a tourism experience where you may drive out and you thought you could just get into a national park and you actually have to have a reservation. And so our messaging is important to make sure that we communicate that out for great experiences.

Tim Wolfe (25:26):

The other thing is, is our western group really look at fire mitigation. How can we do that better? We have a Do Colorado Right, which we partner with several state agencies for that messaging but is there a broader message we can do on a more national level and partner with those national parks to make sure that we communicate things that we want to make sure that the behavior's right to minimize any type of liabilities to our natural resources. So we work on those types of things. And also the headwinds of visa travel and how do we make sure that we incorporate the latest technologies for travel experience, the technologies and entry to the United States, the visa processing and those types of things. We want to make sure that those are available. But then we also work on macro like, okay, how are we going to measure sustainability or how can we communicate that out of the importance of this type of work to market to our guests, again for change of behavior to leave our environment better than we found it. So it's a lot of different things with those and the brand USA really helps elevate the overall message for the United States. And we work with them in nine different languages through a global inspiration guide in various markets where we also want to make sure that we elevate those collective voices through that type of media.

Bob Gilbert (26:51):

So I have one final question for you, Tim. And you've, you've been a great guest on Tourism Heads and Their Tales today. You know, I personally thank you and I know that our audience will be informed and educated and um, they will enjoy this podcast. But, so my final question. What's your forecast for the future of tourism in the state of Colorado?

Tim Wolfe (27:18):

Well, our forecast is a journey. It's going to be a continuation of a journey. The economics will always be important in various communities to one aspect or another. But the future of tourism is going to be and making sure that we sustain our environment, that collectively we improve the experiences that our people are looking for, those unique experiences, which Colorado's well poised for those unexpected experiences and to enhance or preserve our culture and history so that we can communicate that and experience those types of things. The value of tourism is critical. It opens everyone's mind to new experiences and perspectives and it really increases our cultural understanding. And I think that that is important worldwide. The value of tourism and experiencing different cultures can really help everyone learn and appreciate diversity and the greater appreciation of different places in our world. And I think Colorado has a lot of that through our history that can be experienced.

Bob Gilbert (28:23):

Fabulous. Well, Tim, again, thank you so much. We really appreciate your time. Wishing you all the very best, and continued success. Thank you very much indeed.

Tim Wolfe (28:35):

Thank you Bob. And thanks for having me as a guest.

Bob Gilbert (28:39):

We hope you enjoyed today's episode. Please like thumbs up, subscribe and leave a review. You can also visit [eddyalexander.com](http://eddyalexander.com) to learn more about our tourism, marketing and destination management services and read some of our recent case studies.