



# First Impressions Tourism Assessment Copper Harbor



## Summary of Results

November 2024

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## I. Introduction

The First Impressions (FI) program was developed in 1991 by the University of Wisconsin Extension to help communities learn about their existing strengths and weaknesses as seen through the eyes of first-time visitors. The FI program has been used to help communities across the U.S. and Canada inform economic initiatives or further develop community goals and has been modified over the years by various Extension services based on different needs. Michigan State University (MSU) Extension adapted this program via a multi-state grant provided by the Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development in 2014. MSU Extension's First Impressions Tourism Assessments (FIT) is a unique version of FI for our state and, since inception in 2016, has seen approximately 20 Michigan communities participate in the program.

### What is FIT?

FIT is a comprehensive community assessment conducted by unannounced visitors in a host community. FIT involves developing leaders, assessing the host community, sharing results in forum open to all, and providing suggestions to advance community-driven tourism. Overall, FIT helps participating communities learn about their strengths and weaknesses through the eyes of first-time visitors. Since inception, FIT has empowered leaders and stakeholders to develop action plans to improve their communities based on new perspectives and suggestions from first-time visitors. These action plans are proven to be the catalysts needed to launch and expand small town tourism development across Michigan. For more information on FIT, please visit - [https://www.canr.msu.edu/tourism\\_first\\_impressions/index](https://www.canr.msu.edu/tourism_first_impressions/index)

## II. Summary of Results for

Copper Harbor began their participation in the program in early 2024. The key findings summarized in this report were presented to Copper Harbor in October 2024.

### Visitor/Assessor Profiles:

Copper Harbor and surrounding area received six visitors in the Summer 2024, who from this point forward will be referred to as "assessors". To generate diverse perspectives, a wide range of assessors were recruited across multiple disciplines within MSU Extension. All assessors are currently residents of Michigan and had very minimal knowledge of CLA prior to participating.

Four assessors were male and two female. Two assessors identified as Millennials, two as Gen X, one as a Baby Boomer and one as Gen Y. Assessors were non-parents or parents and/or grandparents. Assessors had expertise in local government, community development, regional planning, arts and culture, environment and sustainability, natural resources, tourism development, and community food systems. One assessor visited the area alone, one visited with their spouse/partner, and four visited with their families. To generate diverse experiences, assessors visited area separately during different days of the week in August and September. Assessors visited on assorted days between Tuesday and Saturday, and all spent the night. Five assessors stayed in a local hotel and one camped. All assessors spent between 24 hours or more visiting the area's wide range of assets that contribute to the local visitor/tourism economy. In addition to onsite visits,



visitors also spent between 1-4 hours researching the area using mobile devices and/or personal computers visiting various websites and social media, such as Facebook, YouTube, and TripAdvisor. This report is a general summary of data collected highlighting assessors' experiences captured before, during, and after via survey data.

Results are separated by Pre-Visit, The Visit, and Post-Visit Reflections.

## Pre-Visit:

### **Web Research & Digital First Impressions**

I used Google Maps simply to find additional natural features/places to visit and explore. I used YouTube only on the Pure Michigan website when viewing the promotional clips of various activities and sites in the area.

Visited community Facebook pages to get an idea of special events and activities that might be going on in the community. Also extensively used google maps to identify lodging options that were best reviewed.

As with many communities, some businesses use Facebook as their website. Mostly used Google Maps to identify interesting areas and check reviews. If I wanted to go deeper then looked at TA and Yelp.

Watched YouTube videos, looked at Instagram for inspiration on where to visit, and Facebook for tourist information, lodging, trails, and a sense of the community.

### **Attractions and/or events this community is known for?**

- **Isle Royale**
- **Brockway Mountain**
- **Bike Trails**
- **Fort Wilkins**
- **Biking**
- **Estivant Pines**
- **Many Events**
  - **Trails Fest**
  - **Copper Dog**





## Most Helpful Websites: CopperHarbor.org, Pure Michigan

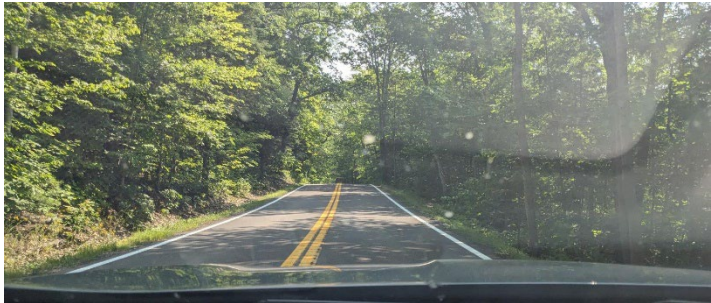
- *CopperHarbor.org is an excellent tourism website overall, very deep and easily navigable. It's pretty much a one-stop-shop.*
- *I found this site most helpful for an overview of where to stay, what to eat, events that occur, and activities that we could select to partake in during our visit.*
- *I also liked the Pure Michigan website in that it has several videos that show you various things you could experience. It builds excitement and anticipation to visit!*

## Challenges for most helpful website(s)

- *Not much for CopperHarbor.org, but perhaps increase emphasis on events calendar.*

## The Visit:

### First 5 Minute Impression(s) – (responses are direct quotes)

- *I was surprised by just how small the community was and how quaint and rustic everything seemed (in a good way). It reminded me of a miniature version of some of the mountain towns that I have visited out west. The setting on the shores of Lake Superior was picturesque although the town had less activity going on than I had pictured in terms of people walking around. I noticed immediately the lack of cell service and was a little concerned about being able to keep in touch with my family during my visit.*
- *I arrived about 3pm on July Friday, busy, lots of multimodal traffic, cars, atv, bike, pedestrian and it can be a little scary. Can more be done to improve safety? Kind of overwhelming in terms of stuff to do. Lots of enticing signs, shops, galleries, eateries etc..*  
  
*Absolutely a place you just want to stop and hang out. Very minimal cell service. The entire drive getting here is like exploring a secret garden. Cool stuff everywhere between Houghton and here. More pedestrian traffic than I've seen anywhere in the UP per capita.*
- *The winding, two-lane road through the woods between Houghton and Copper Harbor was reminiscent of trips I used to take camping as a child. It increased the excitement I had for the trip. Upon arrival, I was pleased to see just how close everything was together, and there were a lot of additional places that we wanted to visit that we hadn't originally planned on once we arrived in person. We immediately looked for where the local market was, the visitor's center, and other places of interest in relation to the Resort and Campground. Once we were there, it was easy to find everything we had read about and was interested in visiting.*



### Community Information Available to Visitors –

- It was easy to find information for visitors –
  - All Agreed
- Info available was useful for visitors –
  - 5 Agreed, 1 Neutral
- It was easy to find a community/tourist brochure –
  - All Agreed



### Visitor Motives

Assessors were presented with a list of 14 visitor motives. They were then asked to select the top three motives someone might have to visit this community and surrounding area.

Outdoor recreation (MTB, Hiking, etc.)	6
Be in nature	6
Get away from people	3
Relax	2
Visit historical sites	1





## Copper Harbor's Downtown Business Area

Can't say I remember much in the way of public seating and trash/recycling facilities other than the park at the visitor center. I guess Hunter's Point Park had trash facilities. More pedestrian amenities like this would be good!

Public Wi-Fi near Grant Twp hall/visitor's center is very good, should be expanded. Honestly didn't notice recycling, but I suspect it's probably there. Not sure.

Cell reception was sparse, let alone Wi-Fi. However, most of the places we visited had signage or Wi-Fi available for free (even the campground) which we took advantage of. It felt like the whole business community was pitching in to make sure visitors had access to internet due to the low cellular reception in the area.

More benches near the water and along trails would help those who need to rest more often. Having the only public restroom location, while nice, was not enough access. Good seating behind the visitor center, but not throughout the town. I didn't see much in the way of recycling. I did not see any water fountains. Wi-Fi was not reliable.





### Destination Attributes (Rankings: Best = 6, Worst = 0)

Nature-based activities	6
Dedicated tourism attractions	5.75
Adventure-based activities	5.75
Historic/heritage attractions	5.75
Authenticity of attractions	5.75
Hospitality and friendliness of residents	5.5
Safety and security	5.5
Cleanliness	5.5
Community involvement	5.25
Customer service	5
Variety of activities to do	5
Directional signage	4.75
Well marked roads/attractions	4.75
Road conditions	4.75
Value for money in tourism experiences	4.75
Special events	4.75
Well known landmarks	4.75
Activities for children	4.5
Visitor accessibility to attractions	4
Shopping facilities	4
Variety and quality of accommodations	4
Variety and quality of shopping options	4
Interesting architecture	3.75
Cultural attractions	3.75
Accessibility of destination	3.25
Variety and quality of restaurants	3.25
Pedestrian travel infrastructure	3.25
Conveniently located	2.5
Communication infrastructure	2.25

**Build on your strengths and leverage them at address areas for improvement!**



## Did you feel welcomed in the community at all times ?

100% Yes!

*Everyone was very friendly*

*Had lots of great conversations with local residents, felt welcomed at every business that I visited*

*Most of the shopkeepers were really happy to have guests.*







## Post-Visit Reflections:

**What will you remember most about Copper Harbor six months from now?**

Long summer days of family friendly adventure in the woods and on the water

the views of lake superior from Brockway Mountain and my desire to come back and spend more time exploring on a mountain bike.

The peace and quiet of waking up in town and getting breakfast at Jamsens, while the wind blows in off the lake.

My kids telling me how they can't wait to come back again next year! In terms of actual sites, I purchased a book by a local author who helps with the community garden and after reading the book I hope I can see where they may have gotten inspiration for parts of the book from.

Lake Superior - sitting in the big swing at King Copper and enjoying the view.

The Estivant Pines and the rock hunting.

**Reflections...**

Question	Definitely	Maybe	Probably Not
I would feel compelled to stop in this community if randomly passing by?	5	0	1
I would recommend the destination to my friends and family?	6	!	0
I would visit the destination on a pleasure trip in the future?	5	1	0



## Key Recommendations

- Given poor quality of cell service throughout the area and modern visitor expectations, consider installing a robust public Wi-Fi network in the downtown area.
- Copper Harbor tourism currently has a highly-mobile audience, build out accessible options for visitors with less mobility so they can participate and patronize with family and friends.
- In partnership with local Tribes, expand Indigenous tourism and tell the story of the Keweenaw's Indigenous peoples.
- Improve signage for trails and historical sites, refresh what exists and add more. Possibly duplicate the Keweenaw County Road Commission style in town?
- Given poor cell/data service, businesses and attractions should pay very careful attention to their web and social media presence: If visitors don't know about you before they arrive, it's very hard for them to learn once there.
- Develop design guidelines to preserve Copper Harbor's rustic charm. These guidelines would help educate property owners on maintaining natural vegetation and architectural consistency, preserving the "sense of place."
- Incorporate more National Park Service/Isle Royale information in the town, especially near the ferry dock.





## Key Recommendations



- Focus on full spectrum of pedestrian safety improvements in the area.
  - Widen road shoulders where appropriate for walkers and bikers, adding signage, paint, and possibly removable barriers or planters.
  - Explore extending the gravel bike trail from Fort Wilkins to connect with Wall Street to keep some bikes off US-41.
  - Improve pedestrian safety with buffered walkways, potentially integrating greenery.
  - Add sidewalks in downtown.



## Recommendations: Outdoor Recreation

- Consider developing a downtown swimming beach, possibly re-engineering the area near the municipal dock or repurposing Brockway Ave between 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> for park use.
- Expand trail systems to support multi-day bikepacking and hiking, connecting local communities and assets. Model could be Newaygo and Mecosta County's Dragon Trail.
- Create easier, family-friendly biking trails that appeal to beginners and tourists who aren't seeking advanced outdoor recreation.

## Recommendations: Art, Culture, and History

- Provide sheds that local and visiting artists can rent as a studio and point-of-sale location.
- Consider more live music at multiple locations, presenting multiple styles of music to engage diverse audiences.
- Create a "Make Art" location where residents and visitors can drop in and utilize supplies to create original arts and crafts.
- Could engage with indigenous artists to provide innovative classes.
- Focus on mining history; consider cultural reenactment.
- Create a walking trail through town with signage detailing the history of the area.
- A sculpture trail could be created to make it more lively.
- Encourage and support smaller events that will provide something interesting and fresh throughout the week, such as concerts in the park behind the Welcome Center.



## Recommendations: Community Business & Marketing

- Summer market may be mature, focus on winter tourism as a growth area.
  - Target non-biking visitors by highlighting history, scenic drives, and relaxation, explore updated lodging amenities.
- Increase focus on the Indigenous story of the area in partnership with local Tribes.

## Recommendations: Community Development

- Introduce more family-friendly dining options, food trucks, and expanded restaurant offerings with better menu variety and pricing.
- Consider creating a trolley service to Fort Wilkins and other key town spots, possibly with docents providing historical insights.
- Address awkward side-road parking that pushes pedestrians into streets by improving formal parking spaces.
- Explore solutions for nighttime navigation, such as improving road signage for better visibility in low-light conditions.

## Recommendations: Websites and Social Media

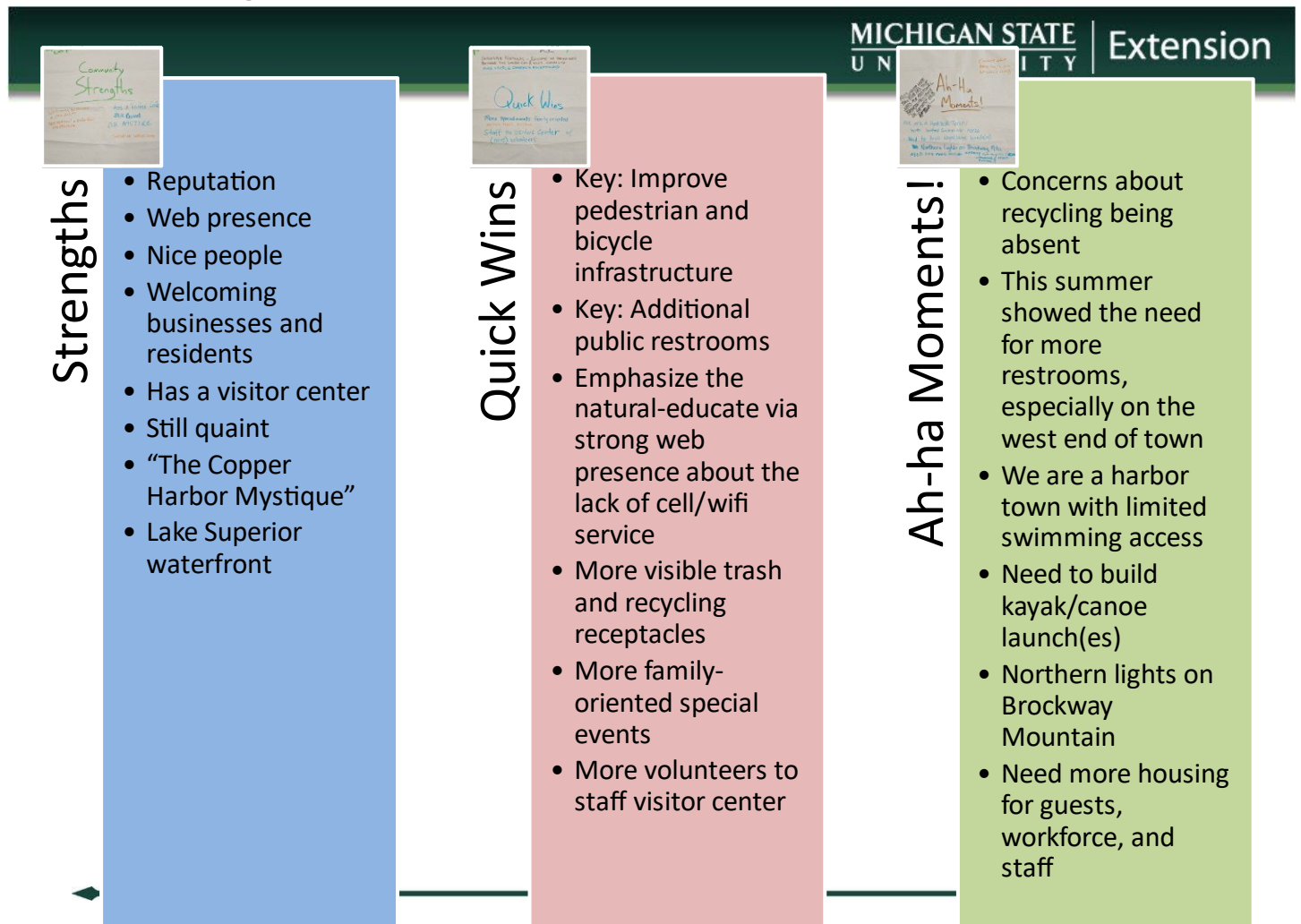
- Every organization and business with a website should take some time to work on Search Engine Optimization.
- Please don't use Facebook as a primary business website.
  - Not everyone has Facebook, and for those that don't getting access to a page is a barrier.
- Make sure your website includes *up to date*
  - Location
  - Hours Menu/Products/Services (as appropriate)



- **Double-check your website hosting is working properly and the site displays well on both computers, phones, and tablets.**
- **Try it on multiple browsers (Chrome, Firefox, Edge, Safari) on both desktop and mobile.**
- **Consider a general brushing up if time allows**
  - **Better, higher-resolution photos inside and out**
  - **Consider how readable your site is**
  - **Text color on background, etc.**
- **If your website includes a directory, give it a once-over for correct links and listings that are no longer relevant. Try to include as much info as possible, more than just a phone number. Hours and a live link of some kind would be ideal.**
- **If you have a social media presence, make sure your basic information is shared and *up to date*.**
- **If you have not, claim your listings on Google, TripAdvisor and/or Yelp!**
  - **Offers another venue to tell your story and get correct info out there.**
  - **Respond to negative reviews.**



# Community Comments





## Assets Visited in Copper Harbor and The Region

27 - Tourism Attractions (lodging, activities, festivals, museums, parks, etc.)

11 - Eating and Drinking Places

17 - Shopping Places

***Fifty-five total tourism assets evaluated!***





## Next Steps for FIT Communities:

- Consult the FIT Community Next Steps manual provided to your Community Leadership Team (CLT).
- Learn from other FIT communities as to what is achievable by reviewing “FIT Successes Report-April 2021 Edition” - <https://www.canr.msu.edu/resources/fit-successes-report-april-2021-edition>
- Consider exploring the raw data further and identifying parts of the results to act.
  - Facilitate discussions with private sector assets visited during the assessment and share asset reviews with each stakeholder and/or department.
- Schedule a public discussion meeting between the CLT, local leaders, and active citizens of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds.
- Review your community’s result and discuss strategies to work together.
- Search out low-hanging tourism-related projects from list of results, picking one or two items that can be accomplished immediately and ensure their completion.
- Schedule a follow-up discussion with MSU Extension Government and Community Vitality/Tourism educators to facilitate your next steps if you need assistance.
  - Contact MSU Extension Statewide Tourism Educator, Andy Northrop – [northro5@msu.edu](mailto:northro5@msu.edu)

## Available Funding and Grants

- MI Economic Development Corporation – Public Spaces Community Places - <https://www.miplace.org/programs/public-spaces-community-places/>
- Match on Main - <https://www.miplace.org/small-business/match-on-main/>
- United States Department of Agriculture-Rural Development Grants <https://www.rd.usda.gov/programs-services/all-programs>
- Michigan Arts and Humanities, Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs (MCACA)
- Arts Midwest (Touring Gig Fund), National Endowment for the Arts
- Community Foundations and/or individual Foundation funds (example: Dow in Midland)
- Business/Corporate sponsorships (example: MI Sugar Trails - <http://www.sblc-mi.org/michigan-sugar-trails.html>)
- Crowd Funding, Individual donations / sponsorships (Lions Club, Rotary Club, etc.)



## Summary of MSU Extension tourism development programs:

The following programs are available statewide to guide decision making around tourism development and implementation.

### Understanding Tourism for Michigan Communities (UTMC)

This interactive workshop highlights tourism industry statistics and exposes communities to trends and travelers' interests, as well as a number of niche tourism markets. UTMC is specifically designed to promote regional synergies, leadership, and tourism product development.

- <https://www.canr.msu.edu/tourism/programs/understanding-tourism-for-michigan-communities>

### Planning for Tourism-Preventing Destination Decline

This workshop walks communities through a planning process and uses life-cycle models to explore where communities may be in establishing themselves as tourism destinations. Additional tools will be employed to determine their readiness, identify next steps for action and explore engagement strategies for coalition building within the community.

- <https://www.canr.msu.edu/tourism/programs/planning-for-tourism>

### First Impressions Tourism (FIT) Assessments

FIT is a comprehensive community assessment conducted by unannounced visitors in a host community positioned to lead development based on the program results. FIT involves developing community leadership, assessing the host community, sharing the results in a community forum open to all, and providing suggestions to drive community action. Overall, FIT helps communities learn about their strengths and weaknesses through the eyes of first-time visitors.

- [https://www.canr.msu.edu/tourism\\_first\\_impressions/index](https://www.canr.msu.edu/tourism_first_impressions/index)

### Custom Tourism Programs

MSU Extension tourism educators are equipped to meet the diverse needs and interests of Michigan communities. Specialized programs are available to communities with a specific interest in agri-tourism, eco-tourism and/or cultural/heritage tourism.

### Learn more

Learn more about MSU Extension tourism programs by visiting <http://msue.anr.msu.edu/topic/info/tourism>.