

The Berkshire Eagle

Berkshires a top destination

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Think of all the destinations treasured by the globe-trotting elite.

Tuscany. The French Riviera. The Great Barrier Reef.

The Berkshires beat them all.

In this month's edition of National Geographic Traveler magazine, the region tied for 7th out of 133 vacation destinations ranked by a panel of 437 experts in fields such as historic preservation, sustainable tourism, travel writing, food, photography and archaeology.

In the article, one unnamed expert writes that the area "seems to have the right balance of picturesque towns, arts offerings, and well-protected natural beauty."

Lauri Klefos, president of the Berkshire Visitors Bureau, said businesses and cultural venues have been ecstatic about the recognition, which she views as the best free advertising possible.

"This is one of the premiere travel magazines in the world," Klefos said. "People pick up this magazine when they're looking to find a destination that they never considered before."

Michael Supranowicz, president of the Berkshire Chamber of Commerce, predicted that the acknowledgment will be used as a "selling point" for the local tourism industry.

"This is a feather in our cap, and we deserve it," he said. "We have a beautiful place here, and a lot of people know it. But what was interesting about this survey is that it wasn't based in stats and numbers. Their experts had personal knowledge of the places.

"These people
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had their feet on the ground."

While representatives from the magazine did not return phone calls Friday, the article's author, Jonathan B. Tourtellot, explained that editors came up with a unique way of ranking the destinations.

They asked the experts to submit anonymous points of view on each place. They reviewed each others' remarks and then filled in their final scores based on six criteria, which ranged from environmental quality to cultural integrity, condition of historic buildings and quality of tourism management.

It's a variation of a research tool called the Delphi method that helps groups reach a consensus.

Points were docked for reckless development and commercialization.

The Berkshires earned a score of 76.

Norway's Fjords topped the list with an 85. Vermont scored a 78, Germany's Bavarian Alps a 77, and Tuscany a 72.

Cape Cod? 58.

Tourtellot wrote that the annual survey, the magazine's sixth, "isn't a popularity contest. It is an assessment of authenticity and stewardship, evaluating the qualities that make a destination unique and measuring its integrity of place."

"When people care about the condition of a place, its score tends to go up ... The condition of any destination is a mix of what local governments, residents, and businesses can control -- pollution, cultural quality, authenticity."

One expert wrote that the area was "still undiscovered enough, and with a tradition of slow-growth tourism to add cultural pizzazz to the lush scenery."

Another said that "some complain it is becoming too 'gentrified,' with boutiques pushing out the mom-and-pop establishments."

One commented that "a balance must be maintained to preserve the area."

Klefos said she valued one of the expert's compliments above all the others.

"Authenticity," she said. "That's one of the characteristics that we care about most. We're not fake. We're not manmade. This is a unique area with a wide variety of venues across the county. Everyone who lives here should feel proud."

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