

Tillamook Makes Something Great, Even Greater



Photo Courtesy of Tillamook Creamery

On a sunny, pleasant day in July, 2012 my wife and I trekked the 300 miles from Kennewick, Washington (our home) to Tillamook, Oregon. The purpose of our journey was to visit one of the most successful *Industrial Tourism* projects in the Pacific Northwest....the Tillamook Cheese Factory (now known as the Tillamook Creamery, still owned and operated by the Tillamook County Creamery Association or TCCA). I was working on the Blue Mountain Station project in Dayton, Washington and was eager to learn from the best.

And, learn we did. You might say we earned our MFT (Master of *Food Tourism*) degree that day. As with all successful marketing organizations, the TCCA realizes that change is not only constant, but necessary in surviving the warp speed, always innovating *Industrial Tourism* industry. On Wednesday, June 20, 2018 the TCCA introduced one of their most impressive

and innovative marketing projects....the newly remodeled Tillamook Creamery Visitor Experience.

According to TCCA President and CEO Patrick Criteser, "This new facility brings to life the TCCA's story, from our vital history as a farmer-owned co-op, to our modern-day commitment to Dairy Done Right." Criteser continued, "The project also represents a significant investment in our local presence here in Tillamook County and one that we anticipate will attract even more visitors to our area."

Bringing visitors to Tillamook County is exactly what the Visitor Experience does. More than 1.3 million people visit each year, some days as many as 10,000. With a population of approximately 5,000 people, 1.3 million is 260 times the city of Tillamook's population. At approximately 26,000, it is 50 times the county's population.

The remodeled Visitor Experience, two years in the making, is modern, clean, open, inviting, educational and fun. And twice as big as the old one at 42,800 square feet. The facility was designed by award-winning Seattle-based architecture firm Olson Kundig, known for such projects as The Bob Dylan Center (Tulsa, Oklahoma), the Jewish Museum Berlin Kindermuseum (Berlin, Germany) and Noah's Ark as the Skirball Cultural Center (Los Angeles, California).

According to Alan Maskin, Design Principal, Exhibit Design for Olson Kundig, "For Tillamook, we designed the opportunity for visitors to make a connection between the food on their plates and the story behind it. It was a chance to tell previously untold stories of Tillamook's 109-year history – the creamery, its cows, its farmer-owners, and the high-quality products they produce."

The three core elements of Industrial Tourism are the **Factory Tour, Gift Shop** and **Restaurant**:

Factory Tour



Photo Courtesy of Tillamook Creamery

People love to see products being manufactured. Especially food products. Better yet, if they get samples. The Tour is the heart and soul of *Industrial Tourism*. The gift shop and restaurant can be found in your local mall. The factory tour cannot. It is the differentiator! Good examples of food companies engaged in successful factory tours are Jelly Belly, Fairfield, California and Pleasant Prairie, Wisconsin, Liberty Orchards, Cashmere, Washington and Bob's Red Mill, Milwaukee, Oregon.

The Tillamook Creamery factory tour is one of the best, especially with the remodel. Like most factory tours today, because of health and safety concerns, you don't technically tour the factory. You see all or a portion of the factory through a glass wall. In Tillamook's case you look down on a portion of the factory, cutting, wrapping and packaging cheese, through a series of windows. There is well placed signage and videos explaining the manufacturing process. The area is well designed, colorful and spacious. Spacious is important since on my last visit, bumping into Mr. & Mrs. Schmidt from Düsseldorf, Germany or the Yip family from Hong

Kong or Sally and her friends from Portland was all too common.

Gift Shop



Photo Courtesy of Tillamook Creamery

The Tillamook Creamery Visitor Experience gift shop is very cool. It could easily move into an upscale shopping district and feel at home. It has a bit of a “Trader Joe’s/REI visits the Oregon coast” feel about it. It is stocked with a wide assortment of food and beverage products, most Tillamook branded, some from other local producers, as well as the usual tourism fare, t-shirts, coffee mugs, etc., although better designed than most. Previous to the remodel, Tillamook had two relatively small gift shops that were crowded, chaotic and inviting. But, in all fairness to Tillamook, I did purchase two t-shirts and a model “Baby Loaf” bus. You might ask, “why did I need a model “Baby Loaf” bus? Need had nothing to do with it. Who needs Mickey Mouse ears from Disneyland or a jar of Boysenberry Jam from Knott’s Berry Farm? For those that are beyond redemption, visitors can continue their Tillamook addiction on-line.

One must remember this is tourism, industrial or otherwise. Tourists love to spend money, which creates a wonderful business opportunity for the *Industrial Tourism* facility.

Restaurant



Photo Courtesy of Tillamook Creamery

We all eat, most of us more than we should, but “what the heck!” this is an example of “food” *Industrial Tourism*. The remodeled Tillamook Creamery Food Hall is a definite up-grade. They have all the day-parts covered: breakfast, lunch and dinner....including snack time, which is all-the-time!

They have gone from “outdated and tired” to “contemporary and fresh” with a tighter emphasis on the Oregon/Pacific Coast theme. They have formed a number of partnerships to reinforce that theme. The food menu was created by Executive Chef Sarah Schafer of Portland’s Irving Street Kitchen. Other notable partners are: Olympia Provisions, Portland, Pelican Brewery, Pacific City, and Mama Lil’s Peppers, Portland.

The menu is dotted with a number of offerings that I find appealing and affordable: Fried Oysters (\$9.00), Oregon Bay Shrimp Salad (\$12.00), Tillamook Cheese Please Pizza (\$9.00),

Albacore Tuna Club (\$11.00) and the Classic Tillamook Cheeseburger (\$10.00). Traditional side dishes are extra. You can finish your meal, or just have a snack, with world-famous (well, if your world is the Pacific Northwest) Tillamook Ice Cream, including such favorites as Mountain Huckleberry, Oregon Hazelnut Salted Caramel and Tillamook Mudslide (Cup or Cake Cones: One Scoop \$3.50, Two Scoops \$5.00, Three Scoops \$6.50).

If you're a millennial or a millennial want-to-be (not sure why?) then you might be more comfortable hanging out at the yogurt and espresso bar. You can build your own yogurt parfaits and enjoy freshly roasted and ground coffee from Five River Coffee Roasters, Tillamook.

A successful *Industrial Tourism* program is a marvelous brand building and economic development tool. Consider the fact that 1.3 million visitors are bombarded with the name Tillamook: the creamery, the city and the county, not to mention myriad other businesses, organizations and products that proudly use the Tillamook name. Tillamook is a bit isolated, 70 miles west of Portland, a small island in a bucolic sea of green pastures. Yet, people from around the world visit every year. We drove five hours to spend two hours there in 2012. Why? Not because of the city or the county or even the nearby ocean beaches, but because of the Tillamook Cheese Factory.

Numbers please! The economic impact can be, and in this case is, impressive. Grab your calculators. The two of us spent \$50.00 or \$25.00 apiece (remember the t-shirts and "Baby Loaf" bus?) at the Tillamook Cheese Factory in 2012. Assuming that is average (probably on the low side), \$25.00 x 1.3 million visitors creates a very attractive income stream!

How about the community? In 2012 my wife and I spent an additional \$250.00 or \$125.00 apiece over a 24-hour time period in Tillamook County on such miscellaneous expenses as motel, gas, food and tourism activities. Assuming that half of

those 1.3 million visitors stay in Tillamook County for 24-hours and assuming that our \$125.00 spend is average, the city and county fathers, mothers and shirt-tail relations, as well as the Tillamook (yes, that word again) Area Chamber of Commerce must be somewhere beyond thankful.

Food Tourism is a powerful marketing tool for the participating business and an incredible economic development tool for the community. The Tillamook Creamery proves that, with the right concept, big impacts can be felt in small, remote communities. I realize few communities have a Tillamook Creamery. But, many communities have a cluster of existing food and beverage companies, or start-ups in a specialty kitchen program, that can provide a nucleus for a *Themed Food Park* that can be just as effective, in the long run, as the Tillamook model.

But, before getting your building permit and writing your first marketing brochure, take a trip to Tillamook, Oregon like my wife and I did in 2012. Then we experienced something great. Today you will experience something even greater.

Tillamook Creamery Visitor Experience

Free & Self Guided Tours

Hours (open daily year-round)

Early-November through Mid-June: Weekdays: 8 am – 6 pm... Saturdays and Sundays: 8 am – 8 pm

Mid-June through Early-November: Monday – Sunday: 8 am – 8 pm

Note: Closed Thanksgiving and Christmas

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