

A Website Design for Journeys East

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Introduction

Journeys East (www.journeyeast.com) is an 18-year old travel company located north of San Francisco. They offer smallgroup tours mainly to Japan and China. Journeys East is one of just several U.S. companies in this specialized travel niche, and certainly one of the longest-lived. The uniqueness of their trips lies in their highly personal service, as well as a specialized emphasis on traditional culture, arts and crafts, cuisine, and history.

The founding partners commissioned the author to create their web site in 2001. After 18 months, a sustainable visitor base had been established, but industry research revealed need for design refinements and functional improvements. The new, current version went online in early 2003. Since that time, the site has generated favorable feedback, providing approximately 15% of new clientele for the current 2003-2004 travel season. This additional business comes amidst a severe global depression in the travel industry. Under such circumstances, the company's web presence has proven relatively successful. As economic conditions improve, it is anticipated that this figure will rise with renewed American interest in leisure travel to north Asia, where social and political conditions are perceived as safe and stable. At the present time, additional content and further improvements are being considered, including cultural reference guides for Japan and China, a gallery venue for clients to exhibit their travel photography, as well as a more efficient and robust visitor data collecting process.

This paper briefly outlines the design process used to arrive at a suitable visual solution for Journeys East, and showcases several pages from the completed project.

The Site Design

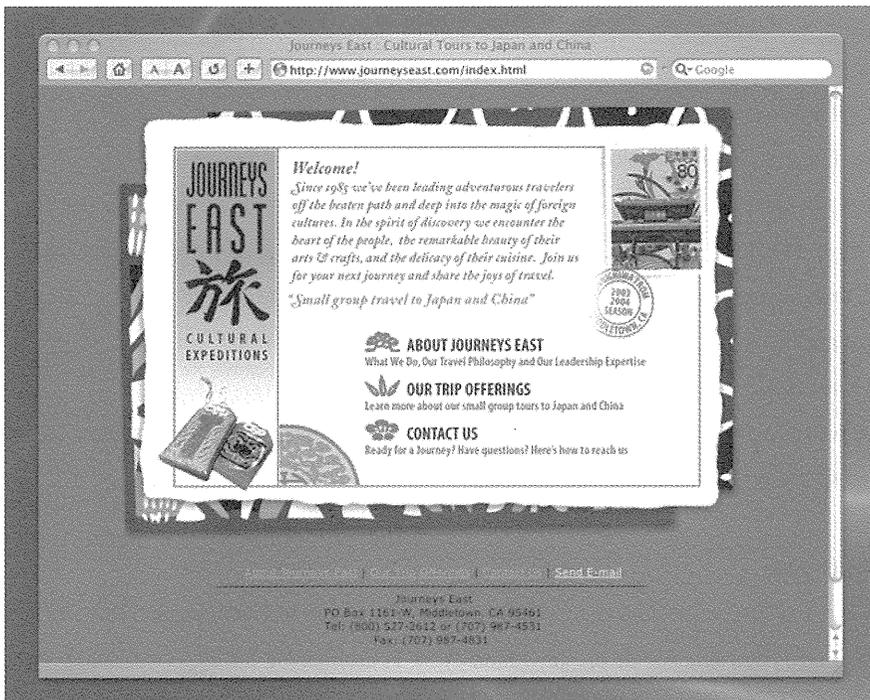
A flowchart was first created to plan for project content in headings and subheadings. This was necessary in order to map out a structure of site navigation. Next, in determining the most outstanding and unique characteristics of the company, approximately ten appealing themes and keywords reappeared in early strategy discussion, including, "intimate group size", "personal encounter", "traditional culture", "arts and crafts", "cuisine", "discovery", "participation" (as opposed to passive sightseeing), "leader expertise", and "industry experience". The author requested that these be placed in descending order of

importance, and received the following edited list:

1. Personal and Intimate
2. Expertise
3. Participation and Discovery
4. Traditional Culture
5. Arts and Crafts

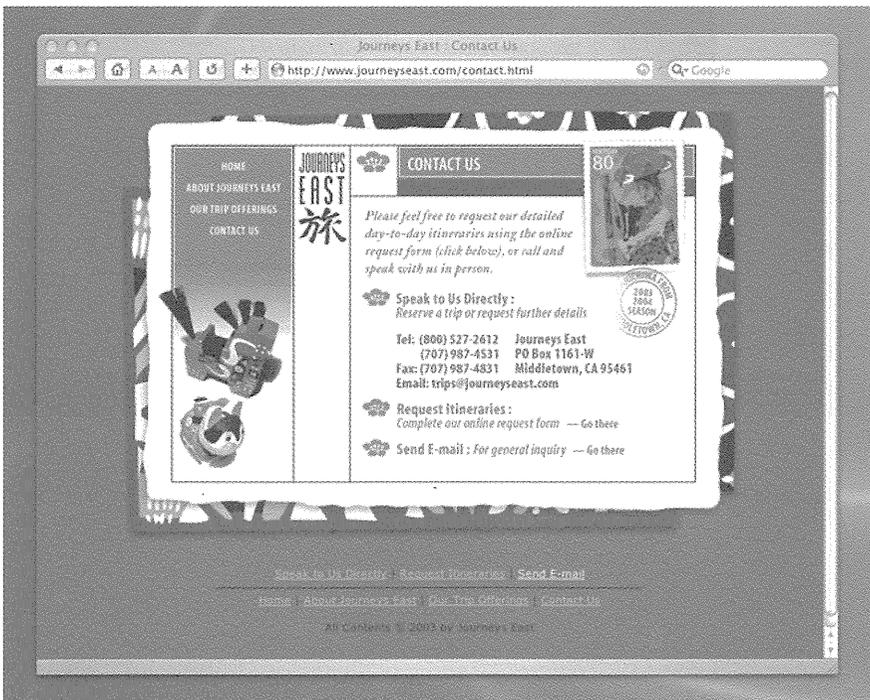
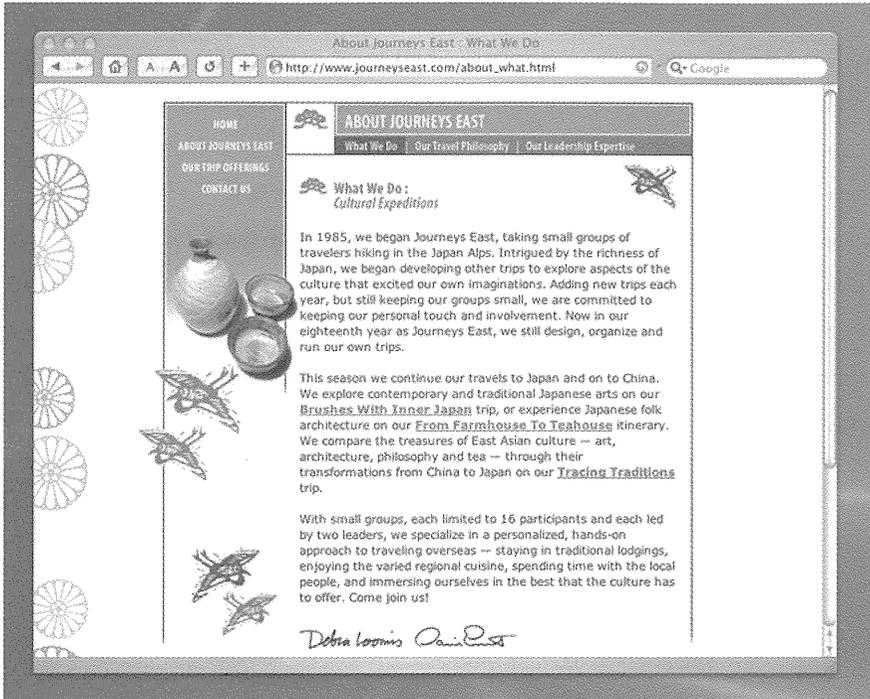
In addition, there were also the obvious points of foreign travel and adventure. The site was then begun with flowchart and this list as the foundation. Aside from dealing successfully with issues of usability, communicating these five important business features became the primary visual design goal.

For web designers, the challenge of the internet remains efficiency. Design for print, now termed the “traditional” occupation of graphic designers, needn’t be bothered with issues of bandwidth, download time, navigation, interactivity and usability. In addition, the limitless and ever-expanding choices available to web users complicates an already formidable task of attracting a commercially sustainable visitor base. Finally, if and when a site design can overcome these problems, turning visitors into paying customers is the ultimate goal of success. Design, for its part, can complicate or simplify this process, entice or repel, and either make an experience frustrating or memorable.



Journeys East Cultural Tours, *Home*

To reflect the small, personal size of their travel groups, a compact design was chosen for most of the site, rather than a more common vertical approach. Each main section of the site features a horizontally

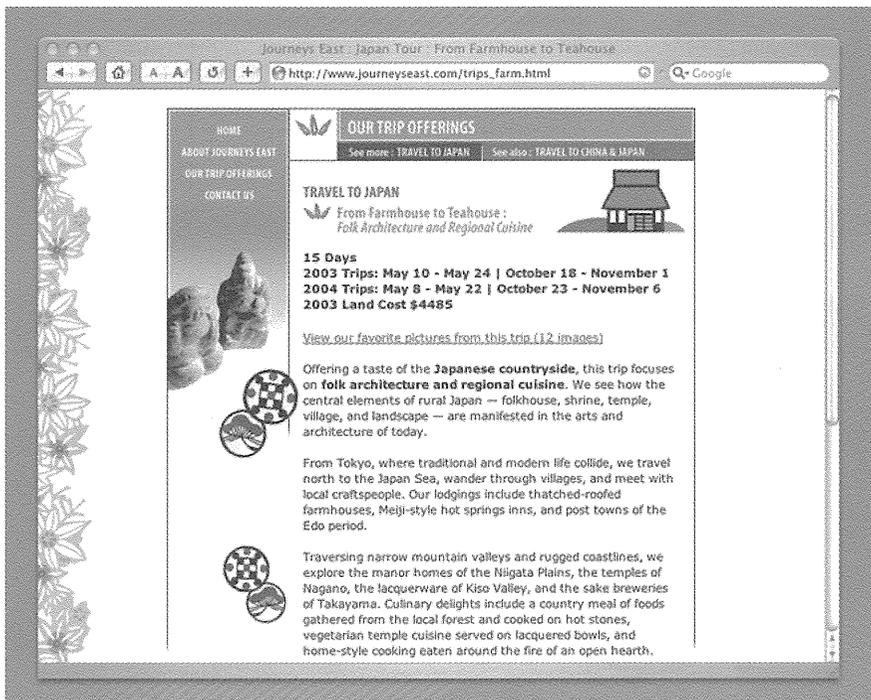


Journeys East Cultural Tours, *What We Do* (top)
Contact Us (bottom)

centered layout that requires little or no scrolling.

To suggest the intimate nature of a Journeys East travel experience, a postcard was used as a placeholder for all page contents and navigation elements. Postcards arouse the nostalgia and romanticism of travel. A card of handmade paper, with irregular torn edges, further reinforces the sense of personal attention and handcrafted quality characteristic of Journeys East.

Postage stamps, picturing several of the many cultural treasures encountered in Japan and China, help to complete the visual concept. Finally, each page includes playful images of traditional arts and crafts products. Small treasures are often the reward of travel and adventure. These images help entice full exploration of each page, as well as portray the enjoyment and leisure of a Journeys East travel experience.



Journeys East Cultural Tours, Trip Offerings