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BEND TO HOST FIRST U.S. THINK X FORUM WITH DESTINATION THINK

Destination leaders from North America and beyond will come to Bend to study regenerative tourism, resident sentiment, and community-centered destination management.

BEND, Ore. (July 13, 2026) — Visit Bend will host a delegation of destination leaders from across North America and beyond this month as Destination Think brings its Think X forum to the United States for the first time.

The invite-only event, scheduled for July 16–19, 2026, will bring approximately 20–25 destination management professionals, community leaders, and tourism experts to Bend for a hands-on exchange focused on regenerative tourism, resident sentiment, sustainability, and the evolving role of destination organizations.

The gathering stems from a partnership between Visit Bend and Destination Think, a global destination strategy organization that works with communities navigating the changing relationship between tourism, residents, natural resources, and local economies. Participants this year include representatives from destinations such as Jasper, Jackson Hole, Sonoma County, Hawai'i, Park City, Indiana Dunes, Åre (Sweden), the Isle of Man, and other Destination Think Collective members and aligned destinations. New Zealand and Denmark have hosted past forums. Choosing Bend for this year's session fits with Destination Think's mission, said spokesperson Amy Bjarnason.

"We are excited to once again bring destination leaders together to learn directly from a place that is taking meaningful action," Bjarnason said. "Our team is inspired by Visit Bend's commitment to sustainability and stewardship and by the many local organizations and changemakers working together to create positive outcomes for residents, visitors, and the environment."

The event reflects a growing national and international interest in Bend's approach to destination stewardship. In recent years, Visit Bend has shifted beyond traditional tourism

promotion toward a broader model of destination management that uses visitor-generated revenue, research, partnerships, and community reinvestment to support both the visitor economy and the place Bend residents call home.

“For years, Bend has been asking a bigger question about tourism: How can it create value, not just for visitors, but for the people who call this place home, too?" said Zavier Borja, Visit Bend's destination stewardship director. "Hosting this forum allows us to share our experiences, learn from peers across the country, and continue advancing approaches that help communities and destinations thrive together.”

During the multi-day program, attendees will visit a range of local projects and partners that show Bend’s destination-management work in action. Planned stops include Bend Sustainability Fund–supported projects such as the High Desert Museum’s Natural Playscape, Miller’s Landing access improvements, Mt. Bachelor summer hiking trails, and Wanoga bike and trail projects.

The itinerary also includes conversations with local partners about renewable energy, trail stewardship, arts and culture, and the connection between tourism and community benefit. A workshop day facilitated with support from Todd Montgomery, head of Oregon State University–Cascade’s Sustainable Tourism Lab, will focus on resident sentiment, destination carrying capacity, and how communities can better measure the value of tourism beyond visitor volume and economic growth.

“Destination management is changing," Montgomery said. "The most forward-looking destinations measure success not just by visitor spending, but by whether tourism leaves the community richer, economically, socially, culturally, and environmentally, for future generations.”

Bend’s visitor economy remains a significant part of the local and regional economy. According to Dean Runyan Associates, direct travel-related spending in Bend surpassed $408 million in 2025, supporting approximately 3,600 direct jobs, a 3.2 percent increase over 2024. Approximately $10 million in annual direct tourism tax revenue helps Bend pay for core services, offsetting a burden that would otherwise fall more heavily on residents. At the same time, OSU’s resident-sentiment research has shown that communities must manage tourism carefully, especially around issues such as crowding, infrastructure, housing pressure, environmental impacts, and quality of life.

“Across the world, we see destinations striving toward this vision, often facing similar opportunities and challenges along the way,” Bjarnason said. “Through its stewardship actions, Bend is setting an example for others to follow.”

The Bend forum will precede Destinations International's 2026 Annual Convention in Portland, allowing some attendees to continue on to the national industry event after their time in Central Oregon.

About Visit Bend
Visit Bend is the official destination management organization for Bend, Oregon. The organization works to support Bend's visitor economy while stewarding a vibrant, sustainable community through thoughtful initiatives focused on people and place. Visit Bend's work includes destination marketing, visitor services, community reinvestment, sustainability initiatives, resident-sentiment research, and partnerships that help ensure tourism benefits both residents and visitors. For more information about Visit Bend's sustainability work, please visit sustainability.visitbend.com and culture.visitbend.com.

About Destination Think
Destination Think is a global destination strategy organization that works with destination management organizations and communities to address the changing role of tourism. Its work focuses on destination stewardship, strategy, resident sentiment, brand, climate and community impact, and long-term value for people and place. For more information on Destination Think, please visit destinationthink.com.