

concierge” who provided information and education to tourists in addition to transportation to the locations. After all, John lived in an area where tourists loved to visit; the city of Durango in the mountains of southwest Colorado.

Durango was a small resort city of nearly 18,000 residents. As the county seat and home to a small liberal arts college, it was the governmental, retail, and cultural “hub city” of southwestern Colorado. People visited the city for a variety of reasons and it seemed that it was always bustling with activity. Through careful preservation of its historic western architecture, the city boasted a vibrant downtown filled with the arts, shopping, and nightlife.

The area provided abundant opportunities for biking, skiing, hiking, white water rafting, kayaking, hunting, and fishing. In addition, the city was home to the historic Durango and Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad and was situated within easy driving distance of Mesa Verde National Park and the historic mining towns of Silverton and Ouray, Colorado.

The city’s outdoor recreation opportunities and the surrounding mountain scenery were wonderful attributes. However, in addition to all of these attractions, many residents considered the city’s best attribute to be its family oriented atmosphere. To many, this formed the bedrock of the residents’ quality of life. It also was seen as one of the reasons that the area attracted tourists.

COMPANY INFORMATION

The operation for High Up Tours and Transportation began very simply. The business was completely mobile and John was the only employee who drove a single luxury van. John would pick up tourists from the airport or their hotel and transport them to a retail marijuana shop and growing facility while providing commentary about the industry and the laws and regulations that govern the purchasing and consumption of cannabis for non-residents. What made John’s business different from other transportation and tour companies was his love of the mountains and his personal touches. As he explained on his website, “With us, you’re not just getting a driver and a ride, but a guide who was completely invested in providing you with a remarkable experience.” As a one-man show, John gave every customer his own personal service.

John received his bachelor’s degree in Communications and began a career in marketing and brand management. He gained experience in the alcohol and tobacco industries and was a territory manager in Durango, Colorado, when Amendment 64 was passed initiating the legalization of recreational marijuana. John had an entrepreneurial spirit and realized the potential for marijuana tourism as a new niche segment. John began building relationships with local growing facilities and recreational shops and started High Up Tours to be designed around his new “cannabis tour.”

In anticipation of the potential for a new market of marijuana tourists, John leveraged his relationships in the community to partner with retail stores that sold recreational marijuana as well as a location where the plants were grown locally. He designed the cannabis tour to include transportation to the store and the grow site and also his guidance as a cannabis concierge to not only make recommendations for local marijuana businesses but also to act as an educational guide and inform tourists of regulations and laws to keep them safe while purchasing and consuming marijuana in Colorado. As start-up with a limited marketing budget, John’s marketing strategy was exclusive to promotions on his website as well as identifying potential partners within the local tourism industry who could build packages for tourists that included cannabis tours.

Despite the potential for marijuana tourism to make a positive impact on the economy in Durango, John was surprised how hesitant tourism businesses were to partner with High Up Tours. Purgatory, the local ski resort, and the historic Durango and Silverton Narrow Gauge Railroad were two of the top attractions in the area and both declined an invitation to partner with High Up Tours because of its association with marijuana.