



The Fascination of Factory Tours

WORK IS NOT A SUBJECT most people want to consider during a vacation. Paradoxically, however, touring factories and other workplaces to see how everyday things are made has become a popular leisure activity. The cost is low, and many tours are free (or at least give free samples). Moreover, there are tours for every taste and interest: food, agriculture, toys, cars, motorcycles, mining, aircraft, NASA sites, glassware, ceramics, arts, entertainment, news media, television—even butterflies.



This factory tours guidebook features more than 300 firms.

That is a diverse list. Indeed, though it has become a standard expression, the phrase “factory tour” is sometimes a misnomer, as many tours do not actually involve factories. Workshops, studios, farms, mines and museums are all regular stops on the “factory tour” trail. Popular tours include those offered by well-known companies such as Harley-Davidson, Ben & Jerry’s, KitchenAid and Boeing, but there are many lesser-known businesses that open their doors to give visitors fascinating insights into their operations.

Eye-opening perspectives: Factory tours and similar attractions are not just about production. At their core, these tours open windows on a variety of different jobs and lifestyles. Visitors find out how the company started and grew, learn about the history of its industry, and see how the workers spend their days. They may even get a new perspective on the American economy, workplace productivity and job creation.

How to find tours: Wherever it is possible to travel in the U.S., you are likely to be within reach of a work-related tour. You may want to consult the local chamber of commerce, visitors bureau and/or state travel office. Most

ages, as the corporate legal department may require compliance. Similarly, there may be rigid limits on group size.

Be sure you and your group understand the restrictions and realities of the workplace you plan to tour. For example, manufacturing sites often prohibit open-toed shoes. Many companies do not allow cameras or video equipment, and some will even prohibit bags of any type—including purses. We have been pleasantly surprised by the number of factory tours that are accessible to wheelchairs, but the physical conditions of some sites may unavoidably preclude them. Lastly, be sure nobody in your group

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companies that give tours provide information about them on their websites, so if a company’s products are of special interest to your tour group, have a look. In addition, the book we wrote, *Watch It Made in the U.S.A.*, can be helpful, as it describes hundreds of publicly available tours throughout the country.

What to consider before a visit: To get the most from a factory tour, you will want to ensure that your visit coincides with production hours and does not fall into a holiday lull or other dormant time at the company. If your group includes children, be aware that some tours have minimum ages. It is important to find out in advance—do not assume that tours will be flexible about minimum

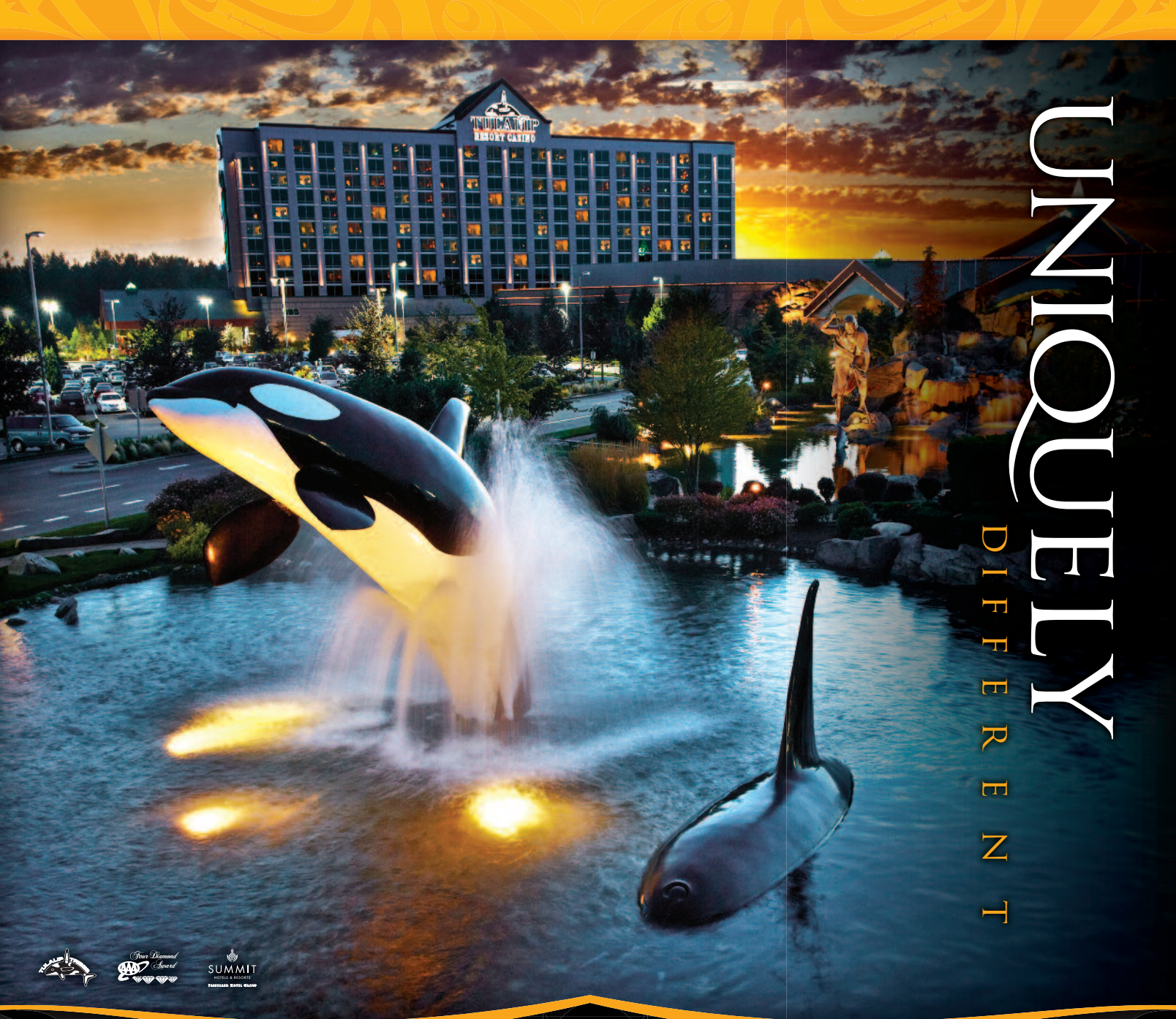
is overly sensitive to any unusual circumstances a tour may present, e.g. industrial smells or loud noise.

Fulfilling insights: In daily life, we are surrounded by technology and products we don’t fully understand. Many a harried consumer just wants to plug it in, mix it with milk, turn the ignition or open the box. Tours can give valuable insights by letting us slow down to see how products are made, who makes them, what’s in them, and how other people work and live.

Based in Brookline, Mass., Karen Axelrod is a co-author of Watch It Made in the U.S.A. (factorytour.com). Matt Simon contributed to the book’s fourth edition.

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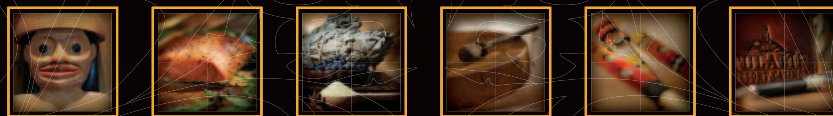
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