

Aboriginal Tourism Enhancement Opportunities – Vancouver and Environs

Dear Keith and Associates,

It was both a pleasure and an honor to address the PAITC 2015 Conference in Vancouver. In the course of my six days in Vancouver – and in light of my interest in expanding my consulting into aboriginal tourism – I decided to pay close attention and take notes on where I saw potential to enhance public awareness – especially traveler awareness, but local BC folks as well – on the many opportunities right in the Vancouver environs to experience the rich culture of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tseil-Waututh Nations and enjoy numerous traditional adventure experiences.

Starting at the airport, which has stunning dioramas of natural Vancouver – the perfect places to have a rack of cards or at the very least, signage for Aboriginal Tourism B.C., such as “Experience this as it still is.” Coming down the flight ramps into the main concourse, a sign on each entry walkway with a strong graphic would capture a lot of attention. The YVR art exhibit, sponsored by the Vancouver Airport, is a natural for indigenous use art depicting culture and adventure and signed to Aboriginal Tourism B.C (AtBC). The airport

(Note: Scattered throughout this text are phrases in quotation marks that resonated with me during the conference, which I believe would be useful in marketing.)

The West Coast Fishing Club on the parking grounds of the airport is a natural venue to advertise indigenous fishing adventures and opportunities.

ABORIGINAL GUEST PROFILES – MY OBSERVATIONS

“Aboriginal Tourism is about empowerment and identity. Four million tourists experienced Aboriginal Tourism in British Columbia in 2012. Last year tourism was up by 9.5% in BC and generated 45 million in revenue.”

In meeting with numerous folks during the conference, I got a good sense of the actual demographic of the visitors partaking in indigenous adventures as follows:

The golden guests – Affluent, 55+ individuals and couples especially with time, education and an interest in culture as well as many sports enthusiasts in the same demographic.

Key characteristics: Money to spend but prudent buyers; get information from magazines and “guidebooks” as well as online travel portals (including those sponsored by government tourism agencies) and better known sites such as Yelp. Facebook likeliest social media platform to be utilized.

Family group travelers – the in-betweens (ages 30-55) – Traveling with their children and primarily interested in culturally and educationally enriching experiences. Often traveling in their own vehicles or rental cars and many camp. Prime age for the kids 5-15. Middling budget. Is there an AtBC family pass? If not this would be an excellent addition.

Young adventure travelers – Limited budget but limitless energy and time to explore. Key characteristics: get info online and especially socially, likely to use public transport, seek out alternative culture.

Consider creating special passes for each Demographic - Cultural, Family-fun, and Adventure - and making them available online and in person.

MARKETING TO PEOPLE’S PASSIONS

“We live in an ethnosphere - a web of cultural life.”

Marketing to people’s passions has emerged in recent years as a key and targeted way to spend cost-effectively. While passions skew differently across demographics, all of these are present and well-represented in Vancouver and waiting to be further developed.

ART

“Artwork is our written language.”

MoA, MoV, MCC provide an almost unparalleled opportunity to dig deep into both culture and history as expressed in art. Already well-curated, they are ripe for profit-added cultural opportunities. The Bill Reid Gallery is an extraordinary world-class resource. However, on the day I visited (Sept. 13) it was almost deserted on a Saturday afternoon. With its proximity to the convention center and the several convention-oriented hotels of the Expo area, I think a major outreach effort is in order there and would be profitable.

Art as social enterprise is well-represented at Skwàchys Lodge and its gift store. The Bill Reid gallery gift store (although some purchasable reproductions of his actual own work would be a stand-out best seller). However, in the conference hotels, the artwork displayed for purchase were spotty at best. I think each of those store buyers could be approached to upgrade their line of offerings, and if carefully branded, those goods would increase awareness of aboriginal tourism opportunities.

Question: Is there a mark or brand for BC Aboriginal art enterprise such as that for AtBC “Our story your experience” and the symbol of the two hands?

Additional opportunity: Create a product tag with a QR Code that lands you at a page with more information about the piece and website link.

BOATING

“Community-based tourism is made of experts and inerts who are united by a vision and values. The indigenous worldview can save this planet.”

Takaya Tours does an excellent job getting the word out about their approachable and adventuresome tours – a model of other adventure tour operators in BC. Talaysay Tours is also doing an excellent job.

FISHING AND WATER OTHER SPORTS

“Knowing where you come from is very important, without it I would lose who I truly am.”

Despite time spent perusing available brochures, key hotel concierge welcome areas for information rack cards and brochures – I didn’t see much touting what I understand is excellent fishing, guided by folks who know the waters intimately. More work in this area would yield valuable results. How about some line casting from points in the Burrard Inlet? No expensive boats needed, just permits, fishing gear, and a guide who knows the best spots. How about classes to learn large canoe handling? Or workshops to learn canoe building?

FOOD

“Indigenous and standard tourism can certainly cooperate. We recommend you attend local tourism events, join local and regional associations, and participate in Aboriginal Tourism Canada as well as your local province's chapter.”

This is already an established niche in Vancouver with two strong frontrunners: Skwàchys Lodge and Salmon*N*Bannock. Both are doing a good job spreading the word but have limited seating. Outside of these establishments, no place did I find bannock on the menu. Since this tasty and simple bread is a staple of the cultural cuisine, perhaps this approachable item could be introduced in specialty form in partnership with a big name fast food such as Tim Hortons or another favorite chain eatery. To have a widely distributed product bearing the AtBC tourism brand would be an excellent vehicle for spreading the word.

Also, a bannock recipe -along with other culturally-relevant recipes- could be added to the ABC Tourism website. A monthly food blog would be fun to add to the site as well. Recipes with pictures are universally enjoyed!

CONCIERGE OUTREACH

"The Geography of Hope"

During my stay I stopped in and spoke with members of the concierge staff at five hotels in the CVD. Two of them were quite knowledgeable about aboriginal travel opportunities while the other three were clearly perplexed. I heard that there had been concierge outreach in the past, which was effective, but the concierge staff change frequently, so I suggest an annual concierge event or at least email by individual name with a brief, succinct list of AT activities and contacts for staying.

And of course, hotels from which you have been driving business (information your staff should request from every caller - "where did you hear about us?") should be supplied with rack cards, branded perhaps on one side to ATBC and the other to individual AT enterprises as a cooperative advertising venture.

PRINT MATERIALS

"Seven thousand languages represent an old-growth forest of the mind. Now half of those languages are on the road to extinction. National Geographic calls this disappearing worlds. Power (which in its essence seeks ultimate control) is a threat to culture."

I suggest that every AT enterprise subscribes to Aboriginal Business Quarterly, as it is a valuable resource with insightful monthly articles on Aboriginal Tourism. Perhaps your business could be featured!

Kudos to the Essential Vancouver in-room tourism book, which includes an incredible chapter entitled Taking Charge- first nations are sharing their history and culture with visitors, on their own terms and in their own words. I recommend contacting them for reprint rights to this definitive article and dispersing it widely. It's an excellent cultural resource and guide.

Travel guidebooks are diminished, but by no means gone, so be sure to contact the editors of the Top 5 featuring B.C. Tourism with a targeted press release.

Consider a Sunset magazine ad to help address a wider audience. Their demographics are a good match for your enterprise.

Try to get articles in outdoor magazines on fishing, boating, and other outdoor recreation you are involved with. This is where a PR person can truly help with a press kit and contacts.

SOCIAL MEDIA

"This place is a place of transformation."

I suggest hiring a young person in the community to help you get active on social media (Facebook, Twitter, and possibly Pinterest or Instagram for photos) and create a strong presence on Yelp. You may want to consider adding a news blog to your site as well, and posting monthly or so with updates about what you're doing.

As Virtual Tours are becoming more popular, consider making videos of what you do, where you are, and what your destination looks like and putting them on Youtube (embedded into your website of course).

All in all, the progress of Aboriginal Tourism in BC is in many ways exemplary and quite advanced compared to many other areas where I have consulted. *"There are 630 first nations in Canada encompassing 2.4 million Aboriginal people. We want to celebrate and share our culture. It's time for us to execute on that journey."* With a few additions to your program, and especially an intense focus on your demographics and the times when people are most likely to visit your area, it will be relatively easy to ramp up in a coordinated manner both your association and individual efforts to result in a significant improvement to utilization and profits across the board.

"Our land is all we have. It represents our spirituality and our culture. In the spirit of Mama K I'll see you soon, in dreamtime."

Pamela

TIPS & Tricks

Pamela's Tips

1. Build capacity by hiring local youth to do website and social networking.
2. Value and work your guest list - word of mouth is #1 - social media is just that -digitized.
 - a. Create an e-newsletter and send quarterly to prior guests
 - b. Offer a small discount for prior guests and their friends and family
3. Make a detailed calendar of events in your area - contact local businesses, churches, schools - find out who they are bringing in for work, presentations, performances, and local events, and how you can serve them.
4. Add pages to your site of day trips which can be accomplished using your property/community as home base and keep those tourist dollars in your pocket and community.

5. Take a picture of guests by your sign (make sure your sign is clear, readable and includes your URL), and have it sent to them upon their departure. This works for adventures and tourism centers as well as lodging. Watch that picture go viral as they share it with their friends!

FIT: Independent travelers and "digital" travelers are some of your likeliest clientele. Here are some tips for that.

Make a selfie spot with good lighting/background/angles and place a camera sign there so folks can get a hint on the best places to take great pictures.

QR Code tags for art, history, and cultural information and a link to the webpage, allowing visitors to act as their own docents.

Kate's Tips

(Shared with me by Kate of Tartan PR)

Stay open on holidays.

Consider major events coming to your region and prepare to showcase who you are and what you have available.

Inter-lace your communications on various social media platforms – promote to a broader audience outside of your natural communication channels/platforms (FB is a favorite).

Out-help the competition – Don't be afraid nor forget to talk about other regional or provincial products that might be a similar theme or have an excellent offering that you've tried or like. Don't see it as competitive. The co-operative nature will make you stronger, and draw people towards you as a resource as well and lets them know there is more reason to stay longer in an area. Your excellent product will speak for itself.

Keep your tourism industry reps updated on what you are doing – by email, meetings, phone calls – tell them what you are up to – what's new, why now, something that ties into what might be trending, etc.

TripAdvisor Tips from presentation

Stay on top of your listing by:

1. Registering with the management center
2. Double checking hours, contact info, location and amenities
3. Adding photos and videos

4. Encouraging reviews (review express/sticker/staff)
5. Get notifications of reviews and track reviews
6. Writing a management response to any less than positive reviews
7. Adding a widget from the Widget Center

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