



British Columbia
Museums Association
SINCE 1957

Best Practices module

TOURISM AND MUSEUMS

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Introduction

Museums are an important part of a local tourism industry. While much of what museums already do prepare them for their role in tourism, having an understanding of the overall industry will make your museum better able to tap into the tourism market.

What is Tourism?

The World Tourism Organization defines tourism as, "the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business or other purposes." The Canadian Tourism Commission further defines a tourist as being, "an individual that has traveled 80 kilometres or more to the location they are visiting".



The Industry

The tourism industry is made up of a number of categories of product providers including, attractions (museums, waterslide, parks, etc.), transportation, accommodation and food service. In some cases, providers supply multiple products. In addition, there are a number of organizations that provide support to product suppliers and tourists.

Destination Marketing Organizations (DMO's) specialize in promoting a region. Most communities have a DMO, for example, Tourism Victoria and/or a regional DMO, such as the Tourism Association of Vancouver Island. Other examples include Tourism BC and the Canadian Tourism Commission. These organizations coordinate marketing, research and are usually government departments, crown corporations or non-profit organizations.

Often DMO's operate some form of physical information centre that tourists can visit. Most communities in BC have at least a seasonal information centre, known as Travel Infocentres. In addition to being a place for tourists to drop into, the centres mail out information packages and, in some cases, do bookings for various suppliers.

Inbound Tour Operators specialize in bringing tourists into an area and may sell directly to consumers or be hired by other operators to coordinate local activities.

The industry makes their money by taking a percentage of the overall tour package cost. To encourage many operators to use your location, you will have to give commissions or discounts.

Museums should be aware that in BC there is legislation that controls some aspects of the travel industry. While it is unlikely that any of your activities might fall under the legislation, you should make yourself familiar with it. See Business Practices and Consumer Protection Authority of BC at: <http://www.bpcpa.ca/Industry/travel/industry-travel-index.htm>



Understanding the Market

Do you have any idea why tourists come to your site? Did they see the highway sign? Did they read about it in their Automobile Association Guide? Are the visitors to the local water-park likely to visit your museum?

Understanding who and why people come to your facility will provide you with an invaluable tool to attract more people. There are two basic tools that you can use to find out about tourists. The first is to ask people who come to your facility and, the second, is to use the research that exists on travellers in general.

TIP:

Understand the different segment, not all travellers are alike! For example, a hunter coming to your area may not be the best target market for you marketing dollars.

In House Research

Getting a sense of those people that come to your facility can be as simple as providing a visitor book for people to sign. By simply making headings in the book that encourage people to tell you where they are from, how many are in their group and their comments, you can gain a lot of insight into your visitors.

Think about adding a request for visitor postal codes. Many stores will from time to time ask people to volunteer their postal code information. In addition to giving detailed location information, postal code data can be linked to existing research on the demographics of people that live in particular codes. From code information, further details of average income, education, etc. can be obtained.

TIP:

When collecting any data, be aware that there are provincial and federal privacy laws that may restrict how you collect and use this data. See Personal Information and Privacy Act at: http://www.privcom.gc.ca/legislation/02_06_01_01_e.asp

Many museums also do formal visitor surveys. Various publications have been written over the years that can help to develop and administer an appropriate survey. In addition, various websites provide information on surveys. The Australian Museum Audience Research Centre has an excellent page with good links at: <http://www.amonline.net.au/amarc/faq/>. Prizes are often used as a means to encourage people to participate in surveys. One useful habit to get into is to keep track of the groups that visit your institution. What company they are and where they are from can be useful for both research and marketing purposes.



Understanding the Market cont'd...

Outside Research

Canadian tourism officials have been on the forefront of tourism research. The National Tourism Indicators and Travel Activities available through StatsCanada and Motivation Surveys (TAMS) available through the Canadian Tourism Commission are key studies that provide details on market segments. The TAMS can be especially interesting, as they not only explore what people have done, but what they want to do, how they do it and how they learn about it.

Examples of recent TAMS include studies on Canadian and American Museum Enthusiasts. Studies have also been done on Aboriginal and Cultural Tourism. By signing up for the Canadian Tourism Commission corporate site, you can access many of these documents for free. See: <http://www.canadatourisme.com/ctx/app/>



Preparing your facility for tourism

As most facilities are already set up to accept visitors, there would seem to be little new that has to be done for tourists. Yet, museum staff must think about the type of infrastructure and exhibits from a tourist perspective.

Are your exhibits geared to people that might not already have a base knowledge about your community? All too often museum exhibits fail to give the necessary core background community information. Road signage is often a problem. It does no good to have a sign on the main street that says “Visit Our Museum at the Fairgrounds”, if people have no idea where the Fairgrounds are!

TIP:

Do not assume that everyone knows where a particular place is. Many museums in small communities only have a post office box. Make sure you provide a street address on your publications and website, so that the potential visitors can locate your actual site. Keep in mind that many people today use computer map programs and websites in their trip planning.

If you want to attract the group tour market, can your facility handle a large bus group? Do you have the washroom capacity? Do you have the cleaning staff to deal with the aftermath of a large group? Do you have the overall space?

Today’s tourist class buses often carry 55 people. While larger institutions can handle groups of this size, many smaller places have related challenges to address. Consider what you can do to break the group up into more manageable sizes, but only do so in a way that does not require parts of the group to be sitting around waiting. Tour groups are usually working on tight schedules. You have to be flexible enough to react when the group arrives early or late. Do you have enough space to accommodate the actual bus? Can the driver manoeuvre the bus in and out of the drop off area in a safe manner? Is the drop off area close to the entrance?

Also, consider the services that are available near your facility. What other attractions close by would encourage the tour operator to detour from the more direct route? For example, if the bus has to travel an hour off of the main highway to get to your location, will there be someplace where they can get a meal if your facility does not offer it? Other services and attractions can become natural partners.

Understanding where your visitors are coming from will help you develop your facility. As an example, if you know that significant numbers of your visitors speak a different language, then you might want to develop materials in that language.



Marketing

Many museums want to increase the number of visits of Group Tour Operators. Knowing which operators are already coming to your facility is your first step, so remember to get contact information from every group that visits!

Many of the major Tour Operators get dozens if not hundreds of solicitations in the mail each day. As they are working on long-range timelines and trips are planned 12-24 months prior, it is not advisable to send a package detailing next month's highlights. If the tour operator is interested in what you are offering, they might book a tour as a trial. They want to know you can provide a good product and will be around next year.

TIP:

Think long term! Tour operators need to plan months and years in advance. Developing a good reputation also takes time.

Personal contact is usually the best method of promotion. This can be done by phone, tradeshows, or by knocking at their doors. Be prepared to offer significant discounts off of what the individual traveller would pay. Consider graduated discounts that reward the operators for bringing even larger numbers of people over the year. It is expected that complimentary passes will be provided for their tour guide and driver.

In Canada, the most important tourism trade show is Rendez-vous Canada, <http://www.rendezvouscanada.ca/>, which is sponsored by the Canadian Tourism Commission and Travel Industry Association of Canada. Held annually, this trade show connects tour operators from around the world with suppliers.

CrossSphere <http://www.crosssphere.com/> (formerly the National Tour Association) is one of the major Group Tour Operator organizations. American based, it also has significant Canadian participation. Their national and regional meetings are some of the best places to meet tour operators. Becoming a member is both difficult and expensive. Many DMO's are members. Working in conjunction with these organizations, may prove to be a beneficial marketing technique. In Canada, the Ontario Motor Coach Association is another important group.

TIP:

Value added packages: Just as Group Tour Operators are looking for special deals so are independent travellers. Think what you can package in your facility or with other local suppliers.

Develop value added packages. A few years ago, a representative of a one of the larger BC Museums who work with group sales commented that groups were a pain, because all that happened was that they got a discounted entry and that they would come without the discount anyway. What was being missed by this facility was the opportunity to provide a value added package! Think about what you can package with your admission that will be perceived by the operator and/or tourist as a special value. Perhaps, a meal or special tour would be an added incentive to visit your institution.



Marketing cont'd...

Having groups making reservations and pre-selling the visit has the advantage of guaranteeing attendance and, hence, revenue. Groups who have paid in advance add predictability to visitation and revenue. Most museums get most of their visitors in the summer, but museums that track attendance and weather report that during periods of hot sunny weather attendance suffers. However, by pre-selling a tour through a reputable tour operator, weather as an attendance variable is eliminated. There are examples in the tourism sector of organizations that credit their financial success to well-developed pre-sold tour programs.

Marketing to independent travellers can also have challenges. Word of mouth is usually the key. Provide Familiarization (FAM) tours for local key contact people such as hotel, restaurant, and gas station staff. These are the people that will be talking to potential visitors. By making sure your immediate market knows what you offer you will get local people recommending your site and bringing their visiting friends and relatives.

TIP:

Word of Mouth! The most important and valuable form of marketing is word of mouth. Having local people who promote the museum is a great asset. Ensure that all locals including the front line tourism workers know your museum and are familiar with what is offered.

TIP:

Many DMO's develop FAM Tours for key tourism operators, travel writers, travel agents, etc., from around the world. Offer your product to be part of their tours.

Be realistic! While you may think it would be nice to have lots of international tourists, are you in an area that is already getting significant numbers of them? If not, the chances of you changing travel patterns are pretty low. The reality is that with few exceptions, the majority of museum visitors come from the local region, in province and immediate neighbouring province.

The Canadian Tourism Commission TAMS reports show that North American museum enthusiasts tend to read daily newspapers, magazines and watch movies on TV. Surveys also indicate that many people that visit museums belong to auto clubs, citing the club guides as why they came to a particular facility.

Leaflets are commonly used to promote museums, but careful thought should be given to design. Leaflets are found on a wall of racks, so consider what design will make it stand out. What looks like a great design on its own can be lost amongst all those others. While it may seem a good idea to have an unusual shape or size of leaflet, consider the fact that most racks are a standard size. Odd leaflets are often folded to fit into the rack, or not displayed at all.

Websites are also important marketing tools. Even a single page will increase your exposure; just make sure to keep it simple and clear, with key information such as location and phone number clearly visible.



How To Be Involved with the Tourism Sector

One of the best ways to get involved with your local tourism industry is to join an organization in the community that is responsible for tourism promotion. By being an active member, you can keep the sector informed about your activities as well as learn more about what they are doing.

TIP:

Find Partners: local accommodations and Destination Marketing Organizations, etc. are all potential partners. Marketing to tourists is time-consuming and expensive, but by working with others, you can share the load.

In several communities, for example, Sooke and Prince Rupert, the museum runs the tourism information system. In others, the tourism office and the museum share facilities.

Either of these two approaches can provide significant benefits. Shared front office staff, one stop shopping for the tourist and increased visibility are all examples of potential benefits. The provision of information about the local community is a very compatible activity for museums.

Some problems that arise include inappropriate exploitation of heritage resources. Since one of a museum's mandate is the preservation of heritage resources, there can be a conflict if the tourism sector sees benefit in promoting an endangered or fragile resource. For instance, a petroglyph site may attract visitors, but from a conservation perspective this could lead to deterioration of the site.

Service provider conflict has arisen from time to time. In some communities, there has been disagreement over whether the "travel information centre" service should be operated by the local museum or the local chamber of commerce. While resources are limited from senior levels of government for operating an information centre, some grants for summer students are periodically available.

Tourism operators are in business to make a profit and are looking for value added services for free or minimal cost. Museums need to be vigilant that their contributions are compensated for by direct payment or demonstrably increased museum revenues. Museums run the risk of being exploited by the tourism sector and not receiving financial benefits for their efforts.



Resources

Canadian Tourism Commission (corporate site)

See: <http://www.canadatourisme.com/ctx/app/>

CrossSphere (formerly the National Tour Association)

See: <http://www.crosssphere.com/index.php>

Rendez-vous Canada

See: http://www.rendezvouscanada.ca/english/E_intro.htm

StatsCanada

See: www.statscanada.ca

Tourism BC (corporate site)

See: <http://www.tourism.bc.ca/>

