

Name of Best Practices Mission

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COMPETITIVENESS THROUGH BEST PRACTICES

FINAL REPORT

Multi Seasonal Destinations Mission
March 27th, to March 31st, 2007

Prepared by:

Name: Daniel Perry

Title: Marketing Assistant

Organization: Tourism Atlantic

Date: April 27th, 2007

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The following outlines the type of information that could be useful for Best Practices Final Reports. Please note that any additional information is encouraged, since this guide cannot address every aspect of every mission. The debrief at the end of your mission, as well as the participant surveys, will provide you with the information you need to complete the report.

Introduction

Provide a brief introduction to the mission and mission location as well as a short summary of the mission highlights. This could include, but is not limited to, a brief background and significance of the mission to the tourism industry in Atlantic Canada, key highlights, why did the mission succeed or not succeed, participants overall feedback, etc.

Purpose

The purpose of the Multi Seasonal Destinations Best Practices Mission was to provide a broad base of knowledge to Atlantic Canadian based tourism operators of how multi seasonal operations in one of the most popular year-round tourism destinations in Canada (Georgian Triangle, Ontario) manage day to day operations as well as share their concerns and challenges within their own operations. The information gained from this is to allow the Atlantic operators to learn what works in these particular areas and apply these practices to their own operations. The group comprising the mission was a well mixed blend ranging from resort and tourism industry operators to public sector representatives, each with somewhat differing issues while at the same time possessing similar issues; that is: maximizing revenues and extending their shoulder season visitation.

Primary Expectations

The following provides a summary of the participants' primary expectations for the Best Practices Mission (taken from their applications):

- Observe
- Learn
- Increase ability
- Experience
- Increase awareness
- Determine how

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- Evaluate
- Build regional collaboration
- Growth and diversification.....
- Shoulder and off-season expansion
- Marketing / advertising / branding

Mission Itinerary

Day 1 – March 27th, 2007

- Travel to Blue Mountain, tour of Scenic Caves and meet with owner / operator Rob Thorburn
- Presentation by Rob Thorburn

Day 2 – March 28th, 2007

- Travel to Town of Collingwood, walking tour of Collingwood Trails Network
- Presentation by Larry Lawrence and George Christie; Town of Collingwood Leisure Services Advisory Committee
- Presentation by Nancy Kindler; Executive Director - Georgian Triangle Association
- Tour of Scandinave Spa
- Presentation by Mylisa Henderson; Director of Marketing and Sales – Scandinave Spa
- Presentation by Bryan Plumstead; Coordinator – Grey County Tourism

Day 3 – March 29th, 2007

- Travel to Wasaga Beach
- Presentation by Bonnie Smith and Group, Economic Development Officer – Town of Wasaga Beach
- Travel to Midland
- Presentations by Bill Brodeur, Marketing and Information Officer – Huronia Historical Parks and Larry Ford; Guide – Huronia Historical Parks
- Travel to Blue Mountain
- Presentation by Paul Pinchbeck; Director of Marketing – Blue Mountain Resort
- Tour of Blue Mountain Village with Casey Thomson; Supervisor – Activity Central
- Travel to Town of Creemore
- Presentation and Tour of Creemore Springs Brewery by Carol Talbot; Guide – Creemore Springs Brewery

Day 4 – March 30th, 2007

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- Travel to Horseshoe Valley Resort
- Presentation by Debbie Poldem; Spa Manager, Horseshoe Valley Resort
- Presentation by David Belsey; Director of Marketing – Horseshoe Valley Resort
- Presentation by Andrew Miller, Owner / operator – Hummer Tours
- Presentation by Anthony McQuilter, Owner / operator – Tour Arbraska Tree Top Trekking
- Presentation by Clinton Smout, Chief Instructor – Riding Adventures
- Travel to Toronto, group debrief on bus

Day 5 – March 31st, 2007

- Depart for Atlantic Canada

Mission Leader

Daniel Perry; Marketing Assistant, Tourism Atlantic

Participants

Newfoundland and Labrador

Shane Curnew; Account Manager – ACOA

Doug Richardson; Economic Development Officer – Humber Economic Development Board

George Parsons; CEO – Mariner Resources Opportunities Network

Nova Scotia

Bob Book; Director – Nova Scotia Department of Tourism, Heritage and Culture

Jerry O'Neill; Account Manager – ACOA

Jeff Stewart; Project Manager – Municipality of the County of Antigonish

David Campbell; President – Cottages at Cambra Sands

Bill Wallace; Assistant Manager – Old Orchard Inn

Prince Edward Island

Donna Hurry; Tourism and Events Officer – City of Charlottetown

Peggy Miles; Special Events Coordinator – City of Summerside

Murray MacPherson; Owner / President – Brackley Beach North Winds

New Brunswick

Mathieu Audet; Owner / Operator – Heron's Nest Cottages

Sherry Savoie; Administrative Officer – Fundy Trail

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Blue Mountain

Name of 1st Presenter- Rob Thorburn; Owner / Operator – Scenic Caves

Brief Description presentations given

Introduction / Overview of the Scenic Caves – Mr. Thorburn made a very good presentation on his operation. Scenic Caves offers “light excitement” for all demographics promoting its outdoor adventure attractions (suspension bridge, ski trails, zip line). His main points were that of promoting the heritage / culture of the area used in destination marketing, as well as the importance of packaging and partnerships with local tourism operators and associations.

Comments of the activity/presentations, and lessons learned from presenters

Mr. Thorburn is a very motivated individual; he has had some great ideas and experiences (concept of “clusters”, partnerships, treatment of employees); enjoyed his business spin on things, talking financials; willing to share detailed information about his business; well prepared.

Was the information provided of interest to participants? Yes

As a result of the presentation, the following points have been noted:

1. Partnering with local tourism operators and associations has been very helpful
2. Involvement and satisfaction of employees is key to ensuring a great experience for travelers

Name of 2nd Presenter – Larry Lawrence and George Christie; Collingwood Leisure Services Advisory Committee

Brief Description of presentations given

Mr. Lawrence and Mr. Christie work closely with the Town of Collingwood to promote and develop the Collingwood Trails Network. The trails split into various routes throughout the town, with the goal of connecting multiple towns in the Georgian Bay area through the trail network. The trails are used year round by walkers, cross-country skiers, and off-highway vehicles (i.e., snowmobiles). All groups work together to maintain and develop the trails and there is a heavy dependency on community groups and volunteers for continued support and expansion of the trails network.

Was the information provided of interest to participants? Yes

As a result of the presentation, the following points have been noted:

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1. The trail network links the many attractions the community has to offer
2. The trails are available for use in all four seasons
3. Partnerships and community involvement are key in maintaining the trails

Name of 3rd Presenter – Nancy Kindler; Executive Director – The Georgian Triangle Association

Brief Description of presentations given

Ms. Kindler was very knowledgeable concerning multi season destinations. She communicated the Georgian Triangle Association's vision for the region very well; once again noting the importance of cooperation and partnerships to draw tourists to the area. Through these partnerships they are able to offer a wide range of attractions and activities to draw people into the area and keep them as overnight guests, rather than just day trippers. Because of their proximity to Toronto, they have a market of about 13 million people to tap into.

Comments of the activity/presentations, and lessons learned from the presenter

As a result of this presentation, the following points have been noted:

1. Partnerships are important to market the region, not just individual operators
2. Getting towns to cluster and share resources greatly decrease the costs of marketing the area
3. Measure results through the increase of overnight stays as opposed to people visiting for the day

Name of 4th Presenter – Mylisa Henderson; Director of Marketing and Sales– Scandinave Spa

Background: Le Scandinave Spa is located in the Blue Mountain region and offers a full health and wellness spa activity for all ages. Some of the features are a Finnish Sauna, Norwegian Steam Bath, Thermal and Nordic Waterfall, hot baths, cold plunges, solarium, outdoor fireplace, 12 massage rooms, Bistro, lounge and executive meeting rooms.

Brief Description of presentations given

Mrs. Henderson was very knowledgeable; the Scandinave Spa's themed experience offers a very unique tourism product. It is a relatively new operation and cost roughly \$6.5 million to build. Mentioned it is very difficult to get staff and the majority of their massage therapists are hired on a contract basis based on expected need. Adding to the

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difficulties of staffing, Ontario regulations require all therapists to be licensed professionals. The Scandinave Spa also relied heavily on partnerships to get funding and construction completed as quickly as possible. Their goal is to franchise the spa experience across the country.

As a result of the presentation, the following points have been noted:

1. Scandinave Spa was created after the owners had a similar experience in Québec
2. Great example of partnerships between the Blue Mountain Ski Resort and the Scandinave Spa, co-marketing and adding more value to the tourism experience.

Name of 5th Presenter – Bryan Plumstead (Coordinator, Grey County Tourism)

Brief Description of presentations given

Mr. Plumstead gave an overview of the Grey County and Bruce County Peninsula. Its main tourism attractions are the waterfalls of Grey County, the motorcycle tour throughout Grey and Bruce Counties, and various stamp themed tours. He was very knowledgeable, but his power point presentation did not do justice to the information he was communicating. It would have been better to do a bus tour of the area with Bryan as the tour guide.

Was the information provided of interest to participants? Yes

As a result of the presentation, the following points have been noted:

1. Creating projects that span across counties to market the area
2. Creating the motorcycle tour to highlight the many various activities found throughout the area.

WASAGA BEACH

Name of 6th Presenter - Bonnie Smith (Economic Development Officer, Town of Wasaga Beach) and group (some local operators and Kal Patterson, Mayor of Wasaga Beach)

Mrs. Smith and group had a very interesting presentation dealing with the state of change they are trying to push through the town of Wasaga Beach. The average population of the town is 16,000 people, but this number can grow as high as 100,000 during the summer months. Over the years the town has become known as a “party” destination for youth during the summer; however they would like to change this image to attract more families and events to the town. There are two key issues, many of the accommodations

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are old and cater to proms, teens and this requires an increased presence of police. Those operating high end accommodations feel that this is driving away families and keeping rental income down.

As a result of the presentation, the following points have been noted:

1. The town seems to have lost control over its tourism industry as private operators have been catering primarily to the youth market for over 50 years, then abandoning the town during the off-season
2. The town needs to unite behind a firm strategic plan with measurable goals to achieve their objectives, rather than waiting for a developer to come in and save them

MIDLAND

Name of 7th Presenters – Bill Brodeur; Marketing and Information Officer, Huronia Historical Parks and Larry Ford; Guide , Huronia Historical Parks

Mr. Brodeur and Mr. Ford were both very informative and gave detailed presentations about the attractions and projects within the provincial park. The park is provincially owned, but the café is outsourced to a privately owned company to cater to visitors. It is a great example of how a not-for-profit and a commercial enterprise can work together and create two financially stable businesses. Apart from marketing to the historical tourist, the park also targets schools with various educational programs for students that expand the park's seasonality and provides another source of revenue. Retreats for up to 48 hours are available to students with a waiting list sometimes reaching 2-3 years.

As a result of the presentation, the following points have been noted:

1. Great example of not-for-profit and commercial enterprise partnership
2. Expanding target market to include schools helps to extend the season and provides more revenue

BLUE MOUNTAIN (COLLINGWOOD)

Name of 8th Presenter – Paul Pinchbeck; Director of Marketing – Blue Mountain Resort

Mr. Pinchbeck gave a very polished presentation on the evolution of the Blue Mountain Resort and its successful partnerships and packages. Some participants felt it would have been a better presentation if some more time had been spent on Blue Mountain's failed initiatives and what they learned from those experiences. Because of Blue Mountain's size and parent organization (Intrawest), they had a substantial budget to try new projects.

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Much of their extended seasonality is due to partnerships with local operations such as the Scenic Caves or the Scandinave Spa, as well as special events held on the mountain during shoulder seasons (i.e. mountain biking).

Name of 9th Presenter – Casey Thomson; Supervisor – Activity Central

Mrs. Thomson provided a tour of Blue Mountain Village and discussed the importance of partnering with local businesses to create a better packaged experience for tourists. The village itself isn't very large, but it offers a wide variety of amenities to tourists staying on the resort. There are restaurants, pubs, clothes and gift shops, pools, business centers, tennis courts and a large courtyard where family activities are held in the evening (sometimes movies are played on a large projection screen during the evenings where kids can enjoy themselves while parents watch on from the outdoor area of a nearby restaurant). It was very well run, but some participants felt it would be difficult to apply something of this scale to their respective operations.

CREEMORE

Name of 10th Presenter – Carol Talbot; Guide, Creemore Springs Brewery

Mrs. Talbot was a very enthusiastic presenter. The Creemore Springs Brewery was an old structure that has been transformed into a state of the art facility. It was interesting to see their brand grow successfully from such a small town enterprise; however participants would have preferred the presentation tie more into how the town is marketed as a destination.

HORSESHOE VALLEY

Name of 11th Presenters – Debbie Poldem; Spa Manager, Horseshoe Valley Resort and David Belsey; Director of Marketing, Horseshoe Valley Resort and Anthony McQuilter; Owner / Operator, Tour Arbraska Tree Top Trekking and Clinton Smout; Chief Instructor, Riding Adventures and Andrew Miller; Owner / Operator, Hummer Tours

The presentations began with Mrs. Poldem giving an overview of the Spa at the Horseshoe Valley Resort and how it is packaged with other activities at the resort (i.e. woman can enjoy a relaxing afternoon, while men play a round of golf at the course on site). The Spa is experiencing the same staffing difficulties as the Scandinave because of provincial regulations and contract-based work. Debbie did a great job considering she was a last minute replacement for another presenter who didn't show up.

Mr. Belsey then spoke about the challenges of the resort and raising awareness of its activities through various marketing efforts. The Horseshoe Valley Resort is not simply a ski resort, but also includes a golf course as well as numerous activities on site and within

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the local area (i.e. Tree Top Trekking, Riding Adventures, Hummer Tours). This presentation was valuable in that unlike the Blue Mountain Resort, the Horseshoe Valley Resort did not have the budget available to it and was forced to find other inexpensive ways to promote itself over the competition. Consumer loyalty is very important and the resort uses a database to keep track of visitation as well as conduct email blasts to market upcoming events or specials. In Mr. Belsey's experience, the email blasts are most effective if sent between 3:00 pm – 4:00 pm usually at the end of the week when people are thinking about the weekend. David was very open and available to answer questions after the presentation.

Mr. McQuilter showed the group a video presentation about his Tree Top Trekking business and gave a brief history of how it began. The Tree Top Trekking adventure is similar to the outdoor adventure style of the Scenic Caves in Collingwood; however the activity is much more extreme and is marketed towards a more adrenaline-seeking crowd. As a presenter, he too was very open and freely shared the costs of getting his operation up and running (roughly \$5000 / 2 trees to connect all the equipment to regulations) as well as his goal to expand the operation across the country through franchising with local partners. Currently the operation exists in both Ontario and Québec.

Mr. Smout introduced the group to his business – Riding Adventures: Powered by Yamaha. This attraction is located minutes away from the resort and is open year round. It offers tourists the experience of riding ATVs, Motorcycles, and Snowmobiles depending on the season and also teaches them proper safety and control while on the vehicles. It is a fairly unique business in that tourists can not find a similar experience in the surrounding area. As a presenter, Mr. Smout was very knowledgeable and enthusiastic about his business and was more than willing to answer any questions participants had. The group found his information very useful.

Mr. Miller of Hummer Tours is a young entrepreneur who provided this tour for years on Canada's west coast and has recently moved back to the Horseshoe Valley area to test the market. As the population is becoming increasingly concerned with the environment, participants wondered about the viability of such a tour. Mr. Miller gave various details about how he tries to limit any impact on the environment while driving through the trails. Proper driving techniques and a mixture of bio-diesel fuel help to keep environmental impact at a minimum, while still giving participants a thrill. Although this particular model of vehicle is no longer being built, it is apparently quite easy to find used and inexpensive hummers for sale over the internet.

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Evaluation of Mission (Taken from participant surveys and debrief discussions)

1. **Strengths**

- Knowledgeable presenters.
- Appropriate contacts and destinations.
- Diversity of the mission participants who interacted well with each other.

2. **Weaknesses**

- Schedule was a little too busy, more time for formal introductions among participants
- Area was not similar to the Atlantic market, tourism operators have a base of 13 million people to draw from in the Greater Toronto Area only 2-hours away
- Some presenters' presentations could have been tailored more to what the group was looking for specifically

3. **Conclusion: Lessons Learned / Recommendations**

In discussions with the participants, it appeared that all were satisfied with the outcome of the mission; however some felt that the schedule was a little too full with presentations and would have preferred some presentations take place on the bus while physically visiting more areas. The group got along very well together and a major strength of this mission was the opportunity they had to speak with each other and compare ideas and practices. The only weakness people felt was not having time to do a formal introduction of themselves and their respective operations as some participants had brought along presentation materials.