

Keeping the **Wave Moving**

The Next Steps: Building Your Aboriginal Tourism Experience

Aboriginal cultural tourism contributes to creating memorable experiences for Visitors and a way for First Nations to celebrate and share their cultures. More so, it has been proven that Aboriginal cultural tourism is a healthy contributor to BC and Canada's economy. When Native Interest Visitors choose an Aboriginal tourism experience, taxes are generated for BC and Canada, and when these visitors buy from local businesses and other businesses along the way when they are traveling to the destination. Municipalities also benefit – they gain through municipal taxes and visitor awareness, plus through a wealth of a new experienced people who move to the area influenced by the Aboriginal tourism experience. And the municipality benefits from connecting with an industry that is rapidly becoming recognized as a quality, respectful and important part of BC's tourism and greater economy. The challenge to Aboriginal tourism operators is how to keep this industry growing and how to benefit from this expansion and keep afloat in good times and bad.

ADVICE ON HOW TO RIDE THE WAVE

- 1) **CONTINUALLY EVOLVE** – recognize you have competition, not just other Aboriginal businesses in BC or Canada, but also other indigenous experiences worldwide like Australia, New Zealand, Africa, China and Russia.
 - ▶ Build your knowledge of market opportunities
 - ▶ Take courses and training, improve your skills and train your staff
 - ▶ Add new experiences; develop programming that keeps your experience fresh and exciting so that visitors, whether local or foreign, have a reason to return. Develop daily programs, seasonal activities, special exhibits or performances, interactive activities, change displays and exhibits bi-monthly, quarterly or annually, or by adding new experiences.
- 2) **BE CONSISTENT** – deliver an experience that is always reliable in quality and service.
- 3) **WHERE'S YOUR MONEY?** – put money aside for asset replacement, improvements and maintenance, and to keep your business afloat when the economy is slow. Know how to read and understand financial statements, and manage funds for short and long-term needs. Knowing where and how to keep the money flowing will help you stay afloat in times of a troubled economy.
- 4) **KNOW YOUR MARKETS AND VISITORS** – understand your customers and their needs to adapt your business appropriately. This may be in listing prices in USD or Euro dollars, advertising to target destinations or groups which include designing these ads in appropriate cultural colors, and using language and images that are appealing to these groups. Also, prepare your facility so that its service, safety and venue needs are what your target group requires. This could be in things like internet services, taking credit and bank card payments onsite, readily available medical and safety services, and handicap access.
- 5) **UTILIZE TECHNOLOGY** – ensure you have a web presence that is professionally produced and where through visitor tracking tools like Google Analytics you can find out who is visiting your website and what pages they like the most. Also be certain to use social networking tools like Facebook and Twitter; they help keep your followers up to date immediately and at a very low cost. Consider connecting with existing web tools like the First Nations web portal which lists best practices, is a source for planning and partnership tools, and provides information on regions. Be sure to consider other regional and specialized tourism websites for initiatives like advertising, membership, marketing programs, and web link exchanges.
- 6) **CONNECT** – be a part of local and regional initiatives, whether it is joining an association like the local Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) or your local BC tourism organization (i.e., Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association, Northern BC, Kootenay Rockies, Vancouver Coast and Mountains, Cariboo Chilcotin Coast, Tourism Association of Vancouver Island). Don't forget the local Chamber of Commerce, or a planning committee or special event. Participating in local area trade shows and market places, events and planning committees too help you connect with other businesses and leaders in your area who become the people who refer customers to your business. ●