



Innovation Snapshot

British Columbia has thousands of innovative entrepreneurs and leaders in tourism. These people are one of the best sources of information on what works and does not work in the industry.

Innovator in:
Visitor experience,
Marketing

Key Words: Visitor
Information, history,
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Baillie House Information Booth

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Background

Though Tourism BC Visitor Centres provide a lot of valuable information to visitors, because of their large geographic focus visitors sometimes do not receive the local knowledge and colour they desire. Historic Baillie House is in downtown Merritt, 2 ½ hrs north of Vancouver. Merritt is a town of approximately 8000 and bills itself as the Country Music Capital of Canada. Each year the Merritt MountainFest country music festival brings in over 100,000 people to the area, mostly from the Lower Mainland. The Merritt Chamber of Commerce used to handle visitor information, destination marketing, and economic development duties. However, for 2006 the City of Merritt offered three separate contracts for the three areas. The contract to provide visitor information services was won by the Nicola Valley Heritage Society, operator of the Baillie House property.

The Innovation

The Heritage Society has operated Baillie House since 1998 as a public green space and heritage site. This year is the first that it is being used as a visitor information booth. They are utilizing both paid and volunteer staff. It is an amazing experience for visitors because many of the volunteers have lived in Merritt their entire lives and have an incredible bank of local knowledge to draw upon. Staff members also offer free tea or coffee to visitors encouraging them to spend a bit more time learning about Merritt and the property itself. Visitors can explore much of what Merritt offers through brochures (which are racked free of charge for local businesses).

The Impact

The use of volunteers for visitor booth staff has many benefits for the Heritage Society. First are lower costs through not having to pay wages. Second is the increased local knowledge they offer. Most of the volunteers have been in Merritt for a long time and have many interesting stories to tell. Visitors really enjoy listening to the local flavour and many times it has convinced them to stay an extra day in Merritt. The local knowledge offered by Baillie House staff is an excellent complement to the regional and provincial information at the Tourism BC Visitor Centre just on the edge of town.

The Baillie House information booth is also unique in that it is housed in an historic property yet can also accommodate picnics, lunches, and private functions. It is an attraction of its own, is easy to find and located at the junction of 3 highways, and provides an interesting heritage experience while visitors get information on other Merritt attractions.