



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

Key Words: visitor experience, customer satisfaction, excellence in service, networking, partnerships, referrals

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Hosts David and Kimberly
May

A Rover's Rest Bed & Breakfast

By Carolyn Mead

Background

This unique four star accommodation is a BC approved Bed and Breakfast. It is located in the Shuswap Region near Sorrento off the Trans Canada Highway at Blind Bay. Co-owner, Kimberly May has both an accounting and hospitality degree that contributes to the business's operations. 'A Rover's Rest B&B' has been in operation since 2001 with a 10-29 percent growth rate each year. The owners have developed business-to-business partnerships where the focus is providing a regional benefit for everyone, so A Rover's Rest is not the sole business benefiting.

The Issue

Small tourism operators often struggle with how to gain repeat customers. Others struggle with how to increase the customer experience and satisfaction in spite of having an excellent tourism product. Some tourism operators remain isolated and work alone to deliver their product. The common goal for operators in tourism is excellent service delivery in order to increase customer satisfaction. To do this, there are many courses, books, manuals, workshops, and resources to provide tips for the entrepreneur. However, some of the more relevant and easy-to-implement visitor experience tips are gained from others in similar circumstances and connecting with other private operators.

The Innovation

A Rover's Rest Bed and Breakfast is a champion in increasing the visitor experience and drawing more visitors to the Shuswap region for longer periods of time. Kimberly's perspective on visitor experience is that the operator needs to "let them [the customer] tell you what they want [in order] to keep visitors here". From this



*Photos from
A Rover's Rest B and B
website*

perspective the operator can refer the customer to the appropriate tourism business which helps retain the visitor in the region. This is where the magic of networking can take place. According to Kimberly, networking provides “avenues you wouldn’t normally have.” With collaborative efforts between business owners there are more opportunities for tourism growth to the region and more operators benefit when visitors remain longer. Kimberly took it upon herself to create an inventory or data base of all the accommodations, including bed and breakfasts in the area with all the services and amenities that each provides. When a potential visitor calls and Kimberly cannot provide the accommodation she asks what type of accommodation is required in order to refer the visitor to the appropriate operator in the region. This inventory was shared with all the other B&B operators in the area to focus on regional promotion to the visitor. Kimberly’s endeavors reflect her words in that “no one is better than another, every service provider has something for someone.” Since this operator’s focus is “to bring them [the visitor] back to BC,” her networking efforts result in increased visitor experiences.

The Impact

A Rover’s Rest B&B has won numerous awards including Best Breakfast in Canada in 2005 and 2006 based on guests voting to a magazine published in Texas, USA. As well, an award voted on and given by local business peers for Best Home Based Business at the Shuswap Business Excellence Awards in 2004. The owners were nominated in 2005 for Community Booster and in 2006 for Business Improvement, both by the Shuswap Business Excellence Awards.

Organizations that these entrepreneurs belong to include Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association (TOTA), BC Bed and Breakfast Innkeepers Guild, and Salmon Arm Chamber of Commerce, where Kimberly sits as Director.

Customers receive many extras at A Rover’s Rest, but surprisingly they are not all about pampering, even though a visitor can receive a massage on-site. Some of the extras are based on providing in-depth information about all the amenities and attractions in the region. Kimberly has a comprehensive “To Do and See” book for the area, and will call an owner of an attraction (whom she knows by name) to book an appointment or to find out some piece of information that the visitor requires. Little extras while on-site at the B&B increases customer satisfaction which means repeat customers. Kimberly’s customers are staying 5-7 days rather than a one day stop. This means that the visitor is spending more money not only on accommodation, but within the region in other areas of food, beverage, recreation, and attractions. The focus of networking and increasing visitor experience means that win-win situations are created for regional tourism operators and visitors alike.