



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: Guest Experience, Customer Service, Repeat Business, Heritage.

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Telegraph Cove

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Background

Telegraph Cove was a thriving community in the early 1920's consisting of a tiny cannery and sawmill. It has a rich and colourful history during the days when logging and fishing were the main sources of income for the area. The community has been preserved as close to its original condition as possible through the incredible efforts of the past and present owners of the town, but mostly, by the recent owner, Mr. Gordie Graham.

Gordie initially purchased the Telegraph Cove Resort Campground and later, the town of Telegraph Cove. He takes "pride in being able to present it to the general public in as close to its original condition as possible", which, among other things, has necessitated his rebuilding of the entire boardwalk through the village. In addition to the physical environment of Telegraph Cove, Gordie understands that the interaction of his staff is equally important to a successful visitor experience. Gordie looks for staff that have exceptional interpersonal relations skills, and who love their jobs, as he knows that passion for their work comes through in their interaction with the guests. As Gordie says, "Happy staff equals happy visitor experience."

The Issue

The issue was how to create a memorable visitor experience in a historically significant area. Guests come for the authentic pioneer appeal, but aren't necessarily ready to totally 'rough it'.

The Innovation

Gordie Graham came up with a balanced solution. "The buildings have kept their original charm from the past with the old "unimproved" look on the exterior [including moss covered roofs] but have been given fresh new modernized decor on the interior'. When exterior repairs are necessary,

Gordie sometimes mills his own logs for authentic rough cut replacement planks and siding. But for the comfort of the guests, the interior of the cottages and houses have been renovated to modern standards for convenience and comfort. The cottages and houses are self-contained with dishes, silverware, pots and pans. All beds have linen and blankets. However, the units do not have televisions or telephones, but this is communicated to the guests in advance and in some way it adds to the charm of staying in a pioneer setting. The cottages are even furnished with board games for the entertainment of the guests. With so much to see and do in the area, (whale watching, fishing, hiking, wildlife viewing, dining) who has time for TV anyways.

In the situation where an original building has had to be removed for safety reasons, Gordie was very careful to rebuild the new structure in keeping with the original location, design and aesthetics, and using as much local material as possible. Gordie frequently uses reclaimed material in his renovations. He recently acquired the original windows from the old Oak Bay Beach Hotel that was located in Victoria and has given them a new home in Telegraph Cove's old post office building.

To provide the guests with a rich experience, Gordie barbeques salmon on the boardwalk in the evenings, and has also created an amazing restaurant which is decorated with historic memorabilia, as well as modern art depicting the orca motif. Gordie also pays particular attention to keeping his staff happy. He provides them with onsite accommodations and opportunities to access activities in the surrounding area, such as fishing and whale watching, during their free time,.

The Impact

Visitors come for sport fishing, wildlife viewing including orcas, eagles and grizzly bears, or to just simply relax and rejuvenate. It's not hard to see why Telegraph Cove has been voted one of the ten best towns to visit in Canada by travel writers (Harrowsmith Magazine).

Many of the visitors to Telegraph Cove are repeat customers who say they return year after year because they "feel like family". Gordie assists in creating this atmosphere by hiring great customer focused staff whose love for their jobs is reflected in the high quality of service they provide for the guests. Gordie believes that if your guests have a great visitor experience starting with their reception and then their serving staff, "after that you'd have to screw up really bad for them to notice".

Thanks to Gordie's dedication to Telegraph Cove, this historic site has been authentically preserved for the enjoyment of visitors, and their experience is heightened by the high levels of customer service provided by the staff.