

Adventure/Ecotourism Operators

As retiring baby boomers continue to reshape the face of Canadian leisure, the travel industry is witnessing a corresponding shift toward experiential- and nature-based tourism. This new wave of adventure seekers is interested in pristine environments and authentic local cultures—two more great reasons to embrace as many sustainable practices as possible.

Quick Start



Adventure works up an appetite! Food is often a significant draw for ecotourists. As a food provider, check out the [Food Services](#) of this toolkit for tips on offering sustainable and scrumptious fare. First, think about what your guests eat. Where possible, buy local and/or organic food. Second, examine how your guests eat. Are you using disposable plates, cups, cutlery, and plastic wrap for all your picnics and camp meals? Ditch the disposables and invest in some lightweight camping cookware and utensils. Many attractive and high-quality utensils are now available. Is this something that you could put your logo on and give as a gift to the guests?

Sharing the Commons

- ◆ **Make local arrangements.** Utilize local guides and suppliers to maximize economic benefits for your host community or region.
- ◆ **Visit national, provincial and regional parks.** Try to incorporate national, provincial and regional parks and monuments into your itineraries. Fees support park upkeep and conservation projects, which in turn help to preserve our natural heritage.
- ◆ **Partner with First Nations communities.** Create opportunities for open dialogue and consultation with First Nations communities. Arrange partnerships with local tours and guides operated by First Nations people. Involve First Nations groups when identifying potential remote campsites to avoid culturally or archeologically sensitive locations.
- ◆ **Educate travellers.** Develop a code of backcountry ethics and conduct, and include it in your opening-day orientation.
- ◆ **Contribute to the community.** Donate to local charities, projects and organizations dedicated to preserving Canadian wilderness.
- ◆ **Give locally.** Offer locally made souvenirs to improve the regional economy, and to add a unique and authentic element to a tour. Examples might include artwork and photographs of local landscapes, wildlife and culture, jewellery made with local materials, preserves, honeys, maple syrup, handmade crafts and quilts, and Aboriginal and Inuit art.
- ◆ **Expand your horizons.** "Learning" travel is a growing sector in the tourism industry. If you don't already offer an educational component in your tour, consider adding one. You might invite a history professor, biologist or archaeologist along on a tour.

Tour Size: Factoring the Ecosystem Into the Profit Calculator

An important aspect of operating a sustainable adventure tour is determining what group size is the most profitable and the most sustainable. The answer will depend on what is offered in the tour and where the tour goes. When calculating your maximum tour size, consider:

- ◆ Minimizing environmental and cultural impacts
- ◆ Ensuring guides are able to have personal contact with guests
- ◆ Ensuring guides are able to control the situation at all times
- ◆ Improving group rapport
- ◆ Enhancing the enjoyment of the environment and the activities for all guests
- ◆ Increasing guests' opportunities to interact with locals
- ◆ Creating a safe environment-make sure that group sizes in remote areas can be accommodated by evacuation services in the event of an emergency.

Smaller group sizes provide more privacy to guests, and also facilitate the use of smaller vehicles, which can in turn open up access to more remote areas. Experiment with group sizes and speak with your guests about their experience to determine what works best for the environment, the guest experience and your bottom line.

Wildlife Encounters

Your customers may have the remarkable experience of seeing a nest of hatching birds or a fawn eating lunch. Such spectacles are wonderful memories. Here are a few things to keep in mind.

- ◆ **Know your area.** Be aware of the presence of wildlife, and the general locations and common travel routes of animals. Avoid breeding and nesting sites. Consult with local environmental groups or researchers for information on sensitive areas and times of year to avoid visits.
- ◆ **Slow down.** Keep vehicle speeds to a minimum while travelling in wildlife areas.
- ◆ **Talk it up.** Educate staff and travellers through environmental immersion programs and interpretive talks. Invite special guest speakers such as biologists and zoologists to point out signs of nesting.
- ◆ **Don't spook the wildlife.** Unless it's hunting season, minimize noise and disturbances like sudden movements, flash photography, bright-coloured clothing and open fires. These often spook animals.
- ◆ **Keep up with tradition.** Offer your guests opportunities to learn from Native elders about local wildlife and plants.

Case Study: Mind the G.A.P.

For the better part of two decades, sustainable tourism outfitter [G.A.P Adventures](#) has worked to bolster local economies while minimizing negative environmental and cultural impacts. In 2006, Condé Nast Traveler named the Canadian firm to its 12th annual Green List, citing G.A.P.'s commitment to environmental initiatives, contributions to local communities and the overall quality of the guest experience. The magazine singled out the company for demonstrating "the best ways to preserve the environments and cultures that make this planet worth exploring."

Consider adopting some or all of G.A.P.'s strategies:

- ◆ Create a planet-positive project: "Book a Trip, Plant a Tree"
- ◆ Support local community initiatives
- ◆ Create an ecotourism code of ethics
- ◆ Maintain small group sizes to limit negative social and environmental impacts
- ◆ Incorporate home stays where possible
- ◆ Support the local economy by visiting local restaurants and markets, and staying in small-scale hotels where possible
- ◆ Train tour leaders and travellers in low-impact travel.

In the Water

The adventure tourism sector relies heavily on water-based activities such as sailing, kayaking, canoeing, snorkelling, whitewater rafting and whale-watching. As such, it also bears a responsibility to preserve and protect this shared natural resource. Here, a few things to keep in mind.

- ◆ **Do not dump**-or allow your guests to dump-any wastewater, sewage or refuse into fresh water. Establish a "take pictures, leave bubbles" policy with your customers.

Case Study: The Sea of Green

[Ocean Quest](#) is a sustainable adventure tourism operator, offering diving tours to the Bell Island Shipwrecks in Conception Bay and other areas off the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador. The company works to enhance the long-term viability and sustainability of the tourism industry by preserving the underwater heritage and encouraging all local and tourist divers to adopt their simple motto-"take only pictures, leave only bubbles".

Ocean Quest has proven itself a sustainable-tourism leader by developing new initiatives such as an annual "Youth and the Oceans" conference. The company also participates in beach cleanups, ghost-net retrieval programs, summer environmental day camps, and lobbying against the illegal dumping of oil, toxins and garbage at sea. Parks Canada has recognized the firm's efforts with numerous sustainable tourism awards.

- ◆ **Anchor away.** If anchoring is absolutely necessary, make sure your boats only drop the hook in designated areas. Use soft wraps (e.g. cushion rope) when tying them to trees to minimize damage to bark and branches.
- ◆ **Run cleaner.** Regularly service your boat engines and when the time comes to replace them, do so with more fuel-efficient, cleaner-burning models.
- ◆ **Think veggies.** If you operate a larger vessel with inboard engines, consider [biodiesel](#) as an alternative fuel source. It is made from used vegetable oil and produces fewer emissions than petroleum or diesel-based fuels. Biodiesel can replace or blend with petroleum diesel with little or no engine modifications.
- ◆ **Avoid oil spills.** Use a funnel when refuelling to avoid spillage.

On the Ground

If your company offers hiking, trekking, cycling and archaeological tours, consider integrating the following best practices into your operations:

- ◆ **Be low impact.** Encourage your guests to use only biodegradable soap in freshwater streams and lakes. Avoid camping closer than 30 m (98 ft) from bodies of water and 100 m (330 ft) from cave entrances.
- ◆ **Stick to the beaten path.** Lessen your impact by using established camps and trail networks. Keep to the middle of tracks, and seek out the highest and driest ground to lessen erosion.
- ◆ **Try the direct route.** When transporting luggage for tours to accommodation sites, consider efficiencies. Take the direct route to the destination rather than following groups as they travel by bicycle or on foot.
- ◆ **Prevent fires.** Avoid open fires and remove all artificial structures after use.

Smokey Says

Recreational campfires cause many wildfires each year. Follow these steps for responsible fire prevention:

- ◆ Check for local restrictions.
- ◆ Consider the wind conditions. If the wind is strong enough to carry sparks to combustible material like twigs and leaves, don't light up.
- ◆ Use a designated fire pit. If there is no designated fire pit, clear a two m (five ft) circle down to bare earth and set your fire in the centre.
- ◆ Keep your fire small and a reasonable distance away from any flammable materials.
- ◆ Keep water and a shovel nearby, and never leave your fire unattended.
- ◆ Extinguish your fire by stirring water into the ashes until it is cold to the touch-hot coals can reignite the fire
- ◆ **Switch it up.** Change around tour routes to allow regeneration and avoid irreversible damage caused by repeated use.
- ◆ **Leave no trace-Leave No Trace** is a widely embraced global campaign that is teaching active adventurers to minimize their environmental impact.

- ◆ **Teach client care.** Train clients to take care of minor issues such as flat tires to reduce the number of "assistance requested" vehicle calls.
- ◆ **Avoid potty issues.** Use permanent composting toilets or bury human waste at least 15 cm (six in) deep and 100 m (330 ft) from water sources or campsites.

Horsing Around

If your operation relies on horses for pack touring or riding, you are already minimizing your environmental footprint. Here's how to avoid negatively impacting wild species and habitats.

- ◆ **Avoid introductions.** Minimize the odds of introducing non-native seeds into a sensitive wilderness ecosystem—deliver feed to horses through a nosebag, collect and remove manure, and water animals by trough or bucket.
- ◆ **Erect fences.** Use a portable fence and soft ties when tethering. Pen horses at least 30 m (100 ft) from the nearest water body and in an area at least 15 sq m (160 sq ft) per animal.

Moving Mountains

In recent years, rock climbing has grown in popularity. Rock formations are precious resources like any other natural wonder. Consider these suggestions when operating climbing adventures.

- ◆ **Chalk it up.** Minimize the use of chalk when rock climbing as it can detract from the natural appearance of rock formations.
- ◆ **Don't be a chip off the old block.** Use soft materials to cushion ropes where they pass around natural anchors. Avoid excessive use of bolts on climbing areas.
- ◆ **Keep them in the dark.** Strong lighting in caves can actually encourage the growth of algae and other foreign species. These can also be harmful to wildlife that dwells in caves.
- ◆ **Go with the flow.** Paths should not block natural water flows and structures should be built to protect sensitive cave formations.

Let it Snow

Downhill skiing, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, heli-skiing, dogsledding and polar treks are all wonderful Canadian pursuits. Just be sure to keep the backcountry as pristine as possible.

- ◆ **Share a ride.** Minimize the use of motorized transport and consider sharing vehicles with other tour operators or accommodation providers.
- ◆ **Make snow.** Aim for good energy, waste and water practices when using snow-making machines.
- ◆ **Find homes.** Animals involved in sledding can enjoy a wonderful quality of life. Work with local animal organizations to find dogs new homes once they are no longer able to participate in sledding.
- ◆ **Take the path of least resistance.** Use established routes and slopes for all snow-based recreational activities.
- ◆ **Diversify.** Climate change will continue to significantly impact snow-based tourism operators. As the seasons shorten, tour operators might consider diversifying their guest offerings. Nature-based and cultural activities can supplement existing activities and provide year-round revenue.

Case Study: Small But Savvy

[Great Excursions Company](#), a small Regina, Saskatchewan-based group-adventure tour operator, offers guests a wonderful dogsledding holiday in Quebec. As part of its commitment to responsible and sustainable tourism, its management ensures that working dogs are treated ethically. The company uses recycled products and supports local businesses.

Great Excursions has also made a commitment to share its knowledge and to contribute to the preservation of the region's traditional cultural activities via collaboration with First Nations communities.

Finally, recognizing that sustainability is as much a social responsibility as it is an environmental and economic concern, the company provides opportunities for young people with special mental and physical challenges.