

Creating
Experiences
A toolkit for the tourism industry

“The first step in exceeding your customers’ expectations, is to know those expectations.”

–Roy H. Williams

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Welcome

This toolkit is designed to provide information about the business opportunities that surround experiential travel. Within the pages of this document you will discover helpful information that will aid your efforts in creating compelling experiences that may entice visitors to come and explore Newfoundland and Labrador. Also included are

tools and worksheets to help keep you focused on your audience and your business goals. You will find several examples of successful operators who have embraced the spirit of experiential tourism. We hope their stories will ignite your passion, and inspire you to create your very own unique experience for travellers to enjoy.

Inspiring Travel Here

When travellers visit Newfoundland and Labrador they come to discover our natural creativity, environment, and unique culture. All with the expectation that they can be a part of it. Whether it's dancing, listening to live music, or enjoying a meal together - they want to be at the centre of the experience. It can be as majestic as watching icebergs from the deck of a tour boat, or as humble as walking along a sliver of our 29,000 kilometres of coastline. With so many things to see and do, as residents, sometimes we can take that for granted. What we may see as normal or insignificant, a visitor might view as an extraordinary adventure.

We are unique here - it's a place that's a half hour off-kilter with the rest of the world. Everything from how we speak, our sense of humour, and the way in which we carry ourselves - many of those qualities you won't find anywhere else. They are our strengths and assets. When people see advertising for Newfoundland and Labrador, they immediately realize: "This is different. I want to be there. I need to be there."

Now, think of your own travels. The memories you take back with you - the sights, sounds, tastes, and smells, along with the people you've met - they're all part of the spirit of this place. Our visitors want to be moved by that spirit, by our spirit. It's the essence of what Newfoundland and Labrador feels like.

This booklet outlines the expectations and demands of our visitors. In the face of an increasingly competitive market, winning the hearts and minds of travellers has never been so critical.

There is no one-size-fits-all plan or idea. However, throughout this booklet you'll learn about a few of our more successful operators. We share their stories to help you better understand what can be possible. Each business offers a distinct experience, and there are common themes that apply to all of them. We hope they'll inspire you as you work through the questions, and help you develop a profitable way to share the distinct experiences of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Using the province's 10-year strategy, *Uncommon Potential: A Vision for Newfoundland and Labrador Tourism* as a guide, government and industry are taking provincial tourism to unprecedented levels of success. Tourism spending reached \$1 billion in Newfoundland and Labrador for the first time in 2011, putting the province well ahead of schedule for achieving the Vision 2020 goal of doubling tourism spending to \$1.6 billion annually. Our approach to research, marketing, and product development has become more sophisticated, and because of that we are seeing the benefits.

The greatest opportunity for differentiation of Newfoundland and Labrador from our tourism competitors continues to lie in our creativity, brand positioning, and our brand personality of being natural and uncomplicated, spontaneous, genuine and authentic, witty and funny. We never take ourselves too seriously.

Our province's award-winning tourism marketing campaign has become one of the most recognizable in the country. The ads evoke an emotional response from the audience through storytelling, rather than just showcasing a collection

of tourism products. It gives the viewer at home a bird's-eye view of a natural, yet surprisingly exotic destination. This approach is appealing to our target group of experienced travellers that seek to learn something not only about the destination, but about themselves.

The success of Newfoundland and Labrador's creative strategy and ad executions has been in showcasing this place through storytelling. When we tell our stories, we always keep the following criteria in mind:

- » Be relevant to the potential traveller.
- » Differentiate Newfoundland and Labrador from competing tourism destinations.
- » Be exclusive and unique to Newfoundland and Labrador.
- » Be deliverable as an experience.

We are capturing the hearts and minds of travellers, and as an industry we must continue to develop, align, and deliver the types of compelling experiences today's travellers are seeking.

Our tourism industry must work hard to deliver on our brand's promise by creating memorable experiences designed to connect travellers to the special places, people, and cultures within communities across our province. This will further advance our tourism industry, help boost the economy, and strengthen opportunities in all regions of our province.

Who are our visitors and what are they looking for?

For Newfoundland and Labrador, there is no such thing as an accidental tourist. It takes deliberate action to visit here, compelled by curiosity and the promise of what is unique and different in our culture, history, lifestyle, and dramatic scenery.

Our research confirms that typical Touring & Explorer travellers coming to Newfoundland and Labrador are:

- » Singles and couples aged 45+ with no children living at home.
- » Well-educated and higher than average household incomes.
- » Looking to discover the unusual, the exotic, the unscripted, and off-the-beaten-path.
- » Knowledgeable, experienced, and curious travellers for whom travel is a form of self-expression and discovery.
- » Seeking a broad range of authentic, quality tourism experiences.
- » Expecting to receive value for their money.
- » Primarily from Ontario, Alberta, English-speaking Québec, and the Maritimes.
- » Secondary markets include the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany.

In order to increase tourism revenue, it is extremely important that we continue to attract more travellers into the province, and encourage those travellers to stay longer and spend more. Newfoundland and Labrador Tourism continues to focus efforts and concentrate resources on doing just that.

Resident travellers (Newfoundlanders and Labradorians that tour and explore within the province) also play a vital role in growing our tourism industry. Those of us travelling the province for pleasure comprise an important customer base for many tourism operators - and we all continue to be travel, and brand, ambassadors.

Most tourism operators in the province will tell you that their customer base is a mix of travellers - provincial, national, and international. The important thing to recognize and remember is that no matter where they come from, travellers today want more out of their vacation time - we all want to participate in or be a part of something that's memorable and unique to this place.

What is Experiential Travel?

Research confirms that travellers really want to go beyond spectating. Travel is driven by a deep emotional motivation to experience new people, culture, and places, and perhaps to discover something inside themselves along the way. They want to immerse themselves in the local culture and participate whenever and wherever they can. Experiential travel is all about engaging the visitor. The aim is to provide something exclusive and integrate as many of the five senses as possible as the visitor experiences the true stories of a destination.

Experiential travel represents a new layer of opportunity beyond delivering traditional tourism products based on goods and services. Undoubtedly, existing and potential tourism operators in Newfoundland and Labrador are in an enviable position. Our destination offers the potential of unique, compelling experiences that are differentiated from traditional travel places. Our rugged landscape comes with 29,000 kilometres of coastline, infused with rich icons of whales, icebergs, and wildlife. It's a place steeped in

creativity with a vibrant spirit, engaging culture, and an ancient history. A place that can appeal to our visitors' sense of a personal and rewarding journey.

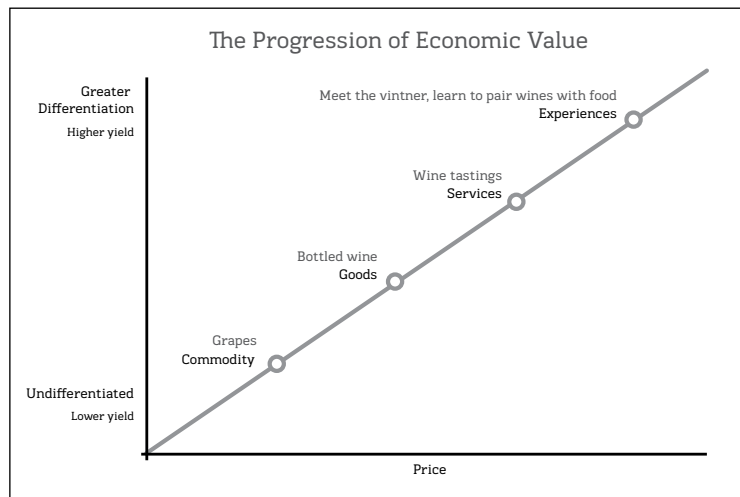
How does it work?

It's pure economics. The basic premise is that commodities, goods, services, and experiences, all offer a distinct economic difference and appeal to specific consumer sensibilities when purchased and consumed. As you move up the scale of economic progression and customize the use of the commodity, good, or service, you increase your competitive positioning and can increase the price.

Using a generic tourism example of a winery, here's a simple example of how the scale applies.

- » **Commodity** (needed to make the good): Grapes.
- » **Goods** (needed to provide the service): Wine produced.
- » **Services** (used to promote sales): Online purchasing, shipping, tours to learn about the vineyard, and wine tastings on the property.
- » **Experience**: Meet the vintner or sommelier and engage in a personalized, hands-on experience that connects you to the land, the people, and something you likely love - wine. Perhaps the experience includes a chef who creates an exquisite meal and pairs the food and wine perfectly with each other.

Experiences incorporate commodities, goods, and services and use these as elements in developing tourism offers that are designed to create lasting memories. Not all businesses deliver experiences, but they represent a choice for tourism businesses to move up the ladder of economic opportunity, differentiate their businesses, and provide a new level of visitor experience to their guests.



Source: Nancy Arsenault, Celes Davar and Todd Lucier (2011)

Success Story #1

St. John's Haunted Hike

www.hauntedhike.com

The St. John's Haunted Hike is an award-winning nighttime tour through the back alleys and spooky history of downtown St. John's.

For ten dollars per soul, the Rev. Thomas Wyckham Jarvis, Esq., leads travellers from the steps of the Anglican Cathedral into stories of the unexplained nightly between Sunday and Thursday from June to September. He asks only that you wear appropriate footwear and come with a willingness to believe.

Jarvis is a performer, researcher, writer, and storyteller who began the tour in 1997. "I think our first season... it ran, maybe 10 weeks, and now we go right from the first of June 'til the middle of September. We've expanded our season and tripled our offerings."

In addition to the Haunted Hike, Jarvis has partnered with Parks Canada to offer Ghosts of Signal Hill on Friday nights in summer.

He got the idea for the hike after experiencing similar offerings in other cities.

"I think one of the things that sets us apart is that we do the tours in character. You're in costume, so they're entertaining and fun and slightly spooky," says Jarvis.

"People get a real experience when they come on the tour. They love seeing the hidden side of the city that they don't get on other types of tours."

Jarvis says another reason for their success is its simplicity. "We keep things pretty simple. We don't go overboard."

Audience feedback has helped Jarvis keep the tour fresh. "People will come up to us afterward and tell us their stories. And some of this material that is now on the hike is actually from stories clients have told us. And that's great. I love that it's a living tradition."

The hike allows participants to feel part of the action. "I think people are looking for things that allow them to participate in some way, and with the hike people can get in and walk around and feel that they are part of a story, and I think that's really important. People don't want to be passers/watchers. They want to be in there and experiencing things for themselves," says Jarvis.

Here's what people on TripAdvisor have to say: "Don't miss the Haunted Hike if visiting St. John's."; "Spooky and Spectacular Time."; "... Best entertainment in St. John's."

Success Story #2

Lighthouse Picnics

www.lighthousepicnics.ca

Lighthouse Picnics has been offering gourmet lunches in Ferryland on the Irish Loop since 2003. For about \$25 you get a salad, a sandwich, a dessert, and real lemonade. When you order, you're given a picnic blanket, and shortly after you choose your spot outside and gaze over the ocean watching for whales, your meal is delivered in a picnic basket.

The lighthouse is a 25-minute stroll from the Colony of Avalon archaeological site (1621). Owner Jill Curran offers the meals Wednesday to Sunday from 11:30am to 4:30pm. The season runs mid-May to end-September.

Curran is from Ferryland. In fact, her grandmother was born at the lighthouse, which has been here since 1870. When she first arrived back home, the building was in rough shape and the concept was unproven. "Are people going to come?"

Come they did - through word of mouth the news began to spread. "We've just finished our twelfth season, and we still haven't advertised other than to say 'we're open.'"

"We do have a really solid customer base that is local, and that has been the key to us being successful," says Curran. "Not only are they wonderful repeat customers, but they've been wonderful ambassadors for us."

But it's not all local. "The visitors that we get from out of the province are totally a range of ages and backgrounds, and just people that would be up for a little adventure and up for something a little outside of the norm," she says.

"It's as much about the food, it's as much about the walk, it's as much about the sitting down and looking at the ocean, it's as much about having no telephone... When people kind of open themselves to all of that and allow themselves to just have an afternoon of not feeling the pressure of 'Oh, my God, I've got to be somewhere else in five minutes' - they really get the true Lighthouse Picnics experience. You can just see them totally relax and their stresses kind of wash away."

Simplicity is one key to their success. "We've kept it really simple. It's a small menu, everything made from scratch each day so obviously the quality is very good. Simple has helped us connect with people."

Authenticity is another. "Everyone wants to tell the story of where they're from, and I just think it's an awesome place to be in your life to be sharing what you love on a daily basis."

Here's what people say on TripAdvisor: "You have not lived until you have a Lighthouse Picnic, Ferryland, NL."; "Do not leave Newfoundland without doing this!"

The experience advantage

Taking your tourism business to the next level by creating a unique experience may sound challenging or even risky to some. However, many operators in Newfoundland and Labrador offer tourism experiences and they will tell you that among the long list of benefits, the most exciting one is the boost to their bottom line.

What are the benefits?

- » Allows you to be innovative and truly responsive to the reasons why people travel.
- » Travellers are looking for quality experiences, and you can craft yours to satisfy that demand.
- » Visitors want to immerse themselves into local culture – they want to see, hear, and smell new things – they want to touch and taste if they can and they will pay more for these experiences.
- » Provides you with a competitive advantage.
- » Allows you to consistently exceed customer expectations.
- » As you create an original experience in your community that's based on a unique story or theme, this will raise your profile within your community.
- » A low-cost investment, as experiences don't have to involve capital expenditures.
- » Happy customers post great online reviews and provide positive word-of-mouth promotion.
- » The opportunity might also exist to work with community partners and other businesses to promote a complete destination experience, particularly in rural communities.

Is experiential tourism just a trend?

No. Travellers around the world are looking to do more than just take pictures while on vacation. They want authentic experiences. They want to take part in something that's special and exclusive to the places they visited. They want to smell, touch, and taste. They want to take home that real experience so they can remember it and share it with others.

Experiential travel represents a real opportunity for tourism operators, not-for-profit organizations, and government attractions such as parks and historic sites. It involves a customer-centric approach to planning travel, communicating with visitors, and delivering programs that are aligned with what visitors are interested in experiencing.

Some tourism operators will endeavor to make the shift from selling tourism products to offering tourism experiences. While others will be more than satisfied to keep doing as they have been with their current tourism product. Experiential travel will not be for everyone – and that's okay. However, for those who would like to take their tourism business to a new level with the opportunity to increase their bottom line – this may be the opportunity you are looking for.

Success Story #3

Linkum Tours

www.linkumtours.com

Ed English started Linkum Tours in the 1990s and since then has added two unique accommodations: lighthouse keepers' homes in northern and southwestern Newfoundland that he's turned into four-star inns. The northernmost accommodation is Quirpon (pronounced car-poon) Lighthouse Inn on Quirpon Island. (Rates: \$250 to \$375, including a boat to and from the island and all meals.) French explorer Jacques Cartier anchored here in 1534, and Captain James Cook charted the area in 1763. But long before that it was an aboriginal hunting area, and trails that English has developed take visitors to the remnants of their sod huts, built 2,000 to 3,000 years ago. What drew aboriginal hunters here was whales, and here you will find the longest whale-watching and iceberg-viewing season on the Island of Newfoundland.

"That kind of makes it special in itself," says English. For those who want to get closer to the whales, there are sea kayaking and Zodiac tours. "We do Zodiac tours every day. You get the orcas and dolphins... touching the sides of the boats."

Owning the property and the boats makes all the difference. "If I just brought a Zodiac boat tour or kayaking, we could not make a living," he says. "The fact that we own the property and the tour company

and everything all built together means that we are able to support our own growth."

In southwest Newfoundland he owns Cape Anguille Lighthouse Inn at the westernmost tip of the island. Rates are \$100 to \$110, with meals extra. The lighthouse is near Codroy Valley International Wetlands, a major stopover for migrating birds. There are whales here, too.

And Linkum Tours takes travellers all over. Partnerships are crucial to the tour company. "We use a lot of accommodators, and different packages, different providers, boat tours like Western Brook Pond" in Gros Morne National Park. They also partner with the Inuit in Labrador. "We always work with them when we are off searching for the polar bears."

For newcomers to the industry, English says expect things to "be lean for a bunch of years," and "understand the cost of being your own boss." He had it lean at first, but "we get a lot of return people now," many bringing along friends or relatives.

Here's what some TripAdvisor commentators had to say about Quirpon Lighthouse Inn: "Great Place to Stay with Lots to Do."; "Exactly what I hoped for." And a comment about Cape Anguille Lighthouse Inn: "Another perfect place in western Newfoundland."

Success Story #4

Tour Labrador

www.tourlabrador.ca

Carmen Hancock is a relative newcomer to the tourism industry, but in the past few years she's built Tour Labrador into the go-to operator in southeastern Labrador. She and her staff offer one- to three-night packages for individuals and for small groups that include local guides, all meals, accommodations, experiences, site passes, and transportation. Headquartered at Point Amour Lighthouse, Tour Labrador offers a balance of comfort and historic appeal. Fine dining - including special meals at the lighthouse - is a key deliverable.

"Our customers are primarily 50 to 55+, some families, retired, high disposable income, and they are looking to experience Labrador in a group setting," she says. "Their primary interests are cultural and historical site visitation."

But there is a bit of adventure. They offer a six-day hiking adventure on the Labrador Pioneer Footpath, salmon fishing on the Forteau and Pinware Rivers, Zodiac tours to see puffins and icebergs, and aquaculture tours to a scallop farm. Their Battle Harbour offering covers four days and three nights in this unique community.

Tour Labrador covers the whole southeast coast from L'Anse-au-Clair to Battle Harbour. In such a small area, "understanding everyone" is exactly what it means. "The biggest recommendation I would have is remembering that we are a really small province and small industry... product and cross-promotion are very important," she says.

Co-operation is key. "All our sites are partners, like Battle Harbour, Red Bay, and Point Amour," says Hancock. "We also have partner businesses that we work with, especially with our shore excursions, cruise ships, and also our tour packages."

Hancock is also a big believer in the power of social media. "We've been really trying to drive our visitors to TripAdvisor, actually. We know that, like ourselves, most people are trying to plan their trip. We want people sending us their feedback, positive or negative." She also relies on email and her social media a lot, offering potential clients various options. "We take all of the work out of planning your trip to Labrador."

Here's what people on TripAdvisor have to say: "4-day tour of Labrador a dream of ours became a reality in 2014."; "Labrador in a day has made us want for more."

Our Core Travel Experiences

Tourism operators should deliver on our brand's promise by creating memorable experiences. Our research tells us there are key areas of interest when it comes to what travellers are looking for when vacationing in Newfoundland and Labrador. For that reason, our brand is supported by these core experience categories:

- » **Nature and Wilderness**
Ocean, coast / coastline, nature, wildlife, geology.
- » **People and Culture**
Local culture, festivals and events, culinary, local art, city activities, live entertainment, aboriginal experiences.
- » **History and Heritage**
Lighthouses, historic sites, UNESCO World Heritage sites, pleasure walking in communities, museums and galleries.

Success Story #5

Wooden Boat Museum

www.woodenboatmuseum.com

This museum in Winterton is where the history and traditions of boat building in this province, and especially in Trinity Bay, come to life. The exhibits show how the wooden boat contributed to the province's economy over the centuries, how designs changed, and how new techniques were adopted.

But it's in the boat shed where this portal between the past and the present becomes an educational and sensory experience. While your eyes take in the models, the tools, and the projects, your nose registers the smell of wood shavings, okum, and freshly sawed timber. This is the real hands-on stuff, where anyone who's ever wanted to learn to build a boat will find a happy home. You can even taste the woodiness in the air.

The museum offers three educational workshops: Level One is a three-hour introduction, ideal for those on vacation; Level Two is a day-long session for those interested in more than an introduction; and Level Three is a week-long workshop where participants build a boat - leaving them with not only the

knowledge, but an appreciation for the tradition of boatbuilding. The prices for the various workshops are on their website.

"It took four years to develop our workshops," says Beverley King, Project Manager and the glue that holds the operation together. For someone who just wants to drop in and have a look, rates range from \$3 for children under 12 to \$7 for adults and \$15 for a family.

There are various options for schools to participate, and King says the feedback they get from students tells it all: "They get more than what they expected."

Most people hear about the museum by word of mouth, but social media plays a part, too. "We encourage people to use TripAdvisor," says King, both for planning and for comments after a visit.

Here's what people on TripAdvisor have to say: "Definitely worth a visit."; "The beauty of wooden boats!"

Success Story #6

Rafting Newfoundland

www.riverfrontchalets.ca

Paul and Joy Rose started offering guided rafting tours on the mighty Exploits River in 1997. In 2008, they added four luxury chalets and this enabled them to expand their season by offering snowmobile tours over some of the longest-season trails on the island. Adult rates for the river rafting tours on the Badger Chute are \$109 (\$89 for children), which includes lunch; the snowmobile tours range from \$75 to \$95 (rentals are \$189); and the chalets range from \$199 to \$329.

The way Joy sees it, there have been three keys to their success. "We offer a product that nobody else is offering," she says of the river rafting tours. "Pick something unique. Don't be a copycat of someone else, because that's not good for anyone's business."

Her advice for people getting into tourism? "Pick something that you like to do." Start small and build it up. Don't be discouraged if the first season doesn't meet expectations. "We might have had 10 customers the first year," she recalls.

Their location at Aspen Brook - about 20 kilometres west of Grand Falls-Windsor on Route 1 - is another big plus. "We are the only chalets in a 100-kilometre radius," says Joy.

Who are their customers? "Mostly who we get are Newfoundlanders, and all the way along, that's been our main customer base," she says, "primarily from the Avalon." But things change. "The last couple of years we've been getting a lot more customers from Ontario."

Listening to their customers has helped them deliver a better product over time, says Joy. "We get the guides' feedback and then alter our trip to make it better every year. We get a lot of repeat rafting customers that have been back four or five times and they see the difference and appreciate it."

Rafting Newfoundland has won a couple of awards from TripAdvisor, and Joy says tourism operators should embrace this customer-driven feedback. "Work with TripAdvisor to keep it up," is her advice.

*“You are never too old to
set another goal or
to dream a new dream.”*

-C. S. Lewis

Workbook: Developing a Tourism Experience

As you've seen throughout this toolkit, there are a variety of ways to develop a tourism experience. The following section is designed to help better define the experience you intend to offer potential visitors to Newfoundland and Labrador.

STEP
2

Know your community and region.

☀ Look around your community and business with a fresh set of eyes, and start making a list of special people and places that make your community unique. Write down your answer to these questions: What makes your community special? Why do people like to live here? What do they do that visitors may be interested in seeing, learning about, or engaging in?

☀ Where are some unique, less-travelled places to go that locals know but visitors may not?

☀ Are there any iconic people, places, celebrations, festivals, and events that draw visitors regularly?

☀ Who are the storytellers, musicians, and artisans?
Are there any local people who love to engage /
entertain others?

☀ Are there any underutilized buildings, trails,
community centres, or legion halls that could
be interesting places to host a group activity?

STEP
3

Identify experiential opportunities.

☀ Identify experiential opportunities unique to your business. What do you have that is unique to you? Think about the types of experiences that make sense for your business.

✱ What unique stories can be told as a part of your tourism offering? Consider stories from your community or region.

✱ How can you creatively expand on your tourism offering? Can you appeal to more senses than sight and sound? (Perhaps you can add smell, taste, or touch?)

STEP
4

Identify partnerships.

✱ Partnerships can help to deliver a complete experience for travellers. What are the opportunities to partner with individuals, groups, or organizations in your community to enhance the traveller's overall experience?

STEP
5

The overall Experience.

✦ What should your customer experience?

✦ How will your customer remember this experience? How will he/she describe their experience to a friend or family member? What would they say on TripAdvisor?

Let's Connect

For more information about developing tourism experiences, travel trends, and funding opportunities, please contact the Strategic Tourism Product Development Division of the Department of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development.

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Sources

Newfoundland and Labrador Tourism is pleased to be a member of the Canada Tourism Commission's Brand Experiences Committee.

The CTC has updated its publication *Experiences: A toolkit for partners of the CTC* and has granted Newfoundland and Labrador Tourism permission to incorporate content from that document to this toolkit.

Visit <http://en-corporate.canada.travel> for more information on the CTC or to review the toolkit.