

WORKSHOP

DESTINATION DIALOGUES 2024

REPORT

Crafting Legendary Visitor Experiences

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📍 Montreal, Québec



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Learn about the key concepts and learnings presented in [Destination Dialogues 2024](#), a webinar and online workshop organized by Destination Canada in September, to inspire, inform and empower rural destination development professionals. This report on the online workshop, *Crafting Legendary Visitor Experiences*, is written by Destination Dialogues host and facilitator [Celes Davar](#) and reflects his personal views and contribution to the conversation. The report recaps and expands on ideas and insights shared during the online workshop. Destination Canada is publishing this independent report with Celes' permission. You can find the webinar report [here](#).



About Celes Davar

Celes Davar is president and owner of experiential tourism company Earth Rhythms, founded in 1995, located in the unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq in western Nova Scotia's Gaspereau Valley. Celes is a storytelling guide, community workshop facilitator, champion of regenerative tourism, community catalyst and experiential tourism coach.

Investing in a Destination Approach for Experience Development

Consider the following aspects of a suggested overall approach to experience development within a destination, to collaboratively enhance regenerative experiential tourism capacity.

Develop a working group of the right people in the destination. Bring together a diverse working group, including tourism businesses, economic development specialists, under-represented groups and perhaps a representative of an organization that could be a funding sponsor. The focus is on developing relationships, collaborating, committing to actions that lead to results, being inclusive, and engaging non-traditional community hosts as storytellers.

Invest in a minimum three-year time frame for coaching and experience development to evolve in a uniquely local way. Develop a business case for this investment and identify what the benefits might be.

Coach community hosts and develop new immersive storytelling experiences with them. Use a systematic approach to coaching and developing these new experiences.

Invest in education and learning together about sustainability and regenerative actions, practices and methods that will contribute to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs). This in turn will result in less waste and carbon emissions, increased renewable energy use—and more investment in community projects that restore ecosystems.

Explore different funding sources from governments, foundations, economic development agencies and municipal organizations. As a significant contributor to today's economy, tourism deserves much bigger investment. Not just to make money or get a return on investment (ROI), but because tourism has the power to bring net positive benefits to our communities, protect our regional cultures and ecology, and demonstrate leadership in sustainability. Develop new metrics as part of this process.



Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

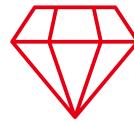
A 10-Step Approach to Experience Development



1 COACHING

Identify coaches who are skilled, have experience and are prepared to coach new storytellers and experience hosts, and help develop new experiences. Build capacity. Train coaches using any resources that are available in Canada, your province or region. Expand Inventory. Identify who is willing to get trained. Organize “Coach the Coaches” training.

This is a critical factor and a key investment area—accelerating experience development requires coaching. The evolution of marketing about your region, landscape and visitor opportunities depends on expanding the inventory of new stories, experiences and destinations.



2 IDENTIFY POTENTIAL COMMUNITY GEMS

Within all destinations are people whose stories may lend themselves to creating unique visitor experiences. These people are called **community gems**. The process of finding these storytellers and hosts involves:

- Nurturing relationships with people to learn about their story, place and passions
- Planting the seeds of an idea by asking if they might be interested in creating an experience about their craft, land or home-grown food.
- Supporting them in developing the experience through a co-development process with a destination marketing organization (DMO) or regional economic development staff
- Ensuring the new experience is relevant to the place, local geography or community



Where can you scan for community gems? At farmers markets and festivals, in local newspapers, and provincial or regional culinary guides, within local conservation, art, craft, cultural and community performing arts organizations—and even from friends’ recommendations.



3 DEVELOP A REQUEST FOR EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST (EOIs)

Develop a list of potential storytellers in your area.

Who are the storytellers (community gems) that are ready to invest time and resources to create new experiences to add to their business? Then, create a request for Expressions of Interest (EOIs) to inform interested community hosts of the commitment and support they would receive and invite them to apply. Be rigorous in qualifying candidates. This step provides efficiency and clarity in finding the right community gems who are ready to invest time and effort into creating new experiences.



4 SELECT NEW EXPERIENCE HOSTS

Using your list of storytellers and hosts, and the EOI, it is possible to develop a selection process to identify qualified, non-traditional community hosts. The following are some considerations as to what is involved:

- **Develop selection criteria** to help identify who is willing to invest time and resources
- **Identify a DMO**, regional economic development or tourism officer to administer this process
- **Create a group of colleagues** from various professions to monitor and invest in the process and ensure diversity
- **Select only a few experience hosts to coach annually**, depending on regional coaching capacity, budget and ability to support the marketing development process.



5 DEVELOP THE EXPERIENCES

A regional training and capacity development approach that enables the nurturing of new experiences over several months should include the following important components:

- **Basic training resources:** An experience development toolkit, guidebook or other helpful resources specifically focusing on experience development
- **Coach or coaches:** To help develop each experience from concept to completion, and ensure the experience is consistently both experiential and regenerative. It can take several months for the full development process.
- **Site visits:** To see and learn about the host's place or property, assess logistics and ensure market readiness. A site visit also opens the doorway to the creative process between the coach and the experience host.
- **Creative brainstorming:** This iterative process can take several weeks or—more likely—months, depending on the host's capabilities and schedule, as well as other factors specific to the experience, such as local weather and community capacity.
- **Experience supports:** Each experience has its own requirements for specific props, tools and materials that may need to be purchased.
- **Costing and pricing** needs to be correctly done, so the decision to launch to the marketplace is based on sound assumptions.



6 PILOT TEST THE EXPERIENCES

Pilot testing is an opportunity try out the experience with a small group of people who can provide helpful and constructive feedback. Guidance should be provided to all who are participating in a pilot test, about the purpose of the test, and how to offer feedback. The test group should include DMO and/or economic development staff, interested tourism businesses or operators in the region, and a few community members who might be interested in participating and giving honest feedback. A budget for pilot testing is essential as support to the new experience hosts. A coordinator from the regional DMO will need to coordinate the pilot test process.



7 CREATE DIGITAL MARKETING COLLATERAL

A budget and commitment to invest in the creation of digital content for each experience is critical.

Hiring videographers and photographers who understand storytelling is different than the usual approach to retail or product marketing. Three main elements will need to be produced:

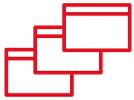
- High resolution photography
- Storyteller profile video about the host, their story and their place
- Experience highlights video showing what visitors can expect

Creating marketing copy involves writers, editors and marketing specialists. This is an opportunity to build new relationships with local professionals and expand their reach into tourism through storytelling techniques.



8 CONFIRM MARKET READINESS

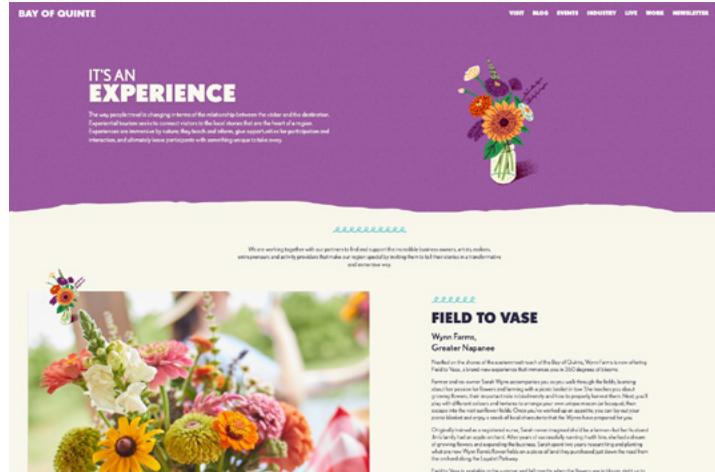
Developing market readiness helps to polish and make the experience ready for launch. Each experience host is at a different stage, depending on their background and whether they have hosted visitors previously, so consistency of criteria is needed. Where available, it is best to use DMO or provincial market readiness criteria. Otherwise develop your own criteria, or work with others who are willing to share their criteria. Fine tune experience for launch and finalize the marketing copy for web, print and promotions alongside the new digital marketing collateral.



9 CREATE WEBSITE LANDING PAGE AND eCOMMERCE PLATFORM

It is critical to set up a website and eCommerce platform (such as EventBrite or FareHarbor) so that both the DMO and the experience host can easily make bookings and sales.

The regional DMO and the experience host need to have clear understanding of each person's responsibilities for having everything in place and updating content. Their collaborative marketing accountabilities must also be spelled out—what does the DMO do from a marketing perspective and how does each experience host market the experience from their own websites and social media feeds?



bayofquinte.ca/visit/experiences

This is the website of Bay of Quinte in Ontario, showing the new experiences landing page, which features several new visitor experiences. It presents a new marketing narrative and doorway for the DMO and their guests. It supports its five regional municipal partners and the new experience hosts and reflects the investment into digital photography and video.



10 LAUNCH, SALES AND MARKETING

The final step is to launch the experience, supported with sales and marketing tactics. Ideally, the launch, sales and marketing are supported by a three-year budget. A clear outline will be helpful, so that each experience host is aware of what their DMO will offer as marketing promotions. Again, the host and DMO will need to understand their individual roles and responsibilities in updating their own business websites, marketing descriptions, schedule of offerings, eCommerce platform for sales and bookings, and monitoring sales.

Case Studies

The following case studies are examples of how a few different Canadian organizations, DMOs and communities have implemented their own steps to invest in developing capacity and ensuring new visitor experiences are in-market with the appropriate regional supports in place.



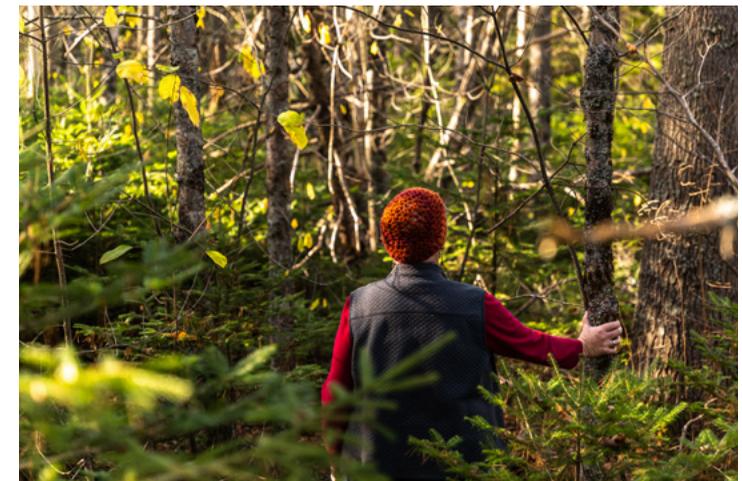
- **Case Study #1:** [Experience development in Meewasin Valley Authority](#)



- **Case Study #2:** [Experience development in Ontario's Southwest](#)



- **Case Study #3:** [Experience development in the Bay of Quinte](#)



- **Case Study #4:** [FoodArtNature in the Annapolis Valley, Nova Scotia](#)

Benefits

The goal of creating legendary, regenerative visitor experiences is to design excellent, highly immersive, hands-on experiences, involving storytelling by a facilitator guide and a “takeaway” for guests, who are transformed and influenced by the people and places they visit. Visitors will become outstanding advocates if the regenerative experience itself is outstanding.

Sustainability and regenerative practices are simply how the visitor experience is executed. The business, community, local ecology and the planet all become beneficiaries.

ReThinking the way we design visitor experiences to shape tourism as a force for good offers opportunities to include new experience hosts and inspiration for businesses to generate new revenues in innovative ways. It also fosters capacity management that respects local ecology and municipal infrastructure and creates new ways for visitors to be delighted and transformed.

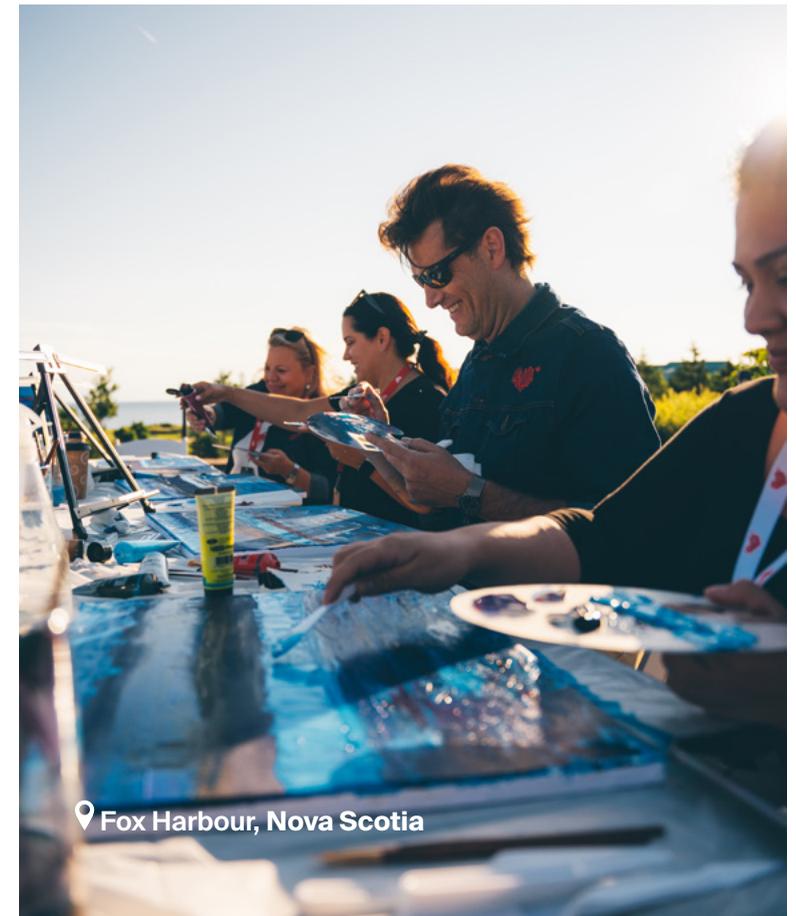
A pan-Canadian investment into experience development takes time, but it will have long-term benefits, when:

- **Creating visitor experiences within Canadian destinations is a co-creative and collaborative process.** Everyone learns in the process.
- **Building capacity in the people in the destination is the focus.** Funding to enable this is critical to the long-term success.
- **Coaches don’t offer prescriptions, but are trained to ask questions, uncover possibilities and inspire.** Trust that by asking the right questions, the experience host will know the answer.
- **Everyone understands that experience development takes time.** It is a process that requires full engagement of a coach, the experience host and the DMO or regional support contact from concept to launch.
- **The relationship between the DMO or enabling organization achieves deep and lasting relationships.** This is where transformation in the experience host occurs, as they move through the process. Trust emerges between all partners.

Read the Destination Dialogues 2024 Webinar Report [here](#).



Onhwa' Lumina, Québec



Fox Harbour, Nova Scotia