

# Building Tourism

## *A Resource for Development*

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### *Developing Destinations*

#### **Live long and prosper . . . through branding**

With a little ingenuity and a lot of hard work the Town of Vulcan, southeast of Calgary, sets itself apart as a tourism destination in Alberta.

How do they do it?

By thinking “out of this world”.

In 1990, Vulcan residents got together to come up with ideas on how to boost the local economy. The result? To build a community brand around Star Trek and Mr. Spock’s home planet, Vulcan.

Dayna Dickens with Vulcan Tourism believes branding is about finding something unique to make your community stand out.

“Use it as a hook,” she advises. “If you can get people to look twice at your tourism promotions, you’ve overcome the first hurdle of capturing their interest.”

Star Trek and space tourism is Vulcan’s hook.

They started small by selling pointy Vulcan ears, then tackled more ambitious plans.

In 1993, the town hosted its first annual Star Trek Convention and in 1995 unveiled the town marker, the Vulcan Starship FX6-1995-A. In 1998, the Vulcan Tourism and Trek Station opened with Star Trek memorabilia, spacey souvenirs and tourism information.

Now you can even be a cadet at the Starflight Academy and save the earth from alien invaders. The station’s virtual reality game is a hit with kids and adults alike.

What else? There’s a space mural, Star Trek mural, space-themed spray park, a cancellation stamp featuring the Trek Station at the post office, and there’s even a Star Trek-inspired gravestone at the town’s cemetery.



**Vulcan Tourism and Trek Station anchors Vulcan’s Star Trek and space tourism brand**

Dayna advises, “For a brand to be successful, it’s critical that you have a local champion to take up the cause, especially for the long-term, otherwise you run the risk of losing the lustre of the brand. There must be on-going focus and development.”

What will make your community live long and prosper through tourism?

Visit Vulcan online at [www.vulcantourism.com](http://www.vulcantourism.com).

#### *Building Critical Mass*

Take a moment and think about your favourite place to visit. What separates it from the crowd? Is it the variety of things to see and do? Perhaps it’s the quality food or a one-of-a-kind experience? Maybe it’s the people.

Chances are it’s a combination of things that make for a great destination: a solid lead attraction or experience, a strong supporting cast of smaller attractions and experiences, and an experienced tech crew—services that meet visitor needs and enhance the visitor experience.

“A great tourism destination,” says Elizabeth Kuhnle of Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation, “has a critical mass of unique, high quality tourism experiences and services.”

Critical mass is key. Think back to your favourite place to visit. Whether urban or rural, it probably has a mix of activities, accommodation, dining and shopping that meet—and hopefully exceed—your needs.

“Critical mass is about having enough activities and experiences to make a visitor want to come and want to stay,” says Elizabeth. Roger Brooks of Destination Development Inc. is a proponent of the Four Times Rule: you need at least four hours of fun for every hour it takes to get there.

“Tourism is an economic development activity,” Elizabeth reminds us.

“A great destination offers the visitor ways to spend more and stay longer.”

#### **Did you know...?**

Resources to develop Ag tourism attractions and destinations are available at:

[www.agtourism.ca](http://www.agtourism.ca)

*Alberta*

## Focusing on Sustainable Tourism in the Beaver Hills

The next time you're driving down a country road, stop and take a look around. What do you see? Out one window, a farmer harvesting barley; to the right, a couple of acreages and a golf course; in the distance a pump jack; and overhead, a red tailed hawk soaring.

And, the demands on Alberta's rural landscape continues to grow.

Such a landscape exists east of Edmonton in the Beaver Hills. This forested region rich in wetlands, wildlife and protected areas faces demands from industrial, agricultural, recreational, urban and rural residential land uses—and, increasingly, tourism.

The Beaver Hills Initiative (BHI)—formed in 2000 to advocate for sustainable land use—recognizes the role of tourism in balancing the region's 'triple bottom line,' its



**Beaver Hills scopes out nature-based tourism opportunities**

economic, social and ecological capital.

"The area draws a lot of visitors," says Brenda Wipinski, BHI Executive Director. "Many local tourism operators play host to these visitors, particularly in the fall with

the bird migration. It's so beautiful here. The question we ask ourselves is how do we plan for its sustainable use?"

BHI is seeking to answer that question by partnering with the County of Strathcona and the Tourism Product Development Branch on a multi-stakeholder sustainable tourism strategy for the Beaver Hills.

"Our strength is in our ecological uniqueness," explains Brenda. "The Beaver Hills has been designated a Dark Sky Preserve and, along with their partners, are seeking a United Nations Biosphere Reserve designation. We know we can build on this to enhance the Beaver Hills as a rural, nature-based destination."

Visit BHI online at [www.beaverhills.ab.ca](http://www.beaverhills.ab.ca).

## Developing Attractive Attractions

How can a destination develop its visitor experience?

Craig Olmstead, Aboriginal Tourism Advisor with the Tourism Product Development Branch explored this question on a recent trip to Métis Crossing, located north of Edmonton near Smoky Lake, and Blackfoot Crossing, east of Calgary.

"These facilities have grown over the years," Craig observes.



**Métis Crossing expands Métis cultural experiences**

"They have taken approaches that reflect their own unique cultural, client services and infrastructure needs."

Métis Crossing has been active in developing its destination through infrastructure upgrades. The gift shop now offers an increased selection of Métis crafts and has been moved to a more visible location. Museum displays were expanded, and a zip-line was installed for adventure seekers.

Similarly, Blackfoot Crossing continues to develop as a destination, with a focus on delivering high-quality services.

After only a year of operation, Blackfoot Crossing has expanded the gift shop, launched a cafeteria, improved interpretive and customer services, developed and expanded trail and tipi camping opportunities, and recently purchased a small bus for transporting visitors from Calgary.

"The key to these development activities, regardless of whether they are infrastructure or services is that they attend to each destination's core clientele," reflects Craig. When considering what and how to develop your facility, consider who your core clients are first, and then develop experiences and services that suit your unique context."



**Blackfoot Crossing focuses on quality visitor experiences and customer service**

Contact Craig for more information at 780.427.0590 or [craig.olmstead@gov.ab.ca](mailto:craig.olmstead@gov.ab.ca)

## Lessons from Rosebud— a tourism development success story

The theatre town of Rosebud—one hour northeast of Calgary—knows what it's like to go from a farming hamlet to a successful tourism destination.

We asked Bob Davis, Executive Director of Rosebud Theatre how it came about.

**Q: How did Rosebud get its start?**

A: LaVerne Erickson spent time in Rosebud as a child and returned in 1973 to open a summer camp with a focus on the arts. The camp grew into a fine arts high school and in 1983 students put on an outdoor play, combined with a meal, as a fundraiser. The venture was successful and was the start of Rosebud Theatre.

**Q: What was the impetus to take Rosebud from being a fine arts school community to a tourism destination?**

A: The focus on arts attracted artists to move to Rosebud. It was a community where artists were free to pursue their passion. Over time the entrepreneurial spirit of local artists and others contributed to the community as they looked for opportunities to develop businesses. Partnerships were forged between the school and business

operators. For example, the school had some vacant land and someone saw an opportunity to open a gift shop. The school leased the land for \$1 to help them get started. As theatre attendance grew, more gift shops opened and two galleries.

**Q: What other products were developed to complement the theatre experience?**

A: A second show is offered so visitors can take in two performances in one day. It has helped keep people in the community overnight. Packages have been developed with Rosebud Country Inn, featuring special meals and short classes. The Lions Campground was leased to a private operator who upgraded it to a full-service RV park, which has resulted in 2-3 night stays. The golf course grew at about the same pace as the theatre.

**Q: Are there any new developments to expand your tourism market appeal?**

A: We have just received federal and provincial funding to build Rosebud Centre. The vision for the centre is to improve the patron's experience—specifically to create a more relaxed dining experience. The gift shop, an

important economic contributor, will be on the main floor. The 2nd floor presents an entirely new market opportunity for Rosebud. It will have meeting and convention facilities to accommodate over 200 people. It is scheduled to be completed the spring of 2011, the 100th anniversary of the Mercantile Building.

**Q: What would you recommend to a community looking to develop as a tourism destination?**

A: Look inwardly and find good people who are willing to invest themselves in the vision for the community. Encourage and build on what people in your community are already doing well. Identify new uses for empty spaces and facilities that already exist. In Rosebud, we didn't build any new facilities in the beginning. We converted the church into an art gallery, the community centre into the opera house, the store into the Mercantile Dining Room and the old hotel into the office for the school and theatre. Rosebud Centre will be the first new commercial construction in the community in over a decade. In the end, success will follow a common and collective vision.



**Images of Rosebud Theatre productions and the Opera House (top)**

**Photo credit: Rosebud Theatre and Travel Alberta**



## Know thyself

The making of a great destination starts with knowing who you are and what you have to offer.

What are some of the questions you need to ask?

- What is our primary draw?
- Do we offer a variety of other attractions and experiences?
- Do we have sufficient quality businesses to support visitors (e.g., rental, repair, retail)?
- Are we easy to get to and get around?
- Do we offer quality visitor information services?
- Do we have an appropriate mix of accommodation?
- Are we developing new products to bring people back year after year?



**Serve up the best of who you are**

The Tourism Product Development Branch can help you work through these questions and more. Contact Elizabeth Kuhnel at [elizabeth.kuhnel@gov.ab.ca](mailto:elizabeth.kuhnel@gov.ab.ca) or 780.422.1074.

## New Assessment Tool Coming Soon

Canadian Badlands Ltd. is developing an assessment tool to help you evaluate your destination's market status. The self-guided manual will provide a foundation for strategic planning and preservation of a destination's natural and cultural heritage. It will help:

- Assess existing resources and identify opportunities
- Identify requirements to move from the role of touring stop to a hub or primary destination
- Enable a destination of any scale to operate at the highest level it can achieve



**New tool to help you put on your best performance**

"We will be happy to share the tool when it is available in 2010," says Cindy Amos. "Helping other tourism areas to be better is good for Alberta and for the Canadian Badlands."

Contact Cindy at [executivedirector@canadianbadlands.com](mailto:executivedirector@canadianbadlands.com).

## Putting the 'Boom' into the Boomtown Trail

When Ken Duncan was approached to be the manager of the Boomtown Trail he jumped on board with his characteristic enthusiasm.

But being passionate about the region east of Highway 2 hasn't blinded him to the challenges.

"Right from the start, I realized that one of our primary goals must be to have more things for the visitor to see and do," reflects Ken.

Recognizing the need to increase tourism products before focusing on marketing activities, the Boomtown Trail approached the Tourism Product Development Branch for advice.

"We had lots of ideas—festivals and events, museum theming, building on our rich history," explains Ken. "We knew our target market—urbanites from Calgary and Edmonton. We just needed to put it all together."

The Tourism Product Development Branch worked with the Boomtown Trail to complete a development strategy in 2009.

"The strategy was well received and demonstrates that everyone has a role to play. It provides our

region with a blueprint for product development and communicates to members the importance of development before marketing," explains Ken.

Developing a destination takes time. "Patience is key," says Ken, who knows that when people get together there is a tendency to want to do it all at once and see immediate results.

"Our focus now is on putting the strategy into action, starting with our 'An Event-ful Day' Conference this fall."

Visit the Boomtown Trail online at [www.boomtowntrail.com](http://www.boomtowntrail.com).



**Métis heritage is a key element of the Boomtown Trail tourism development strategy**