



NOTE

There are many opportunities to use existing structures to cross-sell other attractions, activities and amenities - including public restrooms, which can be a challenge.

A visitor could easily spend several hours exploring the area, yet finding restrooms can be a difficult challenge. At first it looked as though the building, below, could be a restroom facility.



NOTE

After looking around for a restroom facility, I finally found one (left). There was another couple visiting the area that were also looking.



Suggestion #37

Yet this restroom was locked in the middle of the day. Consider leaving this restroom open 365 days a year - at least during daylight hours. Perhaps local volunteers could “adopt” the facility for two weeks each year and open and close it each day, and even maintain it on the weekends when city/county staff are off. Restrooms must also be kept clean to present the community in a good light and to encourage repeat visits.



NOTE

A beautiful sign that does a terrific job of stating that this is a Japanese Garden, without having the use additional words.



NOTE

The Garden is a stunning diversion for visitors that can lead to additional spending in the community.

Suggestion #38

Consider adding interpretive signage regarding the Kohan Reflection Garden, maybe some history, etc. This could be a terrific visitor diversion-ary activity. Consider marketing, during the summer months, a place to pick up a deli lunch in town, then head to the park for one of the most serene settings in British Columbia. Educate locals about Japanese Gardens, which are growing in popularity.



(Left) Is the store still in business? Closed for the season? Or for the day? Nice building, good signage. First impressions may lead visitors to assuming this business is no longer in business. If that's not the case, then say so on signage.



TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS



Suggestion #40

These are some great buildings. Add perpendicular (blade) signs to let people know what you are. What's in the mall? Promote your best lure on the signs to pull customers inside. New Denver has some tremendous potential to be a visitor shopping village.



Suggestion #39

(Above) Great interpretive signage. Expand it throughout town to keep visitors captivated.



NOTE

What does the store to the right sell? What's the lure? Always promote the lure to pull visitors into the store. Antiques? Artists in action? Collectibles?



NOTE

A great location, but it's pretty generic looking. Promote (or create) a primary reason to stay here.

TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS



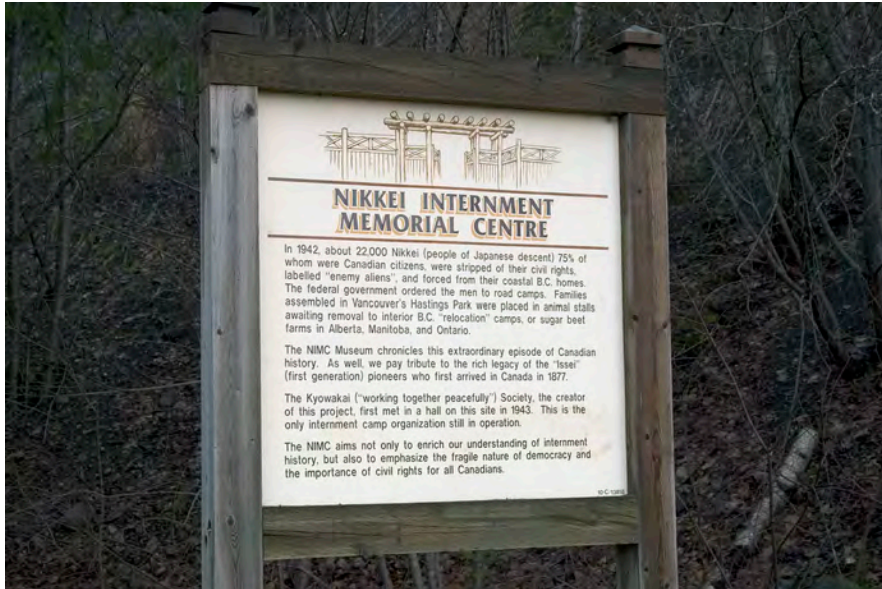
NOTE

Everyone in the office wants to stay here. Having something different can make you the destination. Well done. Offer visitors a look. Place a sign that says "Take a look. No obligation." That can lead to increased sales. It looks like a fun place to stay, and is different than the usual hotel room.



NOTE

Is this place open or closed? Is this the entrance? (Middle left)
This could be charming, but it's not clear what's in the shops or when (or if) they are open. These buildings look like they could be a terrific arts village. But it isn't clear what's in the buildings or when the businesses are open.

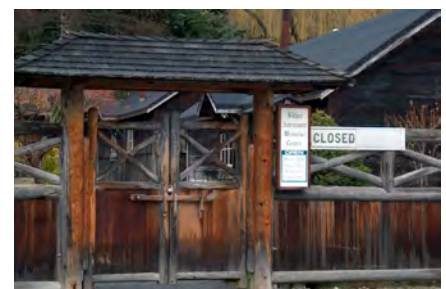


NOTE

Is there anything to see regarding this fascinating story? Be sure to let visitors know where they can see more. Create a brochure that visitors can take with them. It will help bring them back.

Suggestions

On a subsequent visit, I did in fact, find the internment center, but the sign is so small (left) it is easy to miss driving through the community. The center looks fascinating, but like so many other attractions, there needs to be signs stating when it will be open. Include more interpretive signage, as well as stories of some of the people housed here. Stories are far more effective than facts about the buildings and grounds.



TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS



NOTE

Some of the lodging options look absolutely terrific in the area. Most of the cabins look well maintained and cozy.



NOTE

The street banners in Slocan are nice and add a nice touch to the community. Nakusp actually uses their banners to promote events, attractions, and activities in the area. Consider doing that when they need to be replaced.

NOTE

A stunning park area - the entire area is beautiful, even in mid-February. This would be a great setting for concerts at the lake, art shows, farmers markets, and other events. Add visitor information here as well.



TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS



Suggestion #41

Consider redoing the sign with large white lettering that says "Cafe" and perhaps another teaser featuring the best reason to eat there: "homemade pie" or "fresh cinnamon roles" made each morning.



NOTE

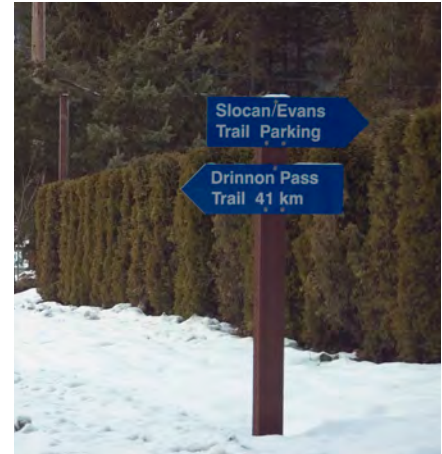
A delightful mural. Good job of turning a nondescript building into an attraction. Consider adding an interpretive sign that tells a story about what the mural depicts.



NOTE

What if every building in town had a mural - a story to tell? It would make the town an attraction for a mural tour. Once again, this would be a great place for interpretive signage telling the story (or stories) depicted in the mural. Very cute and charming.

TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS



NOTE

There is very little information about the parks and trail systems. Why? Specific information (trail length, difficulty, attractions to see along the trail, picnic areas, etc.) will pull more visitors and keep them longer, encouraging more spending.

Suggestion #42

Lead visitors back to the parking area, which is easily missed, rather than just stating that no parking is permitted.

Suggestion #43

Be sure to tell the visitor WHEN you will be open. This looks like a charming restaurant, but is it out of business?



Suggestion #44

The sign above is excellent, but when is it open? Where do you go?



Suggestion #45

Is this building (above) part of the Skycastle Lookout? Where is the parking?

Make it convenient for visitors with roadside information.



Suggestion #46

Want to have some fun? Develop a trail guide or “treasure hunt” to find this and other unusual exterior displays.

RULE 5

Great Stories Make the Campfire Memorable

The rule of telling stories



NOTE

Nothing sells like stories. In your efforts, don't just display artifacts, but tell stories of fascinating characters, hardships, tragedies, and happy homecomings. Engage the visitor. It will bring them back.

TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS



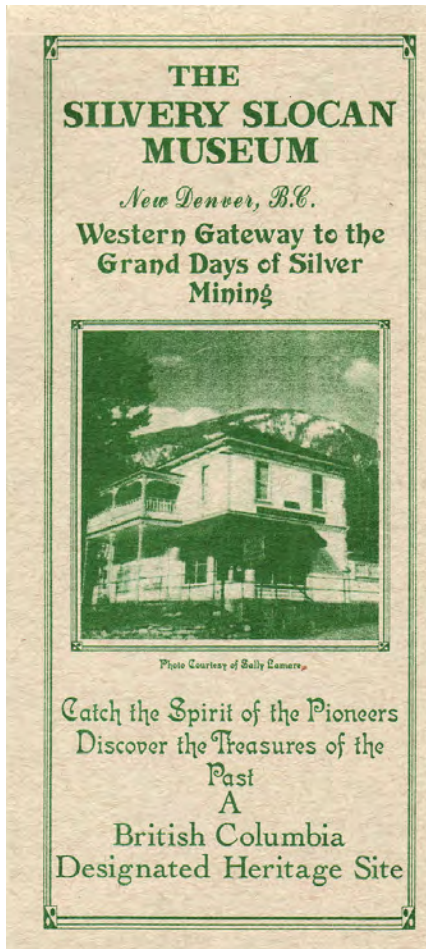
NOTE

To engage visitors, tell them stories - don't just display artifacts. Make it interesting. Stories animate people's emotions, which makes the experience enjoyable and memorable.

Currently it would take a visitor about 15 minutes to walk through and look at all the exterior displays. Most visitors would have no idea what these things were used for or what they did. By adding stories (not just what it is and when it was used or who donated it) on interpretive displays, a visitor could spend an hour or more at the museum. A stay of two hours translates to increased spending.

Suggestion #47

Hours? Main entrance? Perhaps better signage telling what the facility is and the hours it is open, etc. There are two sets of doors. Does one set go to a gallery and the other to the museum? Add directional signage to entranceways, better attractions signage (telling what the building is), and interpretive signage.

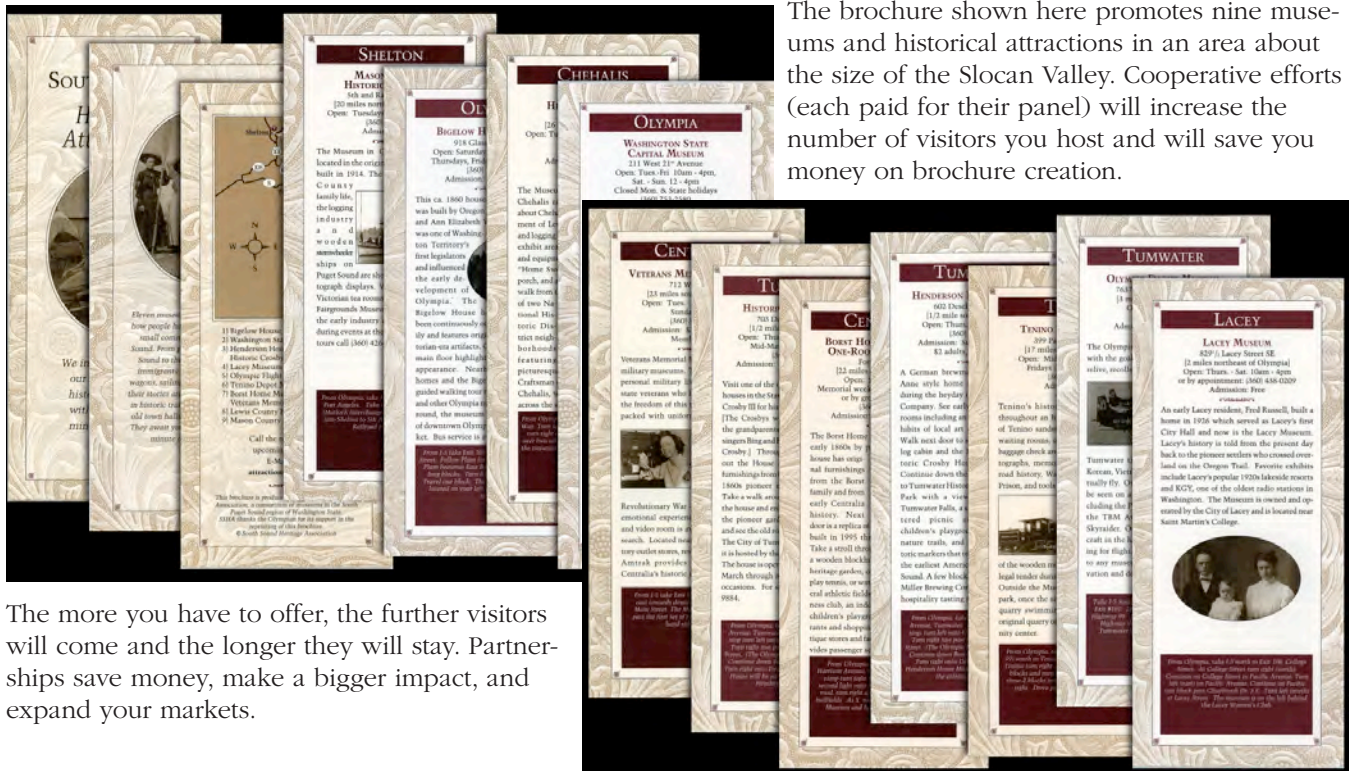
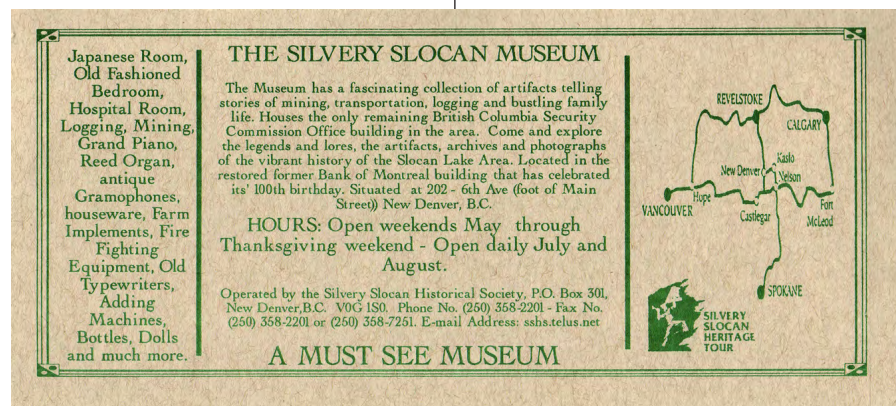


Suggestion #48

Provide a teaser story or two to pull readers (and visitors) into the museum. Avoid statements like "The museum has a fascinating collection of artifacts..." followed by a list (below) of artifacts. Most people have seen enough old typewriters, mining and logging tools, housewares, etc. to last a lifetime. Tell stories of individual pioneers who may have had to battle disease, hardship, bears, etc. in order to make a living here. Make it fun.

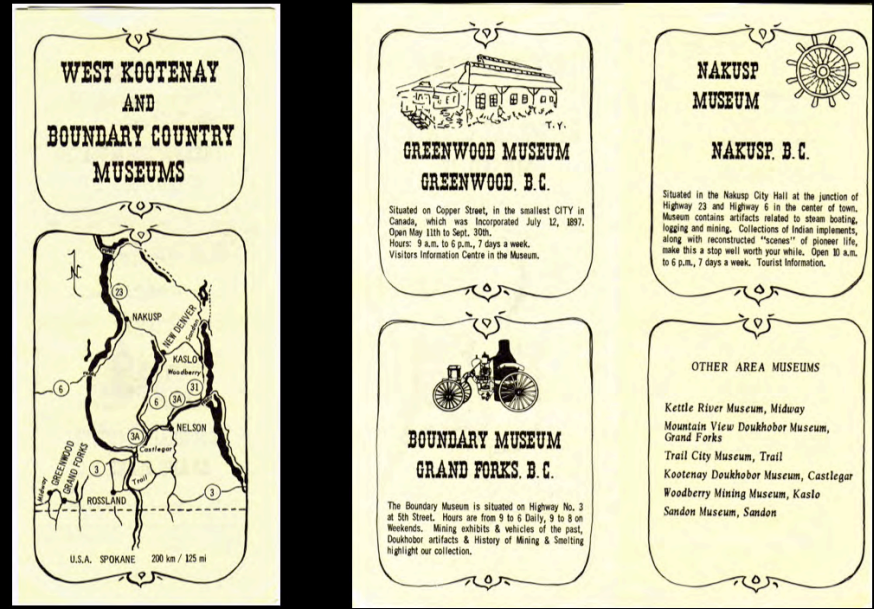
Suggestion #49

Use dates. Thanksgiving - U.S. or Canadian? Always make it specific. Instead of "Open weekends May through Thanksgiving weekend" and "Open daily July and August" consider: Open every Friday, Saturday and Sunday, from the first weekend in May through the end of November. Open every day in July and August."



The more you have to offer, the further visitors will come and the longer they will stay. Partnerships save money, make a bigger impact, and expand your markets.

Suggestion #50: The right idea! Take it up to the next level.



Suggestion #50

The right idea! Take it up to the next level. This follows the format suggested and used for the brochure on the previous page. For each museum create a real strong teaser that will pull people in. In Rock Springs, Wyoming, their museum touts that once inside you'll learn where legendary bandit, Butch Cassidy, got his name and you can see where he used to work, right there in Rock Springs. The museum has much more than this story, but it's a great "teaser" to pull visitor in.

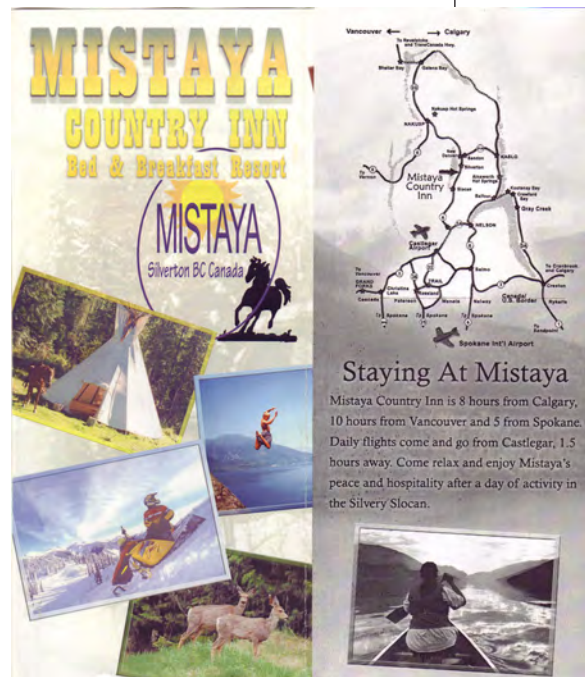


Suggestion #51

Promote activities over places - don't sell geography, sell experiences and activities. Provide specifics. Promote activities over pictures of the sign. Fishing, hiking, people eating or shopping in a neat little country store...

Suggestion #52

The top 3 inches of the brochure is what catches the customer's eye in a brochure rack - create a knock-out teaser that will grab attention.



Suggestion #53

(Left) Where were these photos taken? Can a visitor spend the night in a teepee? Let the reader know. Promote experiences visitors can't get closer to home.

Mistaya Offers

- 5 guest rooms with shared baths.
- A guest sitting lounge with a fire place - an ideal spot to observe the wildlife and view the Valhalla peaks.
- A large family style dining area.
- An outside picnic area.
- Walking trails.
- Fire pits.
- Evening campfires and stargazing.
- Snowshoeing and cross-country skiing.
- Lunches and evening BBQ's on request.
- HOT TUB!

Rates

Double: \$65.00 - \$75.00 plus tax
Single: \$50.00 - \$60.00 plus tax
Extra persons: \$15.00 plus tax

A deposit of one full nights rent is required upon booking. Deposits are refundable with 15 days prior notice of cancellation. \$20.00 service charge. Please, no smoking or pets.

Contact

Hosts: Sue & George Iverson
Box 28, Silvertown, B.C. V0G 2B0
Phone/Fax (250) 358-7787
Email: mistayaresort@netidea.com
Website: www.mistayaresort.com

In The Area

- The Slocan Lake for swimming, fishing and canoeing.
- Hiking in Valhalla or Kokanee Glacier Parks.
- Great mountain bike trails.
- Hotsprings at Nakusp and Ainsworth - both on the Silvery Slocan Circle Tour.
- Various museums for the historical buff.
- Cultural events in nearby villages.
- Golf and tennis.
- Cross country skiing and ski touring.
- Ghost towns.
- Wildlife in the area includes various birds, white tail and mule deer, elk, brown bear, grizzly bear, cougar, coyotes and moose.

Suggestion #54

Always provide specifics. What do you have that a visitor can't get closer to home?

Consider: "For the complete list and detailed sample itineraries, log on to ..."



NOTE

Always promote the experience on the top three inches of your rack card or brochure, not the name of the business. "Cozy cabins on the shores of Lake Slocan" has far more introductory appeal than "William Hunter Cabins." For the Swan House B&B, "A peaceful getaway in Historic Slocan" would be better at the top, and "The Swan House B&B" down below. "Guided Eco Kayak Tours" should be at the top of the brochure (right). Sell the experience first, then the business.

COLUMBIA KAYAKING
Water is Life...Kayaking is Living

- Guided Eco Kayak Tours
- Knowledgeable, Friendly Guides
- Trained and Certified Staff
- Family and Group Rates Available
- Highest Quality Equipment
- Rentals and Sales

1-888-KAYAK-10
www.eco.kootenays.com
columbiakayaking.com



NOTE

The right idea, but just not enough detail. In a rack full of brochures, the top 3" is critical. "Pristine Paradise" should be at the top in block letters (never use italicized or script lettering). Inside there are great photos, but too little information - there's not enough to close the sale.

Suggestion #56

Include miles and k/m. Also include approximate drive times. Nearly half the tourism in the area is from the U.S.

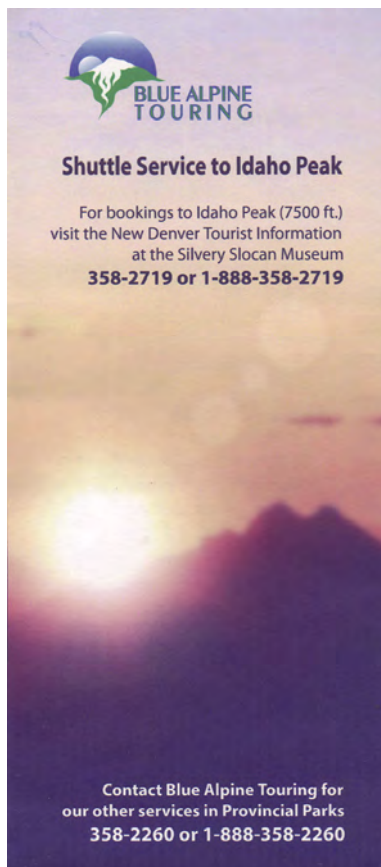
Suggestion #57

Close the sale first.
Reduce the number of phone numbers.

What if the museum is closed? Then how do I get information? What's so special about Idaho Peak? Sell the experience. How long does the shuttle take? Tell me more. This brochure gives virtually no information except what the business does. Sell a sample itinerary. What someone can expect. The seasons, etc.

Suggestion #58

This rack card is a good teaser, but should lead visitors to a website or somewhere they can get "the rest of the story." Details, details, details.



Choose your own adventure...

OUTFITTING SERVICES

- Canoe rentals
- Gear rentals
- Menu planning and Logistics

GUIDED SERVICES

- Day hiking and backpacking
- Canoe trips
- BCRCa canoe lessons
- Van tours of historical sites
- Wildlife viewing

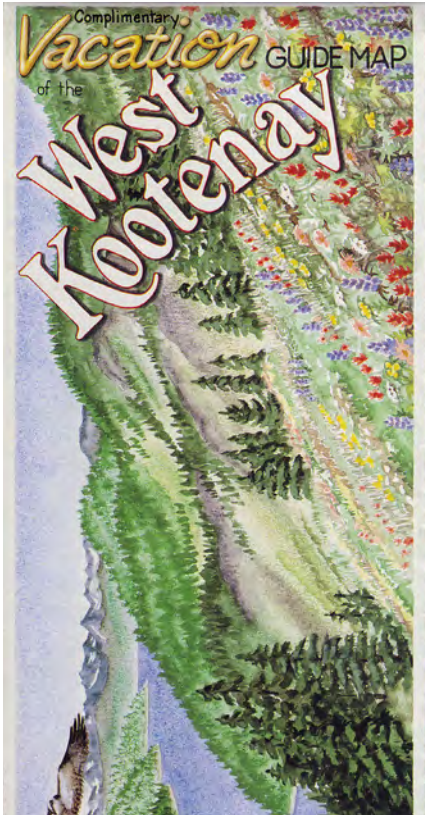
MOUNTAIN SKILLS TRAINING

- Rock climbing clinics
- Mountaineering skills training
- Navigation workshops
- Back-country cooking

All of our wilderness instructors and guides have a minimum of an 80 hour advanced wilderness first-aid certification, and a minimum of 5 years experience instructing and guiding.



1-888-358-2260
bluealpine@msidex.com



Suggestion #59

Some pieces mailed are better left to guests once in the community, like the map (left). It offers no real information on why a visitor should come to the area.

What to send: An Activities Guide like the one shown below.



This Long Beach, Washington, is a public/private partnership effort. Each entity paid for one panel, and the 18 panels provides so many activities, that it nearly doubled the overnight stays in the area.

In your Activities Guide:

- Kalemore Flutes
- Sahara Minerals (but not if only open by appt.)
- Valhalla Summer School of Music (open for visitors?)
- Ghosts of Sandon, Cody & Retallack
- Idaho Peak's alpine flora (shuttle service?)
- Hand & Soul Healing Centre
- Kayaking Slocan and Arrow Lakes (specific spots)
- Slocan Water Taxi (an experience?)
- Ainsworth and other hot springs? (Valley of the Hot Springs)
- Waterfalls? Anything special about the 3 provincial parks?
- Tours? Garden Tours? Art Tours?
- 20 Mountainside trails? Hiking? Biking? Locations? Seasonal considerations? Where to? What will we see? How long?
- Kekkei Memorial Internment Center (where is it?)

In your Activities Guide:

- Bonanza Creek Gallery - who is Walter Wells?
- Chiaroscuro Photographic Gallery - Patrizia Menton
- Eric Rent Nature Art - Ducks Unlimited portfolio
- Ewe Mile Sheep Dairy - Everything sheep & wool
- Les Weisbrich Gallery - Renowned in LA, watercolours
- New Perspective Gallery - Fine art & Gifts
- Nuru Design - Handpainted clothing company
- Place in the Forest - working studio - watercolours, clay
- Solart Pottery Studio Gallery
- Still Point Pottery

These are "Artists in Action"

Suggestion #60: Consider an Arts Trail with signage. Include itineraries and maps.

IN A NUTSHELL

- Have a Branding & Marketing Action Plan developed
- Create an Activities Guide
- Develop specific itineraries and lots of details
- Use stories as teasers: Legends and lore
- Don't promote geography - promote activities. Consider: "Pick your season" and then, "Pick your passion" - the activities a visitor can enjoy that time of year.
- Promote specific businesses that offer something visitors can't get closer to home. That might be a restaurant, a very unique hotel or B&B, a certain tour, or even a vista that is unparalleled in the region.
- Don't let local politics kill your marketing efforts.

TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS

During the assessment process, we asked two people to plan a trip into Central and southeastern British Columbia. They were not aware of the communities being assessed during this process. We asked a series of questions to determine if they could find information about the area, and if that information was good enough to close the sale.

The following is a recap of that exercise:

Central Southern British Columbia

If you were to plan a vacation or even a three or four day getaway into British Columbia, north of Idaho, where would you go and why?

If I was going to vacation anywhere in this area of BC, it would have to be for a good week, rather than a 3-4 day getaway. We've been to Big White Ski Resort outside Kelowna, and it was too long of a drive, at least in the winter, for a long weekend. Perhaps in the summer, the drive time would be better; but after that trip, we wouldn't go to that area again unless we had more time.

My trip would be based on skiing. Other activities and attractions would provide variety, but the main draw would be a ski area. My ski trip would be to Whitewater Ski and Winter Resort in Nelson. I'd stay in Nelson and enjoy the town and some other activities there, such as the historic downtown.

Impressions of different towns/areas

What stands out about this general area of BC is the natural beauty and opportunities for outdoor recreation. Most of the cities/towns offer some combination of lakes, wildlife viewing, mountain biking, hiking, swimming, fishing, kayaking, canoeing, skiing, and even more adventurous sports like hang gliding, mountaineering and ice climbing. There are even several areas with hot springs, spas and mountain resorts.

The trick is finding a city that actually stands out from the rest. I can get outstanding beauty and a huge variety of outdoor recreational activities a lot closer to home. I almost feel like I read the same thing for most of the cities/towns... something like "Beautiful scenery and lots of outdoor recreation. Spend your days hiking, biking, fishing, golfing or just relaxing and enjoying the fresh mountain air." Of course, the wording was different and there were certainly unique things to do in many of the locations. But I didn't find anything that really stood out to made the trip seem worthwhile.

Nelson was one of the first areas I looked into. Their historic Victorian architecture and downtown Baker Street were notable. Like most cities in the area, they have plenty of outdoor activities, and seem to have a good variety of accommodations, shopping, and dining, making it a good choice for the traveler. Ainsworth Hot Springs also sounds worthy of a visit, although it is located outside Nelson and I found it mentioned on the website for Creston as well.

Creston also looked appealing, particularly because of the Discover Creston Wildlife Interpretive Center.

Golden's location amid six National Parks makes it an enticing destination,

particularly for the outdoor enthusiast. They have the requisite hiking, biking, wildlife viewing, etc.; plus, more adventurous activities like heli-skiing, ice climbing and hang gliding. They also seem to have a good selection of accommodations and dining options, making it a good base of operations for all the outdoor activities.

Closing the sale?

Knowing the length of the drive from Western Washington, it's a tough sale to close. I know the area is beautiful and there are lots of fun outdoor activities. However, the same can be said of the Cascades or Mount Rainier, and I can get there much quicker. For me, the key would be a specific activity, like a ski trip. I can see visiting a ski resort like Whitewater for a week, skiing most days and spending a little time on other activities and attractions while there. Barring that, I didn't find anything spectacular that would entice me to go there. My gut feeling is that the area does have a lot to offer and would be worth the drive; but I didn't find anything quite that convincing in my research. I think the market area of Eastern Washington and Northern Idaho, plus Vancouver BC, might be more of a general target market area for the Kootenays, with Western Washington more of a secondary market area.

Websites – Highlights

A few things that jumped out at me, both good and bad:

www.selkirkloop.org – This loop looks like it could make for a cool road trip and be a great way to see a lot of the area. It had great endorsements and lots of specific information.

www.slocanlake.com, www.slocanvalley.com – both of these sites really lacked a good graphic look and feel. The first makes the area appear light on attractions/activities and the second had such a busy homepage it was distracting.

www.blueskyresort.ca – the homepage of this site isn't actually about the resort, but more about the general area. You have to click on Accommodations to find info on the resort itself.

www.silvertonresort.com – this site has some nice pictures on the homepage; makes the area look appealing.

Overall, looking through the resort, cabin and B&B websites, there are a lot of nice and unique places to stay, but the area is light on activities different from what I could get closer to home.

Secret shopper #2 Southern British Columbia Area

I began my search for a vacation location in Southern BC by looking at the British Columbia website (www.britishcolumbia.com). This site was very general and not graphically appealing, but did lead me to Nelson. I also looked at (www.bctravel.com), which was difficult to use for finding information – to use this site, one would need to already know exactly where they want to go. When searching, it gives listings of every town, and every place the town is listed – too much general information. Its home page looked like a bad coupon book cover.

I also found the Go Kootenays site (www.gokootenays.com), which didn't have a lot of information – only one listing for Slokan Valley, and that was for a motel or lodge. The (www.kootenys-bc.com) website was not helpful either. In order to use it, it's necessary to know exactly which region or town you want to visit, then choose a category. And it appears the only businesses listed are ones that have paid – there were very few listings.

After finding links to several towns from the British Columbia website, I was most impressed with Nelson and Revelstoke. I called the Nelson Visitor's Bureau, and the woman I spoke with was very helpful and friendly. She definitely helped influence me to want to come to Nelson. I looked at the Nelson website (www.discovernelson.com), and felt that Nelson would be a fun place to spend a couple of days. Balfour looked too small to have much of interest, and Kalso looked like it would be enjoyable for a day or so.

New Denver (www.newdenver.com) had an attractive website for a village of about 600. They didn't offer any winter activities, which was surprising. That website led me to (www.slocanlake.com) which covers the whole area; however, it doesn't seem to be encouraging visitors. The listings for accommodations and restaurants don't lead to links, only Adobe Acrobat pdfs, which was very difficult. I also looked at Slokan Valley's site (www.slocan-valley.com), which was visually not appealing and technically difficult to find information. It's necessary to click through headings and subheadings to find a listing or information about a location – very difficult to find travel information.

The Silverton site (www.silverton.com) was not bad, and I might consider stopping there for an afternoon. It looked like they have a lot of restaurants and a couple of galleries.

The Nakusp site (www.nakusp.com) had a groovy, 70's look to it, which was visually appealing, and it was easy to navigate. The photos were great and sold me on the town. It looked like a place I would love to explore. This site led me to (www.nakusparrowlakes.com) which covers a lot of other cities too. I was surprised to learn that Nelson is 196 miles from Nakusp, and felt daunted by the distances to travel through this area. I hadn't realized how far apart these towns are! I think for a vacation I would want to pick one town and stay there, enjoying its immediate surroundings.

Traveling to the southern British Columbia area is a long journey, but I was very intrigued by the beauty of the area in both winter and summer. Even

TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS

though many of the websites were lacking in graphic appeal, information, and navigability, I became enamored with the natural beauty of the Kootenays. Although I would love to enjoy the snow, winter activities, and hot springs of the area during winter, I think I would prefer exploring the region in the summer. I like the idea of staying in a cabin along one of the huge lakes and taking day trips to some of the smaller villages. Camping even looks appealing there (and I'm not much of a camper.) The hot springs are a tremendous draw, and the idea that I could stay in Revelstoke (www.revelstokecc.bc.ca) and be near three different hot springs resorts sounded good.

In choosing one place to visit, I found that Revelstoke's website had the greatest appeal, but the woman I spoke to in Nelson was so friendly that I would pick Nelson. It is also not as far away. Before deciding for sure, I would want to talk to a friend or relative who had been there – I've heard great things about Big White, Silver Star and Sun Peaks for skiing, but have never before heard about the Nelson/Revelstoke area.

Southern BC Marketing Literature

I requested marketing materials from Nelson (received in 2 days) and Kaslo (received in 6 days), Slocan and Revelstoke.

Kaslo sent me a one-pound envelope of information that covered many of the surrounding towns. The brochures created by Super, Natural British Columbia were slick and very intriguing. The Ski & Snowboard Map is an awesome visual of the availability of ski locations. My favorite brochure was the Hot Springs, Spas & Wellness Map, and the Circle Routes Scenic Driving Guide sold me on the Hot Springs Circle drive. Kaslo was very generous in that they included the Slocan Chamber of Commerce 8 x 14 two-sided paper guide that I didn't want to read in Acrobat Reader online.

Additional newsprint guides were the West Kootenay Visitor Magazine for both spring/summer 2005 and winter 2005 (seems like they should have 2006 by now.) Using the restaurant guide at the back of these, I was able to determine how big a town was by the number of restaurants listed. Kaslo had one, compared with Nelson's 16. Also included were several individual business brochures for sailing, fishing, ATV adventures, etc. Finally, three pages of local (Kaslo) lodgings printed from the www.hellobc.com website. All in all it was a very comprehensive package of information. It didn't particularly sell Kaslo but I did make me want to visit the West Kootenys.

[NOTE: This is a problem with organizations that only promote member businesses. Kaslo, in fact, has more than one restaurant and Nelson has nearly 50, not just 16. The more you have to offer, collectively, the further people will come and the longer they will stay. Only showcasing members sells the community short on what is there for visitors and reduces the number of visitors you might host if you promoted ALL that is available. Include everyone, but showcase your members and make that clear.]

Nelson sent me three brochures: one slick flyer with gorgeous photos and quotes about Nelson from famous magazines, a tall card featuring Historic Tours, and a black and white 8-1/2 x 11 paper brochure booklet probably printed by the Chamber of Commerce. The booklet has everything you need to know about Nelson. I appreciated the distance information and the map of downtown along with the ferry schedule. It isn't a pretty brochure, but it is certainly helpful.

Based on the information received, I am hooked on the West Kootenys. I would definitely stop in Nelson, which looks like a good starting point for exploring the area. I would most likely do the Hot Springs Circle drive.

Destination Development is currently writing a book, *Your Town Online*, which will include a couple dozen tips for developing a website that's good enough to "close the sale." Of people who have internet access, 94% use the web as their primary travel resource.

Here are a few cliff notes from the book, which will be published in the spring of 2006.

I. Make your town shine – effective website design for destinations.

Tourism is the front door to your community's economic development efforts. It showcases the quality of life in your town, and people who decide to move or open a business in your community will have first seen your community through the eyes of a visitor.

- **Pull your customers into the site** with knock-out photography and powerful text. You have eight seconds to grab the viewer's attention.
- **Create a single front door** to your community with a professional, dynamic home page. From there, the reader can link to your city government, your chamber of commerce, or your visitor information. It's like walking up to a home with terrific curb appeal.
- **Make it simple.** Have no more than seven links on a page, and be sure your site is easy to navigate. It must be easy for visitors to see where they are, where they've been, and find the answers they are seeking.
- **Content is King: words and pictures.** Website readers scan pages – they don't read them. Be sure your text is brief, use bullet points, and proof-read, proof-read, proof-read. Use lots of professional-quality photography; a picture is truly worth a thousand words.
- **Don't provide just lists – provide information.** Lists don't tell a reader what they want to know – which is: What is there to do? Will I have fun? Is there anything special? Give brief, specific descriptions of your shops, your restaurants, your lodging, your activities.
- **Include a map of your area.** Let visitors see where you are and how they can get to you. Is there an airport nearby? Highways? If your town is in a hard-to-reach location, tell the visitor how to get there.
- **Sell experiences – not boundaries.** Visitors are interested in things to see and do, and don't care where your town or county line is drawn. Give them a reason to visit – what activities do you have? What fun activities can they do in your town that they can't do at home?
- **Build the brand.** Branding is differentiation – what sets you apart from anyone else? Branding requires continuity in all you do: your product offerings, claim to fame, marketing, identity, slogan, and the look and feel of your marketing materials. A first glance at your website should tell visitors who you are and what sets you apart.
- **Spread the brand around.** The city, chamber, visitors bureau, and other local organizations should all use the same style or "look." This helps build

the brand.

- **Create a call to action.** Every page of your website should have a call to action. What do you want the visitor to do? Each page should have a purpose and call on the viewer to take an action. That action might be to call for more information, to take advantage of a special deal right now, to sign up for an e-newsletter, to fill out a request for information form, to book a vacation, or to jump in their car to come to your town.
- **Make it easy to get more information.** Provide contact information – your organization name, address, phone number, and e-mail address – on every page. Also provide an online request for information page and links for more information.
- **Downloads save money, increase sales.** Convenience is absolutely critical to success. Provide downloadable, printable PDFs of your marketing materials. However, make sure the visitor can see the brochure online before downloading it. This way they can print only the pages that cater to their wishes.
- **Include a site map.** This makes it easy for people to find what they want quickly. And, again, convenience is critical.
- **Develop partnerships.** The more you have to offer, the further people will come, and the longer they will stay. By promoting nearby attractions and activities, you are providing more for your visitors, and getting them to stay longer. Provide links to your nearby partners' attractions websites.
- **Size matters.** Be sure to develop your website so that it can be viewed by laptops as well as standard monitors – without having to scroll from side to side. Your site should be compatible with any browser. Test it to be sure.
- **Putting together the team.** Besides a technically competent website builder, you also need the graphic designer, the writer, the tourism professional, and the photographer. Hire the best, then negotiate the price.
- **How do you stack up against your competition?** Take a look at other tourism websites – compare yourself with your competition. What are they doing that you should be doing?

II. Make your town stand out in the crowd – marketing your website.

It's one thing to have a terrific website; it's also important that people can find it.

- **Make your URL memorable.** It's not very often we get a chance to choose our "name," but this is one time you can, and selecting your online name can be very helpful. Choose an URL that is easy for people to remember, that is logical for who you are, that fits your town, your brand. Short is better than long, but not so obscure that it's easy to forget. Choose several URLs that a visitor might logically try, then link them all to your site.
- **Purchase your way to the top.** Viewers rarely look past the first page of website listings on a search, so you want to be on that first page. Come up

with key words that a visitor might use in searching for activities or attractions your community has to offer. Take advantage of Google and Yahoo!'s keyword purchase listings. You bid for the keywords, with the highest bidder getting top listing. You pay per click.

- **Tap into website tools (some are free).** Optimize your free listings on the first page of a search by using software tools. One is Search Engine Optimization by NetMechanic, and it can help you strategize your first page key words so that it's easier for you to make the top of search results.

- **Leverage your metatags.** Work with your web designer to use key words and phrases that the search engines will tap into more easily to find your site.

- **Create link exchanges.** Provide links to the websites of your promotional partners, and have them include your link on their sites as well. Link exchanges can boost your listing position on search engines.

- **Permission marketing – creating TOMA.** One of the most powerful marketing tools available is the e-newsletter, providing it is sent only to those who request it (from visiting your site and filling out an online form), and providing it is very brief, contains real news, and contains a call to action.

- **Update your site regularly.** Keep your website dynamic – people will want to check back to see what's new. Let your e-newsletter subscribers know when you've updated information on your site, so they'll be sure to check back.

III. Invest wisely – the importance of your town online.

The internet is the most powerful marketing tool a community has. 94% of all potential visitors (especially those with money to spend) will use the internet. Make sure your website is good enough to close the sale.

Eighty-eight percent of destination marketing organizations, including cities and chambers of commerce, spend more on printed materials than they do on website development and upkeep. Reverse this trend.

Consider the following:

- On the home page, let the visitor "Pick Your Season." Once they do that, they can then "Pick Your Passion," which can include specific activities available that time of year. Make sure you promote things the visitor can't get closer to home, then market the "diversions" - the things that they can do closer to home, but will do while in your community.

TOURISM ASSESSMENT & SUGGESTIONS

This visitor assessment was prepared by the team at:



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