



Tourism

Darlene Grant Fiander



Photo courtesy of Nova Scotia Tourism, Culture and Heritage

Tourism is one of the most competitive industries in the world. To compete it takes investment in infrastructure, product development, and marketing.

Tourism is an economic powerhouse for Nova Scotia. Few sectors of the economy have grown at a faster rate since the late 1970s, yet as an industry we have struggled to achieve the recognition deserved.

By its very nature, the tourism industry is diverse and fragmented often finding it difficult to be heard as a cohesive voice in the corridors of power. Tourism is also the most competitive industry in the world. Other destinations have found tourism to be the answer for their economy and are investing heavily in infrastructure, product development and marketing.

Never before has the competition been greater for tourism dollars. With growing access to global destinations, rapidly changing travel patterns and soaring expectations, creating authentic experiences with a high degree of quality and service will be the defining factor in tourism's success.

Tourism is a \$1.33-billion industry employing over 40,000. Although, there was a slight increase in revenues this past year, over the last few years tourism revenues have been stagnant. U.S. leisure

travel has been in decline for years, and it is unlikely the situation is going to improve with security concerns, new passport regulations, mounting energy prices, a strong Canadian dollar and a weakening U.S. economy. We need to continue to build on non-traditional markets.

To ensure tourism claims its rightful place as Nova Scotia's most promising sector, we need appropriate tourism infrastructure. New investment in tourism facilities, such as convention

facilities, has to be a priority. The appropriate-sized facility would represent the biggest single boost to tourism in Nova Scotia. Research indicates that 40 per cent of convention delegates spend time pre and post traveling throughout Nova Scotia.

Increased investment in our secondary roads, which lead to key tourism attractions, and drawing visitors to our rural communities is also required. Ensuring predictable access into the province by air, ferry, rail or road is vital as well. We need to protect our natural assets through the completion of the protected areas network and ensure public access to the coast. Removing unnecessary regulations and barriers will stimulate good business growth.

During 2007, tourism faced a number of issues affecting its competitiveness. The proposed cancellation of the Visitor Rebate Program would have been devastating to all of Canada. We now have a reformed program that no longer offers tax rebates to individual travelers; this is contrary to the global trend of those destinations we compete with. The abrupt changes to the federal student employment program took tourism by surprise in the spring of 2007; the criteria changes did not consider the impact on the rural tourism industry that relies on students to work at attractions, festivals and visitor information centres. Although this decision was quickly reversed, these situations highlight the lack of understanding and priority given to tourism in policy consideration.

Although facing numerous challenges, this is an exciting time to be in tourism. There are many positive things happening. Nova Scotia now has U.S. preclearance, a more liberalized federal approach to air agreements, and the return of Icelandair to name a few. Nova Scotia leads the country in having the highest number of certified tourism professionals as well. We are also seeing an increase in private sector investment and the Department of Tourism, Culture & Heritage has finalized its review of the Tourist Accommodation Act, enabling industry to work toward improving the quality of the tourism accommodation product.

As tourism evolves into a globally dominant industry, tourism businesses will need to place a higher focus on the quality of their product and offer services that meet the needs of the new consumer. Tourism operators also need to enhance their human resource practices and be creative as they compete with other sectors for a decreasing skilled labour pool.

If we want tourism to reach its full potential, we need to manage the business of tourism better in Nova Scotia. We need champions in industry and in government who will recognize the tremendous opportunities tourism offers this province.

— Darlene Grant Fiander is the president of the Tourism Industry Association of Nova Scotia and the executive director of the Nova Scotia Tourism Human Resource Council.

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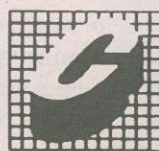
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