

# Memorable Visitor Experiences Lead to Relevance and Sustainability

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## Introduction

Parks Canada welcomes annually more than 22 million visitors to the national parks, national historic sites and national marine conservation areas of Canada. The Agency sets the stage for visitors to enjoy meaningful, high-quality experiences through the provision of information, infrastructure, facilities, programs, services and personnel. The visitor experience is the cumulative outcome of the individual's visit and their interactions with Parks Canada, and its partners. This includes pre and onsite trip planning information, reception and orientation services, interpretation programming, campgrounds, hiking trails and other recreational services, visitor safety programs, and ongoing post visit information.

Through the services, facilities, programs, personnel and infrastructure offered at national parks, national marine conservation areas and national historic sites; Parks Canada provides Canadians with opportunities to enjoy, understand and appreciate Canada's natural and cultural heritage and to create their own memories. Parks Canada aims to stage meaningful and exceptional experiences, making these special places important and relevant to Canadians. Visits to national parks, national historic sites and marine conservation areas help to foster a shared sense of responsibility for environmentally and culturally sound actions that will extend beyond their boundaries, and influence the values of Canadians as a whole. The experiences and knowledge gained through visits to national parks, national historic sites and national marine conservation areas will provide visitors with a clear and strong sense of Canada, adding to the well-being and health of all Canadians.

## Results

A visitor's experience at a national park, national historic site or national marine conservation area is unique and personal. It results from: purposeful and personal connections with the heritage resources and settings; personal interactions with Parks Canada's guides, storytellers and guardians; and the provision of information, facilities, infrastructure, services and programs designed to respond to visitor needs and expectations. Parks Canada will continue to provide opportunities to contribute to a visitor's personal growth and understanding, through explanation and connection with the authentic and nationally significant resources protected and presented in these places. These encounters will illustrate the relevance of the national parks, national marine conservation areas and national historic sites to Canadians and reinforce a sense of connection with this heritage. Programs, services and facilities will continue to be provided in a manner that respects the Agency's traditional high standards for quality, cleanliness and safety, and a commitment to the protection of the heritage values of these places.

Parks Canada has always provided high quality programs and services. The Agency is now refining its approach to better understand and subsequently meet the emerging interests of visitors through a wide spectrum of activities and programs. In consideration of their needs and expectations, the Agency is proactive in tailoring opportunities for visitors to experience Canada's natural and cultural wonders.

The travelling public is a dynamic entity; the cycle of change of their needs, expectations and behaviours is rapid and will require monitoring and anal-

ysis at both national and local levels. This will include monitoring of recreation, leisure and tourism trends, ongoing public opinion polling and ongoing analysis of other contemporary information.

Visitor feed back also will be actively sought by operational managers through tools such as comment cards and other real time methods as a way of monitoring visitor perceptions and responding through ongoing service improvements. This will provide staff with information that they can act upon quickly in direct response to visitors' needs.

To Canadians and people worldwide, national parks, national marine conservation areas and national historic sites represent the best of Canada. This image is founded on the attributes of authenticity, national significance, uniqueness, quality of service, sustainability and good value. Most importantly, national parks and national historic sites continue to be highly valued by visitors for the scope, variety and richness of the experiences they offer.

As the cornerstones behind quality natural and cultural tourism experiences, the national parks, national marine conservation areas and national historic sites of Canada can be positioned as the quintessential opportunities to experience Canada.

The visitor experience begins prior to arrival at a national heritage place. The provision of clear and easily accessible information helps to influence and respond to visitor expectations. Parks Canada will continue to provide pre-visit information via its expanded national toll-free telephone service, its tourism industry partners and its own Web site which will be improved to better serve potential visitors with their planning requirements. The improved campground reservation system addresses visitor expectations for advance trip planning and assurance of available campsites.

A key component of information provision is on-site welcoming and orientation. Providing visitors with the right information at this stage of their visit will ensure that visitors benefit fully and safely of all opportunities for enjoyable experiences. Over the next five years, Parks Canada will also enhance the quality and consistency of signage and other information services.

Key is the provision of a range or continuum of opportunities for visitors both at individual national parks and national historic sites and also through links between different heritage areas. Parks Canada will work to broaden the range of opportunities for visitors within the context of maintaining the ecological and commemorative integrity of these special places in order to reach both existing visitors and non-visitors with a menu of diverse and tailored experience opportunities.

While maintaining a core level of service for all potential visitors, the number and types of programs and activities and the related services offered will be developed with consideration of current and future market segments. The need to identify key markets through research and respond with desirable programs and activities is essential to increasing the relevance of the parks and sites to Canadians.

Parks Canada has long known that for many visitors, personal contact with friendly, knowledgeable and, engaging staff is a key element of a memorable experience. For this reason personal interpretation is at the core of many Parks Canada experience. Parks Canada will continue to work with partners to augment investments in the development and delivery of professional and authentic learning experiences.

Facilities such as day-use areas, trails, campgrounds, visitor centres, water and sewer systems, and roads afford onsite opportunities that optimise visitor understanding, enjoyment and appreciation. By the very nature of national parks, national marine conservation areas and national historic sites, services often vary by scope and scale and are dependent on the unique characteristics of each location, as well as the needs and expectations of different visitor markets.

Parks Canada will be renewing its visitor related assets strategically and seeking opportunities to make adjustments to its asset base by achieving a better understanding of how its facilities respond to visitor expectations and contribute to meaningful visitor experiences. The Agency will take advantage of opportunities, to right size, innovate and modernize infrastructure to realize improved efficiency, standards and levels of service. In cases

where facilities are no longer responding to visitor needs and expectations for environmentally or culturally sensitive experiences, they will be phased-out or decommissioned.

Finally, the Agency will involve and work closely with community and business stakeholders to design visitor experience opportunities that meet the needs of their shared markets while respecting the rights and values of host communities, neighboring property owners and Aboriginal peoples. Through partnerships and collaborative efforts, Parks Canada will advance visitor experiences opportunities offering economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits as well as create a sense of connection and attachment to Canada's heritage place for the visitors.