

# TWEEDSMUIR PARK LODGE

## CASE STUDY



A gem of the Cariboo Chilcotin Coast region of British Columbia, Tweedsmuir Park Lodge is one of the Magnificent 7 Wilderness Lodges of Canada. Nestled in the Great Bear Rainforest, Tweedsmuir Park Lodge is situated on 60 acres within Tweedsmuir Provincial Park located in the Bella Coola Valley.

The lodge is an award-winning accommodation provider with ten chalets, each accommodating two to five guests, offering world-class service and scenery. Exceptional dining, a wellness centre (hot-tub, sauna, exercise room) trails and wildlife-viewing platforms round out the core offer.

Visitor experiences in the spring, summer and fall include wildlife viewing, grizzly safaris, hiking, river drifts, Via Ferrata<sup>1</sup>, fishing, archery, mountain and e-biking, lawn sports, frisbee golf, swimming, fjord trips, valley tours, canopy walk in the forest and Nuxalk First Nation cultural experiences. In the winter, the experience is focused on heli-skiing through their sister company, Bella Coola Heli Sports, the first heliski operation in the world to be climate positive, and voted the “*World’s Best Heliski Operator*” 2017-2020. Also a member of the Magnificent 7, Bella Coola HeliSports attracts international guests to the largest heli-ski area on the planet, providing a range of untracked terrain as vast as the entire Swiss Alps.

Visitors can access this remote lodge and winter heliski paradise by car (Hwy 20), a flight into Bella Coola (QBC) or Anahim Lake (YAA) or by ferry from Port Hardy on Vancouver Island.

### COVID-19 REALITY

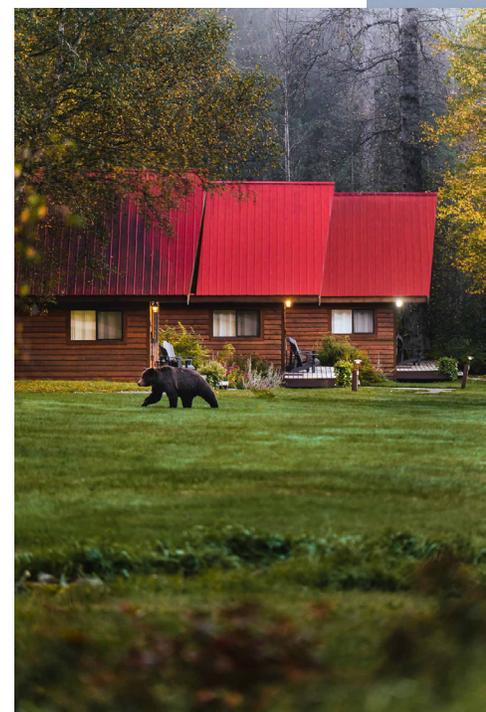
Bella Coola HeliSports and Tweedsmuir Park Lodge historically attract 90% of their guests from international markets during the winter season and 80% during the spring through fall, 50% of which are from the USA. When the Canadian border closed on March 18, 2020, the companies lost 35% of their winter business and 98% of their booked business for the remainder of 2020 and the winter of 2021. As a result, there was a need to adjust their strategy to appeal to British Columbians.

### FACING REALITY

*“Success required thoughtful planning, flexibility, teamwork and a laser focus on our provincial guests as we adapted, and continue to adapt to the ever-changing realities of COVID 19”*  
**Beat Steiner, CEO**

Unable to welcome guests from its traditional markets, the companies faced several critical challenges:

- Addressing the needs of confirmed international guests who were unable to visit
- Developing a new customer base within the British Columbia market
- Addressing the health concerns of the Nuxalk Nation, on whose traditional territory the lodge operates, and who were uncomfortable with bringing people into the area
- Evolving the product offer to attract a new customer
- Maintaining core staff through to the following winter season (2020/21)
- Preserving their strong travel trade relationships
- Retaining key senior staff



1. Via Ferrata is Italian for “iron path” and refers to a climbing route that employs steel cables, rungs or ladders, fixed to the rock to which climbers affix a harness with two leashes, allowing them to secure themselves to the metal fixture and limit any fall.

## TACKLING THE COVID-19 CHALLENGE HEAD-ON

*"Our first step was to understand the financial situation and determine the implications of a variety of ideas being discussed."*  
**Will Sasges, Director of Finance**

A focus on the BC market required understanding the financial realities of attracting the new customer being targeted, respecting the Nuxalk First Nation, modifying and developing new products and pricing options, and employing new marketing strategies.

- **Financial analyses** identified potential saving opportunities that would not negatively impact guest perceptions of value and the visitor experience. Various elements of the traditional experiences were assessed for possible removal. While no changes were made to the summer offer, the company removed the opportunity to ski on arrival and departure day; but their traditional promise for total vertical feet remained. Scenario planning helped understand the effects of promotional pricing and varying occupancy and staffing levels on the bottom line. These financial analyses informed the heli-skiing decision to operate only the Tweedsmuir Park Lodge property and not lease the other four as in previous years.
- **Reframed the standard pricing model** to attract the more price conscious provincial market by adding a-la-carte options to the usual standard, all-inclusive packages. New options included flexibility in the number of nights booked (from 1+) and the ability to choose individual meals and activities.
- **Guest research** from the reservations system and [Google analytics](#), along with input from frontline staff, helped the marketing team identify new customers within BC markets with similar demographic characteristics and interests to their traditional customers.
- **Collaborated** with the [Bella Coola Valley Tourism Association](#), and the [Nuxalk Nation](#) to develop a plan to begin welcoming BC residents back to the area for the remainder of the summer/fall season. This successfully ensured the community and the business were aligned in their [approach to safely](#) bring visitors to the area. The lodge continues to work with the Nuxalk Nation on a plan for the 2020-2021 winter season.
- **Updated policies** related to [booking](#) and [cancellation and refunds](#) in order to allay the fears of potential guests regarding the uncertainty of travel. Changes for 2020 included no longer requiring a deposit at time of booking (vs. a 50% deposit required pre-COVID), no fee for cancelling in advance of 30 days or if due to COVID-related circumstances (vs. 50% refund on deposit if cancelled 90+ days in advance and no refund if cancelled within 90 days).
- **Contacted international customers** who had booked directly for 2020 and offered to rebook them in 2021 or 2022 at the 2020 rates, providing a base of future business while opening availability for the BC market.
- **Promotional pricing** is something neither company has done to attract guests in the past. However, they realized that to remain open and keep their key staff, they needed a mitigation strategy until international markets returned. Offering a BC Residents rate (summer 2020) and a Canadians rate (winter 2021) introduced residents to the experience and helped to develop a domestic market for the future.
- **Developed a new experience** through new partnership between Maple Leaf Adventures and Bella Coola Hel Sports. This new [Catamaran based heli-skiing](#) package geared to high net-worth individuals, has been [launched](#) with the first departure set for March 2021. A one-of-a-kind [experience](#) that solidifies both companies' standing in the luxury adventure market.



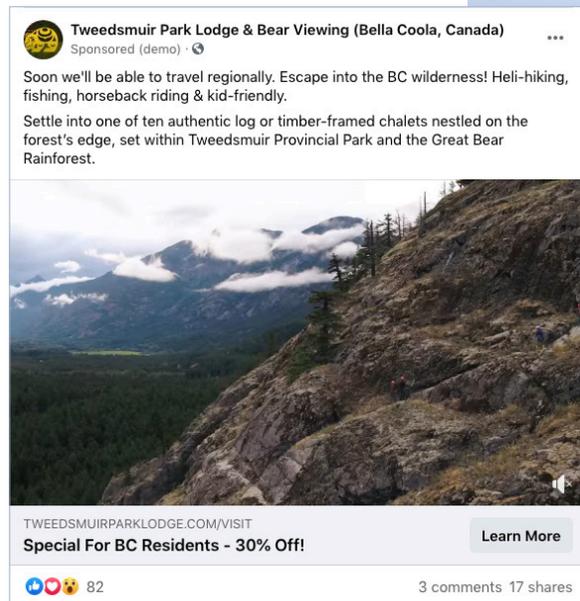
## COVID-19 MARKETING DECISIONS

*"One of the benefits of digital marketing is that we can monitor, measure and modify our tactics based on what is happening in real-time."*

**Tim Wilkinson, Director - Sales & Marketing**

- Significantly reduced traditional marketing programs targeted to international markets, though continued to use their customer database to communicate with them by email.
- Made a small investment in the US market for their winter experiences to continue building brand awareness with a call-to-action to book now for the 2021/2022 winter season.

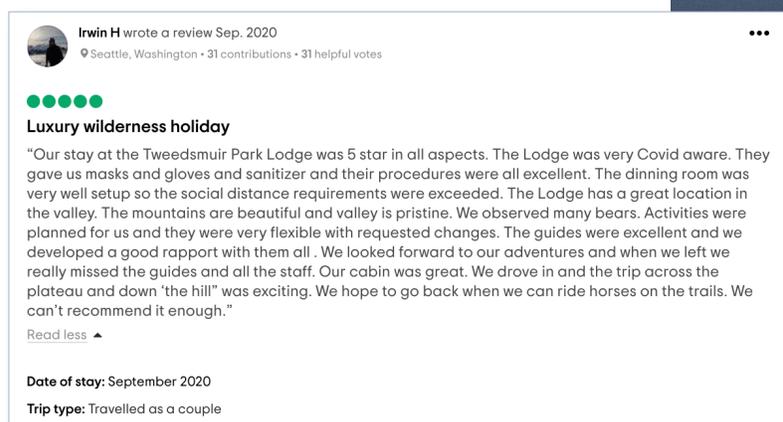
- Continued to spend on Google ads to capture potential visitors searching on key terms from Canada and the USA for winter.
- Restricted geotargeted advertising to BC for the summer.
- Increased their ad spending in social media as they were able to: monitor and measure success and modify their ads based on real-time metrics; reach a broader market than those searching on key terms; and cut through the clutter by having followers forward/share their content with others.
- Took advantage of lower occupancy levels to do contra deals with BC-based companies to create a range of new photographic and video assets for [summer experiences](#) such as the Via Ferrata.
- Participated in new, sector-based co-op advertising programs for heli-skiing offered by [Destination BC](#).
- Provided travel trade partners the ability to hold their customers' deposits and payments by allowing them to defer 2020 bookings into 2021 or 2022 at the 2020 rates.



## 2020 RESULTS TO DATE

*"We loved that our guests from BC were interested in ALL of the amazing experiences that we have to offer, whereas most of our international guests are interested in JUST doing one thing: seeing grizzly bears!"*  
**Tim Wilkinson, Director - Sales & Marketing**

- Of the international guests booked to visit during the summer 2020 and winter 2020/2021, nearly 90% have re-scheduled to a future year.
- The shortened summer season occupancy was 66%. While 24% lower than in 2019, it was seen as a success given the short lead-time to market to the BC market audience.
- Social media marketing offers were seen by a Vancouver travel trade operator who sold the product to their local Chinese community. This is seen as a potential new market for future summer business.
- Relationships with the Nuxalk Nation continue to develop.
- Generated interest amongst luxury consumers in the international market for the new catamaran-based heli-skiing experience.
- The local market appreciated the flexibility of the a-la-carte options, yet surprisingly was more likely than international guests to participate in the full range of activities. While the a-la-carte pricing is not as beneficial for the company in the short-term, it is something they may continue to offer during periods of low occupancy as a tactic to support long-term market development.
- Maintained staff through to winter 2020/21 (when thought they would be able to bring back their traditional market).
- Strengthened relationships with travel trade by providing them with the same rebooking options as customers who booked directly.



## TIPS FROM THE COVID-19 TRENCHES

*"Running staggered dining times ensured the lodge dining room was only ever half full at most, enabling safe distancing amongst our guests and staff"*  
**Rebecca Percy, Lodge Manager - Tweedsmuir Park Lodge**

- BC residents are interested in BC experiences when developed, promoted and priced to meet their needs and interests.
- Work together with the local community, First Nations and other businesses to communicate a

consistent, clear message to visitors that fosters trust and confidence that the destination is open, safe and welcoming visitors.

- Engage a digital marketing consultant to allow for a faster and easier implementation if you do not have an in-house expert.
- Keep an eye out for opportunities promoted by destination marketing organizations such as co-op marketing programs.
- Keep the future in mind by continuing to build awareness in traditional markets and develop new BC-based markets, strength comes from a diversified base.

## SUMMARY

Tweedsmuir Park Lodge and Bella Coola Heli Sports are showing remarkable resilience through the COVID-19 pandemic. Their actions have strengthened their relationships with past international guests and travel trade, created new experience offerings suited to the local market and developed new local travel trade partnerships. Furthermore, the companies are entering the winter season with a more diversified customer base, a stronger awareness and interest amongst Canadians, a continued commitment to sustainable tourism, and a continued commitment to work with the local community and First Nations.



## WEBSITE AND SOCIAL CHANNELS

### Tweedsmuir Park Lodge:



### Bella Coola Heli-Sports:



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This case study was made possible through the cooperation of the following people:

- Tim Wilkinson, Director - Sales & Marketing
- Ben Duthie, Sales Manager
- Rebecca Percy, Tweedsmuir Park Lodge Manager
- Will Sasges, Director of Finance
- Beat Steiner, CEO, Founder and Co-Owner

**Lead Researcher:** Jane Osler, PJ Osler & Associates

**Support Researchers:** Nancy Arsenault and Lesley Anderson, Tourism Café Canada

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