



A BRITISH COLUMBIA CASE STUDY

MAPLE LEAF ADVENTURES

Setting Sail with Increased Accessibility

This case study* illustrates:

- how a commitment to the visitor experience at the heart of development and investment decisions can strategically open new doors to new and repeat visitation.
- how an unwavering commitment to responsible, sustainable tourism practices is an asset to future business expansion.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- You can invest in new customers by responding to their needs while simultaneously ensuring the values of the company remain at the heart of the business.
- Invest in responsible, sustainable travel practices. It is more than a differentiator, it is essential to the long-term health of the planet and tourism industry and valued by all their guests within British Columbia and visitors to the province.
- Follow your dream and develop a tourism business you can be truly proud of. Politely accept people's advice on how to run "your" business but stay true to your values and passion.

THE COMPANY



Maple Leaf Adventures is a locally owned and operated company committed to providing immersive, personalized eco-tours along the coastal

waters of British Columbia and southeast Alaska. Their "leave no trace" philosophy ensures their business success is built on relationships with the people and communities they visit. Every cruise provides special access to the wildlife, nature, and local storytellers who bring the culture of the west coast of Canada to life.

Since 2008, Maple Leaf Adventures have received 16 awards for being a top adventure and eco-tour company, offering the best trips of a lifetime, exceptional visitor experiences, their commitment to the environment and responsible tourism. Their success is built on a commitment to superior guest services, excellent community relations, skilled crew who ensure safety and adventure and caring deeply for all guests, staff and partners who together create their own

*This case study was made possible through the cooperation of Kevin Smith and Maureen Gordon, Co-Owners/operators, Maple Leaf Adventures and Tourism Café researcher Nancy Arsenault.

unique magic on every trip. They source locally, create exceptional meals and simultaneously educate guests on the choices available such as wild vs. farmed fish, supporting local economies vs. buying bulk.

Value-driven social entrepreneurs, Kevin Smith and Maureen Gordon set sail 18 years ago with a commitment to:

- environmental sustainability;
- celebration of natural history;
- personalized warm interactions with everyone;
- fostering the local economy;
- connecting with science and discovery; and
- general excellence.

In establishing the shareholder agreement for Maple Leaf Adventures, Kevin Smith decided “Ok, I’m going to turn what people expect for a profit motive on its head. I will write into the shareholder agreement that I will never make a decision purely on driving profit for my family and friends who invest in the company. I will make decisions based on the triple bottom line — environmental, social, and financial.” Business partner Maureen Gordon adds with a smile, “we actually have a quadruple bottom line — fun is our fourth bottom line.”

THE CHALLENGE

The company currently operates the “flagship” Maple Leaf, a 92-foot Schooner that accommodates up to eight guests, whose average age is 53 years old, in four semi-private sleeping areas. The Tugboat Swell is an 88-foot converted ship that accommodates up to 12 guests in six private cabins, appealing to a slightly older average demographic of 59 years old. Both the ship and itineraries have strong appeal to Baby Boomers, born between 1944 to 1964.

In deciding how to expand their business, Smith and Gordon wanted to go beyond merely, “adding an extra ship”; they wanted to raise the bar on the entire guest experience, thus creating a differentiated expedition unlike any they currently offer or can be purchased along the west coast of Canada.

SOLUTION

The summer of 2019 saw the addition of a new high-quality, expedition ship to their fleet—the Cascadia. This 138-foot catamaran is one-of-a-kind commercial tourism vessel on the west coast of Canada. With 12 luxury cabins, accommodating up to 24 guests in a whole new level of comfort.

⁷<https://mapleleafadventures.com/about/our-vision/>



EXPERIENCE DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

SHIP SELECTION

- The size of the Cascadia guarantees increased luxury and better onboard amenities.
- The ability to manoeuvre into places large cruise ships cannot access creating once-in-a-lifetime experiences and stories that will last a lifetime.
- The spacious salon, immaculate interior, and on-deck dining areas and lounges adds to the private yacht feel.
- Increased stability while dining and using two chefs to create culinary masterpieces.
- Large covered decks allow for wildlife viewing and photography/videography.

LANDING CRAFT SELECTION

Unique to the cruise and expedition market on the west coast, guests of the Cascadia enjoy multiple shore trips per day. To facilitate this type of shore access, in 50+ age of their guests, Maple Leaf Adventures contracted Gibson, BC based boat builder Jasper Marine to custom design the newest, most accessible landing craft along the west coast. Smith designed the new landing craft with the owner of the boat building company and the engineer.

“We really focused on the guest experience, which generally is not the way you build boats. And what I’ve discovered it that that this is a huge advantage for our guests.”

The key experience design features of the two custom land craft style boats include:

- The ability of the landing craft to land right by the shoreline then lower a walk off platform for easy and comfortable access to the shoreline. This in comparison to jumping or rolling off other types of small boats, which is the norm with most companies.
- Numerous handholds to allow the ease getting onto and moving around on the boat.
- Enhanced seating comfort.
- An electric drive outboard that is a silent, vibration, smoke, and noise free. When going slow it is used for enhanced wildlife viewing and increases the guides ability provide in depth interpretation.

Now says Smith, “I just crank down the large bow door and guests, average age 65, can easily walk off without sort of having to jump over the bow of the boat like they would in typical expedition type boat.”

The investment in specialized landing craft demonstrates how a locally owned business can protect British Columbia’s wildlife and ecosystems, respect the diversity of the coastal cultures while simultaneously opening visitor access.

DEVELOPING THE ITINERARY WITH EXPANDED SHORE TRIP CAPABILITIES

Appreciating that guests choose Maple Leaf Adventures over a cruise ship because of the small, intimate nature, the new itineraries for the Cascadia have been enhanced by:

- Incorporating two to three shore trips per day that feature hidden gems—be that people or places—that surprise and delight guests, leading to memorable, transformative experiences.
- Establishing and re-establishing partnerships and community relationships to provide guests with access to local story tellers, marine specialists and the local first nations people up and down the BC coast.
- Incorporating hands-on, interactive shore experiences along with enhanced marine life interpretation.
- Using big nets, guests can pull up wonderful things that people would normally only see if they’re a diver. They are placed in an on-deck aquarium, guests learn about the sea life, take photos and then the catch is released back into the ocean unharmed.

- Continuing the company’s relationship with researchers and scientists to ensure leading edge information is shared with their guests and creating opportunities for citizen science activities.

“What is memorable about a trip, most often, comes down to interacting with the people and culture around you. The unexpected moments that are unpredictable and ultimately force you to look at the world differently with a new sense of understanding and humility.”

— SKIFT: The Post Experience Economy (2018)

COMMON TO ALL MAPLE LEAF ADVENTURES

- Allowing time in the schedule for spontaneity means a meal may need to be delayed an hour — to optimize the opportunities an ever-changing natural environment offers. If nature “serves up” adventure, that’s what happens!
- Ensuring a high guest to staff ratio and encouraging staff to chat and spend time with the guests, a sense of friendship and comradery is developed.
- Ensuring exceptional meals using local foods and simultaneously educating guests on the choices available to us such as wild vs. farmed fish, supporting local economies vs. buying bulk.
- Disconnecting to reconnect. There is no Wi-Fi while sailing, offering a digital detox experience, except for using phones to capture photos and videos to post upon their return.

- Ensuring the trip is a fit by having guests complete a pre-booking questionnaire.
- Maintaining an unwavering commitment to responsible travel practices and embrace sustainability as foundational to your operations.
- Finding ways to give back to the communities that welcome their ships and support the guest experience.
- The ability to gather all decision-making information and book online.

RESULTS

“This ‘journey’ was beyond expectation. The natural environment to which we were introduced is beyond belief and will stay with me for the rest of my life. I hope that the knowledge we have learned will spread far and wide and enable this area of Canada to remain totally unchanged.”

-Mo Tipples, Manitoba

The Cascadia just set sail in May 2019.

Preliminary results for this first season include:

- Three itineraries including Vancouver Island’s Wild Side (Northwest), the only excursion of its kind in British Columbia.
- Increasing the average age of the guests to 65, thus achieve the goal of extending their reach into their core market.

- 90% of their sales secured within one month of launching the new ship.
- The expansion has not cannibalized sales on the Swell or Maple Leaf as each ship offers a different guest experience.

The company looks forward to this new ship helping to build on the current success and their:

- Perfect 5-star TripAdvisor rating with long, glowing, detailed reviews from past guests.
- Ability to emotionally connect visitors that leads to great content in the form of photos, videos, testimonials and stories.
- Pride in being the first adventure cruise company in the world to become part of “1% For the Planet” an organization that works collectively to be a powerful source in solving the world’s problems.
- Sixteen awards including National Geographic Traveller, Expedia, Frommers, Parks Canada, and Fodors, to name a few.
- Recognition by Destination Canada as a Canadian Signature Experience for their Haida Gwaii/Queen Charlotte Islands Tour.
- Ability to contribute \$100,000 over 10-years to support the Raincoast Conservation Foundation ensuring the goals of conservation, eco-tourism, and involving local First Nations in the science and stewardship of the territory is advanced.

WEBSITE

mapleleafadventures.com

⁸www.onepercentfortheplanet.org/about

This case study was made possible through the cooperation of Maureen Gordon and Kevin Smith, Co-Owner/Operators, Maple Leaf Adventures

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