



Driving Itineraries – Let’s Get Moving

Industry Topic Specialist

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Specialist Highlights

The GPRTA created a set of driving itineraries as a proactive solution during the pandemic that would drive business for local operators and build awareness and pride among residents for the experiences in the region by:

1. Building a strong understanding of the target market and its base motivations for visiting Grande Prairie.
2. Brainstorming with others to determine ideas along with the activities, amenities and opportunities available that could be part of a driving itinerary.
3. Determining a set of “must haves” that would result in a strong driving itinerary.
4. Deciding on the key requirements for a specific business to be included in a driving itinerary.
5. Creating a campaign to let everyone know about the itineraries and as a result increase awareness of all the fabulous things that could be done in the area.
6. Enlisting potential partners and finalizing the itineraries
7. Defining success metrics and setting up the means to track success and adjust plans as appropriate.

Discussion Ideas & Tips

2021 is expected to be another year of Canadians staying put and travelling within Canada. Research from Expedia reports that 70% of travellers will be comfortable travelling within a six-hour drive from their home. Driving itineraries are a great way to invite people to explore a region, without venturing too far off the beaten path.

“It just takes a little imagination, some coordination and collaboration, to weave together a fabulous driving itinerary.”

Terry Dow

This summary highlights the discussion held by 21 operators/professionals regarding ideas and approaches to developing great driving itineraries.

Tactical Practical Take-Aways

The following were perceived as must haves in the development of a strong driving itinerary:

- Able to fit in a 1-, 2- or 3-day trip itinerary.
- Includes 2-3 outdoor experiences (1/day).
- Provides options for accommodation.
- Includes 2-3 culinary options.
- Provides a hands on experience.
- Must complete a circle or specific driving route.
- Centres around a theme or focus such as a demographic segment (e.g. families) and/or a specific interest/passion (e.g., history).

From a DMO’s perspective, other considerations that related to if the business was a good fit and should be included in the itinerary were:

- Following all provincial health regulations.
- Being a member in good standing of the local tourism association
- Having a physical property that is staffed.
- Being easy to find with adequate parking.
- Being visitor ready, having an updated website and being responsive to emails/phone calls.
- How the product is delivered.
- Willingness to participate in the marketing campaign and having recent imagery that could be included in the campaign
- Willingness to have a site check.

Geo-fencing was an effective marketing tactic used by Grande Prairie to drive visitors to local businesses. They identified mobile devices in the area, at specific times, and then targeted those devices with specific marketing offers. Check with your local DMO to see if they are using geo-fencing as a marketing tactic and if it is something that you can participate in.

Ideas shared at this session

- Understand your assets, their strengths and what motivates your customers is key to developing a successful itinerary. COVID-19 has changed why people are visiting, as Grande Prairie found when they identified shopping as a key motivator for people coming to town. Check with your customers to understand why they are coming to your area and tap into this when creating an itinerary.
- Visitors want to explore an area – simply staying at a B&B or Inn is no longer a sufficient experience and itineraries help accommodation providers position themselves as a base from which to have a variety of experiences.
- In addition to demographics (families, women, couples) consider passions (e.g., art lovers, cyclists, etc.) and themes to create personas around which you can develop an itinerary. The “I wish I was cycling in Europe” itinerary, that presents wineries, fields of sunflowers, amazing coffee and gelato spots, etc.
- Itineraries provide a great way for businesses to collaborate and present the experiences available, without having to sell a packaged product. Collaborating also provides additional reach as the itinerary will be presented through each business’ website and social channels. Additionally, a good itinerary developed collaboratively will be of interest to the local and regional DMOs who can provide another marketing channel. (Make sure all businesses are members of their local tourism organizations.) Boosting a FB post that includes the itinerary is another inexpensive marketing tactic.
- Digital itineraries (web-based or apps) are great, however providing a downloadable pdf with photos and links is an inexpensive approach to getting the itinerary into the hands of consumers and can be important when the itinerary is in an area that has spotty/no Internet access.
- Itineraries can be a useful way to entice people to stay longer in an area as they present a variety of things to do in single/multi day formats. They are also a fabulous way to creatively present a grouping of suitable offers for niche markets.
- When developing an itinerary for a specific market, make sure it includes the key information that market needs. For example, key information for cyclists includes distance, ability level, and type of terrain/elevation gain, whereas drivers may want to know the locations of gas stations.
- Consider the little extras that can make a real difference and build them into the offer, such as providing luggage transfers for cyclists between properties. Things that used to be handled by a tour operator may provide a way for a business (or group of businesses that have come together for an itinerary) to differentiate themselves in 2021.
- Be imaginative and have fun with it. Creating an itinerary is an inexpensive approach to presenting what is available in your area for different types of visitors. Theme them. Have fun. Be cheeky. And dare to be different.

Ideas shared at previous sessions

- During these times the traditional approach to itineraries where people move from attraction to attraction no longer applies. It is important to think about the new traveller and their needs.
- Locals don’t always know what’s in their backyard and driving itineraries can be an effective way to get them moving around and discovering all their region has to offer. Northumberland Tourism provided a great example of this with their '[Just Down The Road](#)' campaign that helped locals discover all the region has to offer. In addition to supporting local businesses now, it is hoped that the knowledge gained by locals will make them better equipped to recommend what to do when tourists start returning to the area.
- Understand the extent of your local market/catchment area and why people are coming in order to develop itineraries of an appropriate length and that will align with those needs. For example, Grande Prairie has a 500km catchment area and people will come in to town to do shopping at the big box stores – means there is an interest in multi-day itineraries. In contrast, smaller areas have a greater opportunity with one-day itineraries and may even be able to offer those coming in to town for an appointment a mini itinerary/experience of 1-2 hours.
- Look at the assets that are near by and/or identify opportunities to partner with other businesses to create your own itineraries. These can be offered on your own website as well as provide a base for the local DMO to build from.
- Don’t make people have to think about it – map it out and make it easy for them to travel around.

- Apps such as [Goose Chase](#) can strengthen the experience especially if providing opportunities to engage with additional content.
- Apps, or providing downloadable ‘passports’ that can be stamped by businesses included on the itinerary, also provide a means of monitoring interest in the itinerary and the individual businesses that are a part of it.
- When determining what standard features to include in an itinerary think about the target group’s needs, for example:
 - Playgrounds – are spots families will use
 - Publically accessed washrooms – for all, especially now that many are closed
 - Gas stations – especially if taking people off main thoroughfares
 - Dog parks – given more people are travelling with their pets there could even be a dog themed itinerary (pet friendly hotels, eating areas, attractions, etc.)
- Driving itineraries are great, however a review of your region’s assets may identify other options for itineraries (cycling, walking, boating).
- Many people enjoy seeing artisans at work and are interested in purchasing artisanal products; including these experiences can be a real draw.
- Many had focused their driving itineraries to summer and shoulder seasons, however there is consideration being given now to developing itineraries for each season, including winter. There was agreement that consumers are looking for things to do in the winter so the development of winter itineraries provides a opportunity to present an in a new way and to a new market
- Some businesses can be anchors for an itinerary as they are well known, may offer a variety of experiences, and/or have a broad appeal. The opportunity for DMOs is to identify these businesses and determine how to position them for different themes.
- Things that were negative to some pre-COVID (e.g., remote trails, dark skies) have become more desirable since. Identify the outdoor experiences in open spaces that can be complemented with other businesses to provide a focus for an itinerary. Similarly, while people used to stay on the highway and rush to get where they were going are now open to opportunities that take them along less travelled backcountry roads where they can stop and discover out of the way treasures.

Additional Helpful Links

Platforms to support the technology needs associated with delivery of a digital experience, such as: [Patreon](#) for artists and [Uncorked Experiences / Mystery Towns](#) for amazing race/scavenger hunt type experiences.

If designing a cycling itinerary check out [Ontario by Bike](#) for information on what cyclists are looking for

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