



WHISTLER

AGENDA

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2012 STARTING AT 2:00 P.M.

At Municipal Hall, Flute Room
4325 Blackcomb Way, Whistler, British Columbia V0N 1B4

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Approval of the Committee of the Whole agenda of October 16, 2012.

PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION

2:00 p.m. – A presentation from Dr. Stephen Milstein and Dr. Laurie Grant, Whistler
2:30 p.m. Education Group (WEG), regarding the results of their recent study on
destination education opportunities for Whistler and the next step.

A discussion regarding education and travel tourism.

ADJOURNMENT

Destination Education Opportunities for Whistler

~ A study to investigate Whistler's current opportunities and advantages
in hosting destination education programming ~



By Charlotte Caron & Lennert De Potter

Prepared for: The Whistler Education Group

August 20, 2012

In the course of a summer 2 international students with BCIT discovered Whistler to be a beautiful place that is deeply treasured by the people who live, work and play here. As a premier mountain resort, it showed out working visitors how much it has to offer Surrounded by breathtaking landscapes, these international students experienced Whistler's natural assets as well as first class facilities and events.

Their task however was to examine once particular area of challenge for the community: Global trends in tourism traffic and recent economic climate have translated in local challenges for the mountain resort. One issue in particular is the reported excess capacity Whistler is experiencing.

With this trend in mind, a group of citizens came together to examine the continuing opportunity they suspect exists for Whistler to better capitalize on the North American and International market for destination education programming. Diversification of the Whistler economy is something that is always in the process of being examined and Educational Tourism has often been one of the economic expansion possibilities that is considered as a sustainable future economic driver for the community. The challenge in the past, as well as with this current study, has been to determine 1) what the current destination education travel market looks like, 2) what Whistler can best offer this market and 3) how to communicate the value for facilitators and planners of education in ultimately choosing Whistler as a place to host their programming.

In preparation for conducting this study, two BCIT School of Business students worked with the Whistler Education Group to develop a *Terms of Reference* and *Scope* for the project, establish *Deliverables* and an *Action Plan*.

During the course of the study, the students researched the Education Travel Destination market with a global perspective, conducted interviews with many Whistler community stakeholders to get a sense of the resource inventory in Whistler, and investigated the selection criteria and processes for organizations that were potential types of groups who might consider bringing their education/training program to Whistler.

The scope of the study was limited to:

- Creating an industry overview,
- Researching and documenting trends in international destination education programming, and characteristics,
- Documenting examples of current destination education locations /models in other resorts ,
- Identifying the strengths and weaknesses for Whistler compared to other similar destination locations
- Researching and identifying characteristics of potential customers for destination education in Whistler (professional associations, personal development groups, etc.)
- Providing recommendations regarding continued investigation of the opportunities and limitations of a proposed Whistler entity to support destination education programming.

An implementation strategy and pricing model were out of the scope of the study.

Highlights of the study findings included:

Industry Trends

The latest series of global recessions (US '09, UK '11/12 etc.), and their aftermath, have driven a new consumer focus on meaningfulness, “making people look inward at things that are really important to them,” (Levine). What matters now are: families and friends; education and self-improvement; health and spirituality; creativity; community involvement; and the environment.

Implications: “Travelers are willing to spend money on travel experiences, but they need different reasons to spend it,” Levine said. “For agents, the real strength is in marketing what they have in a different way – offering it to their customers as valuable, meaningful experiences. You have to press different buttons.” Travellers are searching for personal development and understanding, it is expected that tourism will become ever more centred upon a quest for something larger, something more personally fulfilling

In 2008 Tripadvisor.com surveyed more than 2,500 travelers and determined that 32 percent of travelers were planning to engage in educational activities while on vacation in 2008. This statistic was up 7 percent, from 25 percent the year before. A new study is due out by the end of 2012.

In addition to simple tourism with the desire for educational components, there has been growth in educational as the primary driver, with tourism as a secondary component (courses being the set in vacation environments). This segment should be an opportunity for resorts such as Whistler who have maintained world class standing and recognition in a variety of tourism categories. Individuals eager to learn and eager to combine that learning with world-class destinations should have Whistler appear more and more on their radar if the offerings are packaged to meet the “meaningful engagement” criteria trends.

Defining the Educational Tourism Market

Educational tourism is not a homogenous group of products, services and experiences. Based on the model discussed in the report and for the purpose of the study, two important distinctions were identified

Tourism first: Some form of education or learning is integral, and in some cases a motivating component of the tourist experience. We think about products such as cultural or heritage attractions (Informal).

Education first: The actual tourist experience is considered to be secondary to the primary educational element. Education first travel products include exchange programs, language schools, extra training (Formal & non-formal).

	Focus on tourism	Focus on education
Formal Learning Intentional, organized and structured. Usually institutionalized. Often part of a curriculum or other formal program.	The difference between formal and non-formal learning is mainly based on the recognition of the program.	
Non-formal Learning Not always intentional or institutionalized. No formal credits granted.	Summer School Study Tours Learning Programs Training Programs	Vocational Education & Training (VET) Language school Exchange programs Internship programs

Stakeholder Input

The study interviewed 32 people from the community, including education providers, suppliers of accommodation and services and community involved people. There were many comments, suggestions and ideas that came from the one to one interviews. Some of the highlights include:

Education providers (11 Interviewee)

- During the stakeholder interviews a lot of people interviewed had the experience or the desire to organise learning in all kinds of forms. Some have established a reputation in Whistler or somewhere else and host their programs on a regular basis. Others have plans but are looking for more information to set up their programs.

“Most education providers host small groups ranging from 1 to 50 people. There is no outstanding demographic profile that seems to participate in these programs. Everything depends on what you offer, who you bring in to teach and the price. Although the baby boomers seem more represented, they want to try something different and have the time and the money for it. “

- The marketing of their programs seems to be the biggest concern. **“How to get the word out.”** Most education providers trust on online marketing, by using their website or partner up with other websites. Advertising itself is considered as too expensive, but they believe that **“targeted demographic advertising would be useful”**. Others means of marketing include the use of blogs (partnering with bloggers), client resources/databases for email sales departments of hotels, destination management companies, Facebook and fairs.
- A lot of the education providers would like to see **“a collaborative effort in advertising so that more extensive online marketing becomes possible.”** They also would like to **“access the existing networks in Whistler such as Tourism Whistler and Whistler Blackcomb.”**

- “Venue cost” was often mentioned as a barrier to organise training in Whistler. **“The use of standard event rates doesn’t work for smaller groups and organisations”.**
- Finding the right venue might be a problem but most education providers **“have all the supportive tools they need or they know where to get them.”** Food catering, audiovisual equipment, internet access and flip charts seem to be the most used services.
- Significantly, it was reported that **“almost any professional development course can be organised in the city as well, and because of its, Vancouver is considered to be more competitively placed.”** However, sometimes the outdoor location is primary or at least a secondary asset. It makes the package appealing, a location like Whistler was reported to have **“the power to sell”**, and therefore it should be used as **a selling feature.**

“Everything in Whistler stems from tourism; it would be very arrogant to think that someone would come for a training session without being interested in the outdoors. There are lot of destinations we cannot compete with, they are often easier to get to, cheaper, have top notch conference venues but we have the outdoors.”

2. Suppliers of accommodation and services (12 interviewees)

- A lot of facilities and accommodation run under capacity, and for most of them it has been like this for the last 2 years, beginning after the Olympics. There needs to be a distinction made however between, summer, winter and shoulder season but overall there is excess capacity. For some venues the excess capacity is only occurring during the shoulder season. A lot of venues are looking for new opportunities, and they are willing to work on new synergies to host educational tourism. As mentioned before, venue cost is a huge barrier; the use of standard rates, based on not for profit, profit or educational institutions is not paying off for small groups. Therefore some of the location providers will have to look at their price structure. Maybe this would convince more people to use their facilities instead of only a few that pay a higher rate right now.

3. Comments about Educational tourism in Whistler from all categories of interviewees

- All stakeholders reported that they believe there is an interest and high potential for educational tourism for the community. They believe that it is in the best interest of the community as all the members rely on success of others. It fits the brand of Whistler and therefore this is a good direction to go in. By building on what Whistler has and what makes Whistler unique, the community could support strong educational programs.
- Not only do they see Whistler as a **vibrant, forward thinking, proactive community it’s an amazing 5 star resort with a constant buzz.** Being an involving and caring community that embraces opportunities is something that can translate in the success of educational tourism. People don’t want to do things half way, they are passionate. Thanks to the Olympics, Whistler is even more renowned and it has a very strong international appeal. People want to come to Whistler and experience how it is like.
- “Of the traditional tourists only a fraction wants to learn something while they are travelling but this minority is considered as a potential driver of tourism. And it is supposed to grow over the years.”

- “The culture in North America makes people desire to learn and enjoy life; educational tourism brings these two things together. More and more people are looking for this balance.”
- Adding educational tourism to what Whistler has to offer would make the resort even more appealing to people, while some like to spend the whole day on the mountain others look for something different. People want to be challenged in all kinds of ways, they are looking to learn a new skill but not through the traditional way of university. Whistler could be a place to learn, to be inspired and have fun. If we can offer them the Whistler experience and an opportunity to learn so that people can engage with a destination, we create a more meaningful experience and people tend to come back when they have a connection with the place. In this case education is the first point of sale that creates affinity with Whistler. In the best case people will come back and bring in others as well.
- One of the study’s assumptions was that through planning educational tourism could provide extra revenue in the so-called shoulder season. Not all stakeholders agree on this. They question if there are enough activities and events to convince people to come to Whistler to learn and add some vacation time.
- The financial benefits associated with students and their families coming to Whistler, next to the educational component of their visit to Whistler they will also engage in other activities.

Local Market

- Many of the interviewed stakeholders doubt the feasibility of the local market. With around 10.000 locals there isn’t a big market, there might be some pick up but it’s not something we can count on. Time and money seem to be very precious in Whistler. And as we talk about educational “tourism” it has to be built on a business model that is not locally based but that counts on destination participants and that should hopefully result in more overnight stays. In contrast, other interviewees reported that other interviewees often mentioned the Sea to Sky corridor as an opportunity for educational programming. Yet other interviewees cited the human resource potential in our community.

Nature of educational tourism opportunities /target groups

- culture and structure.
- Most stakeholders believe that the offering in Whistler should be inclusive, for all demographic profiles. But to start off we should focus on a few core areas. Most stakeholders believe that baby boomers would be a good fit for Whistler, they have time and money.
- Some of the often mentioned areas that would stay true to the Whistler brand are:
- Everything depends on the program and support, if you understand your learners’ needs and demands and you are able to meet them, you are most likely to be successful. To make a strong program their needs to be a fit between the program offerings and what the community has to offer. Whistler has a unique Sport, people want to push themselves and after that they want to relax, there is a real opportunity around wellness, holistic approaches and improving yourself, yoga, art, personal growth, aboriginal tourism and environmental education.

- Whistler is the first community in North America to adopt The Natural Step sustainability plan and is recognised by the United Nations Environmental Program.

Partnerships

- An interesting idea that was mentioned was to share costs with other events in BC, bringing in any authority in whatever field is expensive. But if you can share the costs with another event that is taking place around the same time this is a win-win situation. Then we could offer spin off events in the resort.

Venues

- The Whistler Education Group assumed that there is excess capacity available to provide space and support for educational tourism. And while that seems to be correct a remark that has to be made is that while some venues translate well for learning purposes other don't. We have the hotels, the conference centre, the SLCC, Millennium Place, private condos, B&B's, community space. Many venues claim to be multifunctional but that doesn't always work. A creative approach can overcome some of the problems; someone mentioned that they once held a meeting in the Body Shop.
- Whistler has a lot of world class facilities to offer and that seems to be a wonderful legacy after the Olympics, some might lean to the athletic side but with a creative approach that is something that can be balanced. (article) Whistler learned a lot from the Olympics, especially the logistics part of it. But now it is time to rethink the use of these facilities.
- And then there are the unused storefronts that are most likely too expensive to use for educational purposes. Someone mentioned that an education incentive issued by the municipality could boost this. By matching private property to smaller groups we could probably reduce the costs. One of the ideas that came up was rental ideas.
- As mentioned before venue cost is a big issue and definitely something that need to be looked at. Whistler may be conceived as being overpriced and it is definitely more expensive than others but if you measure the value you won't find any better. If people (both trainers and learners) make a cost benefit analysis the outcome is most likely to be positive. Whistler is a renowned location that sells, a program will probably sell more seats but the margins are likely to be lower. Some referred to the resort as the Whistler cashier.

Although some of the issues mentioned before most stakeholders believe that Whistler could be a competitive destination for educational tourism. If we can adjust the cost of venues to attract smaller groups and get the support of the community.

The second phase of investigation is now under way:



International Trade and Transportation Program

TDMT 3402 – Project 9. Description

Client:	Whistler Arts Council / Laurie Grant
Organization:	Whistler Education Group
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Project Focus:	Client Needs Assessment
Project Description:	<p>The Whistler Education Group has just completed an initial feasibility study re: the opportunity for Whistler to position itself better to attract educational programming and training (other than conferences) as an additional pillar to the tourism business in the community. This additional market opportunity was investigated in response to lower occupancy rates for meeting spaces, accommodation and tourism amenities in the business community.</p> <p>The “destination education travel market” has been assessed in general in the first study and now “WEG” would like a Client Needs Assessment conducted to determine the specific characteristics of the target market group and recommendations regarding the ways in which the location decisions of these groups can be influenced. .</p>
Comments:	