

BC First Nations Welcome German Tourism

By Beverley O'Neil

700 high performing German travel agents are now witness to the hospitality of First Nations in British Columbia. From November 28 to December 10, 2001, DERTOUR Reisaekademie, being Germany's second largest tour operator and its top seller of North American product, held their twentieth annual convention in Vancouver.

The objective of the DERTOUR Reisaekademie was to provide advanced training for select German travel agents that are actively involved in the selling and promotion of holidays and business travel world-wide. Through a series of workshops, site visits, pre and post tours and exams, the agents learned of tourism in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada and in First Nations.

The opportunity came to the First Nations to showcase their cultures and tourism products when another tourism organization failed to respond to an invitation by DERTOUR hosts Tourism Vancouver and Tourism British Columbia to participate in the event. **Chief Sophie Pierre** of the St. Mary's Indian Band and the Administrator of the Ktunaxa / Kinbasket Tribal Council recognized this event had "A very real ability for First Nations in BC to share our diverse and unique cultures, enjoy our hospitality, and just as important, to inform them of the tourism businesses we have." The KKTC Bands are the owners and developers of the newest First Nation owned destination resort in BC, being the St. Eugene Mission Resort in Cranbrook.

To launch and develop the program, a First Nation Advisory Committee was established consisting of respected First Nation economic, business and tourism developers and influencers. They took on the task of identifying parts of the DERTOUR program to build a First Nations component, garnering support, and ensuring the First Nations culture was respectfully presented. The resulting program was woven throughout all aspects of the convention beginning with 17 of the 35 teams having First Nation names, opening ceremonies and welcome by the Lower Mainland First Nations, cultural knowledge and education delivered by guides, Coast Salish greeters, feasting and gifting. Through the efforts of Tourism BC and the Committee, a second opportunity was identified for an Aboriginal tourism organization to partner in a reception at the Vancouver Aquarium expanding the exposure of Aboriginal tourism businesses and entertainment. The First Nations Summit and several First Nation Bands and tribal organizations throughout BC gave their support to the First Nations program. Sponsorship was provided by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND), Aboriginal Business Canada, Western Diversification, Canadian Heritage, BC Ministry of Competition, Science and Enterprise, BC Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women Services, Tourism British Columbia, and the Osoyoos Indian Band Economic Development.

The excitement and support around DERTOUR built as the event grew near. The DIAND placed an advertorial on First Nation tourism ventures in BC into the Vancouver Sun. The publication was inserted into 700,000 copies distributed throughout BC and

then later translated to German and inserted into the travel agent delegate kits. First Nations and Aboriginal tourism businesses became involved in the program through opening ceremonies, showcasing their arts and crafts at the dinners, and featuring their venture in a multi-media presentation at the dinners, gifting to DERTOUR Reisaekademie, as well as in pre- and post-event tours (which included the Lund Hotel owned by the Sliammon First Nation, and the St. Eugene Mission Resort Development). The Tsleil-Waututh, Musqueam and Squamish First Nations officially welcomed DERTOUR with a traditional ceremony, the signing of a welcome proclamation and gifting of a talking stick symbolizing their new relationship. At the dinners, the Tsleil-Waututh and Little Shuswap First Nations, and the Ktunaxa/Kinbasket Tribal Council presented DERTOUR with gifts representing their nations invitation to visit their names and symbolizing a new relationship. Some Aboriginal tourism businesses participated in a reception at the Vancouver Aquarium.

The First Nations program became one of the highlights of the DERTOUR Reisaekademie ensuring greater knowledge and understanding of the travel agents of the First Nations in BC and their tourism businesses. As a follow-up to the convention, there will be the production of a brochure scheduled for completion in spring 2002 featuring the First Nations of BC and their tourism businesses. BC and Canada are anticipating a significant jump in German visitors next year of around 30 percent as a result of hosting this convention.

Why German Tourists?

Unlike North American childhood belief, German children grew up believing the Indians were the good guys... not the cowboys. The fascination with the North American Indian was fostered by a German author by the name of Karl Mei who wrote novels for youth of the plight of the North American Indian. These novels later spawned the development of Indian and Western Clubs across Germany featuring plains style Indian life, teepees and pow-wows. For First Nations in Canada, this fascination has translated into a viable market for cultural products, more specially in tourism.

According to Tourism BC, "Germany is BC's fourth largest global market and the second largest in Europe representing 2.1 percent of global visits and 21.9 percent of European visits. Germans are also the biggest spending visitors in British Columbia representing 44 percent of all European revenues."

Many of the First Nations tourism businesses in BC and across Canada are well suited to serve the needs of the German tourist... the German tourist is a lover of nature, an explorer. They enjoy the outdoors spending time hiking, camping and sight seeing. They travel independently, renting automobiles or recreational vehicles to visit less populated sites. Contrary to the belief that they are big game hunters, the majority of Germans are like most European tourists, they do not participate in and are non-supportive of big game hunting including grizzly bear hunting. Instead they prefer to experience nature and enjoy wildlife through soft adventure and through a camera lense. Like many First Nations, German tourists have an affinity for the outdoors believing in sustainability and enjoyment of nature.

The German tourist is an attractive market to Aboriginal tourism businesses. Most Aboriginal tourism businesses in BC and Canada are located outside the gateway cities requiring visitors to travel by ground to get to them, and often small making it difficult for them to accommodate large travel groups such as buses. The German visitor is an attractive market to them. The German traveler is independent traveling beyond the gateways in their rented vehicles, collecting information from travel agents (such as DERTOUR) on things to do while they are abroad, and then heading out to explore destinations on their own in small travel groups of 2 to 4 people.

For the First Nation tourism business offering outdoor adventure and authentic and approved First Nation cultural components, the German tourist is a market to be explored. As with any international marketplace, research must be done and your business operations modified to meet their needs and to attract their interest. Few markets are as compatible with what First Nations cultural tourism businesses have to offer as this market does. It is truly a market to be explored.

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