

German's Discover BC's Aboriginal Culture

By Beverley O'Neil, Ktunaxa Nation

“The German tourist has not yet found British Columbia or western Canada.” That is, according to German tour operator Rudolf Hochenauer jun., of Bavarian Tours. He has been sending German tourists seeking soft adventures to Canada for roughly 20 years. Most of his tours are stationed in eastern Canada. “They like to see Niagara Falls” he said, “but now they are getting tired of it. They’ve been there and now want to see other places.” And, Rudolf feels that western Canada is the next place.

Rudolf was amongst 130 German Tour operators and agents visiting Vancouver on a Canadian Tourism Commission (CTC) fam (familiarization) tour to Western Canada in early October. Vancouver was the official start on Sunday, October 3rd, 1999 that began with tour options of Whistler, the North Shore, and downtown Vancouver. Their day was completed atop Grouse Mountain in an event hosted by the Aboriginal tourism industry, and CTC. Entertained by Coast Salish dancers, Bob Baker and Willie Nahanee, this was for many guests their first time experiencing westcoast Native culture. They will not soon forget it, especially since now they know how to caw like an eagle, swoosh like a killer whale, and howl like a wolf Coast Salish style from a signature dance created for the Feast House. After dinner, the Germans joined British Columbia Aboriginal tourism operators at a reception for a chance to speak to them one-to-one.

This tour, as well as other fam tours, is an important part of the CTC, as well as Tourism BC marketing strategies. Tours are often hosted by the at home tourism businesses for operators who sell tours to or for media who write about Canada. Often the costs of these tours are sponsored by airlines, tourism operators, and regional marketing associations who hope these tours will become a part of their packages, a favored conversation piece, or on the front page of their publication. Ideally a fam tour will increase the profile of the region and the tourism products in that region and show an increase in travelers from that region in 1 1/2 to 2 years from the time of the visit. “It is a long term investment in business”, says Sandra White. Goals of AtBC, TBC, and CTC are to increase the number of overseas visitors to their destinations, and a fam tour is a perfect way of doing it.

At present, overseas visitors account for 17% of tourism revenues (based on 1998 Tourism BC statistics), and the European visitor accounts for 8% of those tourism revenues overall with Germans representing only 5.5% of this share. The competition is heavy in Canada with Alberta, Ontario, and Quebec, as well as outside of Canada beefing up their marketing activities. “We all want a greater share of the market, but be clear, tourism marketing does not increase the market size, and it can only take a greater share of the market and protect what they have”, commented a Regional Tourism Marketing Association staff member at a marketing presentation. An estimated 1 in 1000 Europeans actually travel outside of Europe, and British Columbia has to fight hard to attract these people to this province as their final destination. “We (British Columbia) are in direct competition with thousands of other destinations around the world... It isn’t easy, and a well planned and implemented marketing strategy including these fam tours is important to keep our numbers up... for European, other overseas, American, Canadian, and even BC visitors.

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