WINNING IDEAS FOR YOUR COMMUNITY
Presentation
Annual Conference of the
Tourism Industry Association of Nova Scotia
November 7, 1995
By Dr. Clare A. Gunn
Professor Emeritus, Texas A&M University

INTRODUCTION

This is something of an anniversary year for me. It was exactly 50 years ago that I began my study, teaching, and consulting work in the field of tourism. Back then the only source of information was interviewing business people in the real world of tourism. Now we can benefit from research being done by universities, public agencies and the private sector. Much of what I have learned over these five decades is contained in my book, TOURISM PLANNING.

But today, I do not intend to read you the entire 400 pages but rather have been asked to focus on community tourism development. Fortunately, I have visited your beautiful province many times--was involved in Operation Encounter in 1971, Operation Discovery in 1989, a workshop in Acadia University, and have toured the entire province from Kejimkujik to Glace Bay. I am always impressed by the spectacular scenery, rich cultural background, and the delightful inns and their fine food and welcome hospitality.

For my comments today, I should explain that I am not going to emphasize the marketing side because this seems to be better understood than the physical development side--what we can develop so that it can be marketed. I don't have very many successful community examples but have derived some conclusions from work in many communities from Australia to South Africa, and from Spain to Tahiti.

So, today I would like to comment on just four points:

WHAT ARE YOUR OPTIONS FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT?
WHAT MUST YOU UNDERSTAND ABOUT TOURISM?
HOW CAN YOU AVOID THE LAND MINES?
WHAT STEPS SHOULD YOU TAKE?
I. WHAT ARE YOUR OPTIONS?

A. Prohibition—No, we don't want any.

Although difficult to accomplish, local people should have the right to say "No, we don't want any tourism." It creates a lot of congestion of traffic and litter, creates a lot of conflict with foreign visitors, can even increase land values beyond our means, and can disrupt our life style. For example, right now there are many residents of Niagara-on-the-Lake who would like to get rid of the 3 million tourists who come every year, mostly in July and August. To prohibit tourists would require severe control. In most communities, the debate in favor of tourism has usually outweighed denial in the belief that the economic gains are worth it. So, prohibition is not a very popular option, but it should be considered at the start.

B. Capitulation--We'll just let it happen.

In most instances thus far, local areas have given in to any tourism development from anybody. Although at the start, it appears that any development anywhere is good—new dollars, new investment, new taxes paid. However, now with hindsight, we are seeing a dark side when tourism is developed this way. For example, often coastal hotels pollute their own beaches and waters; excessive harvesting and poaching have destroyed wildlife; bulldozing has destroyed native vegetation; and potential natural and cultural attractions are gone forever because they were not recognized and protected. I've seen it happen everywhere.

C. Adaptation--OK, but we will plan it best for us.

This is the most successful approach. Don't accept outside or local proposals before you have done your homework. Don't listen to the promoters who have not considered the consequences of their development. Don't assume that tourism is a "smokeless industry" and has no impact. Don't accept handouts from government unless you know it is best for your community.

As you can see, this option—adaptation—requires considerable self-discipline on your part. And this is where the rub comes--few communities know how to
prepare themselves for tourism development. Each individual may be an expert in his own field, but because tourism is very complicated, it requires an entirely new set of understandings and plans. This leads me to my next point.

II. WHAT MUST WE UNDERSTAND ABOUT TOURISM?

While I don't wish to bore you with a lot of textbook principles, there are some very fundamental facts that must be understood by every community if it wishes to guide its tourism growth in an acceptable manner.

A. We must strive for a market-development balance.
In other words, what we do here in our community to serve tourists must be in balance with what the market wants. Although this is simple Economics 101, it is not always easy to apply to tourism because there are so many players. We need to have a good understanding of the travelers who might come to our area—where they are likely to come from and especially what they like to see and do. Then, how well does our existing supply of services and facilities match up? If they seek so-and-so, do we have the ability to develop these features?

B. What are some travel market trends?
Based on what the travel market researchers tell us, here are a few current trends. Knowing these can help you plan for your future tourism growth.

* From consumption to non-consumption.
Today, hunters are doing more photography than killing; fishermen are releasing their catches; more travelers want to enjoy rather than destroy. Some of the most vocal environmentalists today are the travelers who are disgusted with how some tourism destinations are abusing their resources.

* From commonplace to sophisticated.
The ordinary no longer satisfies. Travelers are more experienced and better
educated and demand better quality. New categories are emerging--ecotourists, alternative tourists, adventure tourists, and cultural and historic tourists. What do we have that could be attractive to these types of tourists?

* From younger to older.

You know how much population demographics are changing. As travelers age, we cannot generalize that all are handicapped. Most are healthy, have money to spend, and enjoy the activities that they wanted to do in the past but just didn't have the time. Because they have had a lot of experience, they seek deeper meanings from their travel experiences.

* From "I-me" to greater interest in others.

Today's travelers seek greater understanding of other peoples of the world. People are recognizing that underneath the surface differences, there are some common characteristics. They are not satisfied with "canned" performances created for tourists but seek one-on-one contact with individuals and families. This is not easy to provide but is a trend.

* From WASP to colorblind.

Today's travel markets are coming from a great diversity of ethnic and racial backgrounds. They are no longer dominated by white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant tourists. I can remember when Afro-Americans could not stay in our motels. Now, it is essential that in developing tourism, we understand the different cultural backgrounds of our visitors and how they would like to be treated.

* From domestic to international.

Increased air travel and the rapid rise in the economies of foreign countries are bringing millions more foreigners to our destinations. Again, these foreigners may seek quite different services and facilities than we have been used to.

These are just a few of the current trends in travelers. It is essential for us, as
we develop community tourism to understand and plan for these and other trends that come along.

Today, we hear a lot about ECOTOURISM, the desire to experience natural and cultural resource activities. But, I must point out that ecotourists are not all alike.

Some prefer comfort and convenience in lodging while others prefer primitive accommodations, such as sleeping in the forest or under the stars. Some prefer not to be very close to nature and seek a vicarious experience, such as visiting interpretive centers and tour guide narrations. Others, however, prefer intimate contact with nature. Some believe that half the fun is getting there through strenuous backpacking, whereas others prefer motorcoach tours. Some seek high degrees of risk, such as whitewater adventures, while others seek a more passive approach. Some prefer to be in groups while other prefer the solitary experience. And, I am sure there are many other kinds. The point is that as we plan for tourism development we need to direct our SUPPLY SIDE efforts toward the market segments that we can provide for the best.

In this region, experiments should be made in exploring off-season markets. Certainly there are cultural resource assets here that could be developed to reach the growing fall and winter travel markets.

C. WHAT ARE THE SUPPLY SIDE COMPONENTS?

This brief review of traveler trends should raise questions about our supply side development. Generally, I find it useful to divide the supply side into five major components that every community will need to develop.

* Attractions. The power side of your community tourism is not in the hotels, motels or restaurants, important as they are. No, the power component of tourism consists of the attractions--the things for visitors to see and do. Attractions provide two very important functions. They provide the lure, the pull from the market
sources. Second, they provide the visitor satisfactions. All travelers must leave your community with better impressions of their experiences than they had anticipated. Today, both natural and cultural attractions are very important.

I am pleased to see that in this conference, you are highlighting new attractions development in three areas—Wolfville, Cape Forchu, and Cheticamp.

* **Transportation.** Although quite obvious, it is important that we understand all modes of transportation used by our visitors. How convenient and how reasonably-priced is access to our community? Is intermodal travel available, such as fly-drive access? For Nova Scotia this is a very critical issue especially for U S and overseas visitors.

* **Services.** Travel services provide the greatest economic impact on a community. However, it must be remembered that these are facilitators, not causes. They depend greatly on the attractions available. Important to planning is the location of services, preferably in or near communities where they can be serviced with water supply, waste disposal, and police and fire protection. Too often I find new hotels, restaurants, and shops being built directly on unique land areas that should be protected and developed as attractions.

* **Information.** Generally, this has been a weak component. Travelers are starved for information and guidance. They seek maps, descriptions of attractions, how to find them, what they will cost, when they are open. Today, this is being helped greatly by computer access. In your development of tourism, information must be separated from advertising because they provide different functions. For years, I have held up your Nova Scotia guide book as the best example of tourist guidance I have ever seen.

* **Promotion.** Traditionally, promotion has been the most active component of tourism development. Generally, it is made up of advertising, publicity, public relations, and incentives (discounts, packages, premiums). I sense that Nova Scotia
tourism promotion is well under way at all levels, from Ottawa on down to individual businesses.

The main point of reviewing these essential components is to realize how dependent each one is on every other one. This suggests that no one is alone in tourism development and that cooperation with people in these other components is essential to your success. Furthermore, this entire system of the Supply Side must be in tune with travel market demand. These are issues that must be dealt with if you plan to develop tourism.

**D. SOME IMPORTANT ATTRACTION FEATURES**

When we begin to develop attractions, there are some important features that we should understand. In spite of the great diversity of attractions for visitors, there are some features common to all. Here is a brief review.

* **Attractions must be easily understood.** For example, it is insufficient to merely restore an historic building. Unless visitors are given some explanation of the historic setting, a description of why it is significant, and an understanding of its many features, the building may have no meaning at all. Even natural resource settings require interpretation so that the visitor can understand what he is viewing or listening to.

* **All attractions are based in the environment.** Land areas within and surrounding the community are the foundation for attraction development. This means that local people need to look at their lands with a new perspective—that of the potential visitor. Both natural and cultural resources are important. One should examine resources such as: waters, topographic change, wildlife, vegetative cover, wildflowers, as well prehistoric and historic background.

* **All attractions are owner controlled.** This means that one must examine
the public use policies of park agencies, historic associations, and natural and
cultural resource agencies of government. How these agencies provide for public
use is critical to future tourism development. And we must be aware of policies of
all private tourism development.

* All attractions must be magnetic. This may seem an obvious statement but
there are many instances where developers have created what they thought would be
an attraction, only to find out that no one wanted to visit it--it just did not attract,
partly because it did not meet a market demand and partly because it was poorly
planned and managed.

* All attractions must satisfy a demand. Again, this is related to the
attracting power. But, there are many owners of attractions that cite the great
numbers of visitors but never have asked whether they liked the feature. It is
possible that promotion brought many people to the site but that a significant
number left the site saying: "It wasn't worth the effort; I'll never come here again; or
this was a waste of money."

* All attractions are created. This sounds very boastful. But, the point is
that merely having resources, such as lakes, rivers, scenery, historic sites, is not
enough. These are important foundations but until they are provided with access
and planned facilities to handle masses of visitors, they are not truly attractions.
Every attraction must be designed to a certain capacity, otherwise there may be
excessive crowding, littering, and wear-and-tear on the environment that brings
visitors in the first place.

These are just a few reminders of what communities must consider when they
are developing their resource for greater tourism.

III. HOW CAN YOU AVOID THE LAND MINES?
Community tourism can be of great value, but we should learn some lessons from others who have run into obstacles as they developed tourism--the land mines we should try to avoid. When we recognize that tourism can have both positive and negative impacts, we can plan to avoid the pitfalls we might encounter. There is no reason to merely muddle along blindly and then wish we had seen these potential difficulties at the very start.

**ECONOMIC**

Frequently, promoters of tourism development cite only the great positive impacts--more people employed, more income, more taxes paid. While it is true that these can come from tourism, we must not ignore some economic costs.

Tourism development will require investment. Who will supply the funds? In smaller communities, it often requires new expenditures on larger water supply and sewage treatment systems. It may require street improvements, better lighting, and increased police and fire protection.

Tourism's positive economic impact may outweigh its costs but, no, tourism is not free.

**SOCIAL**

When thousands, perhaps millions, of visitors descend on a community, they can cause conflict with local residents because they may come from quite different cultural backgrounds, interests and behavior. If, however, local citizens have agreed to accept the congestion and competition for space and services, tourism can be a worthwhile addition. But, this may require some education in the very beginning, especially when foreign travelers arrive and need special treatment such as translation into their native tongue. Tourism can be culturally positive but one must be prepared for possible negative impacts.

**ENVIRONMENTAL**

We cannot ignore that tourism is a huge land user. This means that we need to plan where we need to protect and where we can develop resources. Every
community must examine its area carefully and make its own decisions on where it wants new hotels, restaurants, gift shops, and other services versus other lands that have attraction potential and must be given environmental protection. Many communities ignore their responsibility in making such decisions early in the development process. Although revenues from tourism are sometimes used for environmental protection, such as for some ecotours, we must be aware of tourism's negative impact on the environment if we are not careful.

**MANAGERIAL**

Frequently forgotten is the fact that tourist development must be managed. A great amount of cooperation among many facets of a community is needed so that when great volumes of tourists do come, they can be kept under control. In other words, businesses, nonprofit organizations, and public agencies must work together so that tourism is managed in a positive way--a way that can avoid many of the potential difficulties.

Now, let us turn to my final point--how best to go about tourism development in your community.

**IV. WHAT STEPS SHOULD YOU TAKE?**

I wish I could say that there is a common formula that will assure you the best steps to create tourism in your community. Even though there are several model approaches available, every community is a bit different--its own history, traditions, and ways of getting things done.

In reading your TIANS Annual Report of 1994-95, I was pleased to see in your Strategic Plan, Point 4, entitled PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT. The stated goal is:

*To assist the industry in development of product, to enhance and improve professionalism, marketability, sustainability and to generate competitiveness, profitability and viability in the Nova Scotia Tourism Industry at an international*
level of excellence.

I commend you for including this goal in your vision of the future. Then, the statement of specific objectives that should lead toward this goal is equally important, and I quote again:

* Communicate new product and trends which are applicable to the Nova Scotia Tourism Industry.
* Facilitate the development of new viable tourism product.
* Become a central resource of information.
* Accommodate and assist the development of all tourism products.

These statements put your organization on record as supporting all the things I have been talking about regarding your options, needed understandings, avoidance of land mines, and steps to take for development.

The example of the approach taken by Wolfville, described in this conference, has a great deal of merit. This is a diagram that illustrates the model. I suggest that you study their entire report called DESTINATION WOLFVILLE REPORT 1994.

Here is my model that is very similar but includes a little different slant, based on my observations and work with communities from western Australia to South Africa and all across the United States. Although not shown here the same feedback loop all along the way that appeared in the Wolfville model is assumed. Here are seven steps that I would recommend you consider. You may already be involved midway in this process.

1. GET HELP

Today it is important to take advantage of outside assistance. Even though there are many talented and experienced people within the community, it is wise to gain the advice of specialists in tourism development.
A good example is the approach now being taken in several small communities in Arizona. From a governor's conference came the recommendation that a rural tourism development program be initiated, resulting in the creation of the Arizona Council for Enhancing Recreation and Tourism (ACERT). This is made up of representatives of several state and federal agencies that influence tourism. No new budget is provided, rather existing specialists are on loan to the program as needed. The principles to be followed include:

- **Guidance must be comprehensive.**
- **Recommendations must be sustainable.**
- **Development must be at low cost.**
- **All plans must be customer oriented.**
- **Development must be fiscally positive.**
- **All recommendations must be technically sound.**

The program requires the establishment of several teams—a local community action team, a reconnaissance team, a resource team, and a facilitation team. This program is new and just now being applied to the communities of Globe-Miami, Arizona. In my opinion, this approach has considerable merit. Here is their model of the process steps they are taking.

I am confident that here in Nova Scotia you have access to many specialists who could be of help from universities, experienced business people, and public agencies at all levels.

2. HOLD SEMINARS

Too often, community tourism development does not involve the community. It is probably necessary, if you have not already done so, to hold presentations on the complexity of tourism, how economic impact is obtained, your existing experience with tourism, the main functional components of the supply side, their interrelationships, common pitfalls with tourism development, and the local attitude toward tourism.
3. SET GOALS

Why do you want tourism? What do you expect it to accomplish? Recently, I held a series of workshops in Newfoundland and asked local groups to identify their goals. When they really thought about it, they came up with some very important goals, such as holding their young people with tourism jobs, studying their environmental assets and making sure they are protected, and improving the local economy but maintaining diversity of an economic base.

I suggest that every community go through this exercise to identify:

ECONOMIC GOALS
SOCIETAL GOALS
ENVIRONMENTAL GOALS

4. ORGANIZE

Unfortunately, it is unlikely that an existing organization, such as a chamber of commerce, can really take on the task of tourism development. This task must include nonprofit organizations, such as historical societies, and governmental agencies, not usually included in chamber of commerce membership.

Someone, or at least a council or team, must take on the leadership.

Then, as many publics as possible should be involved. These might include: downtown businesses, local residents, city council members, church groups, historical societies, schools, park agencies, conservation societies, lending agencies, provincial and federal programs of aid, police, and highway, airport and harbor authorities. This is not an easy task but is the only way to avoid a conflict from a segment of influence later on.

5. PLAN

When I say plan, I do not necessarily mean that an official and professionally
designed plan is necessary. My main comment is on the verb--make sure you have looked ahead and anticipated the consequences of development before you do it. Certainly, your planning steps should include an understanding of your resource base, a listing of your tourism strengths and weaknesses, the identification of specific objectives, and the strategies needed in order to accomplish them.

6. IMPLEMENT

A first step in implementing your plan is to set priorities--what can be done most readily and with least cost. The grand plan is desirable so that each increment will lead toward a desirable goal, but projects that are too grandiose will drag on and the initiative toward development will be lost.

Essential to implementation will be the identification of the most logical category of organization to implement. For example, if a scenic area along the coast can become a major attraction, it probably would be within a park and recreation agency's responsibility to implement. However, if a collection of historic buildings might become an attraction, the local historical society may wish to take on the responsibility. And, if there are commercial opportunities, members of the private sector may prepare business feasibilities for these projects.

7. MONITOR

Notice that I have added one more step to the typical approach of development--monitoring. Too often, once projects are in place, no one checks on how well they perform. Were they successful; did something go wrong; what adjustments are needed? Some organization needs to accept this responsibility because even the best of plans cannot predict exactly how projects will turn out. Tourism is so complicated and too many players are involved to make precise forecasts.
CONCLUSIONS

Although I realize that I have touched on only a few important aspects of community tourism development, what would I like to have you remember from this discussion?

First, I hope that you who are residents of your community realize that the guiding power of tourism development lies in your hands, not that of some governmental agency or an outside investor. It is up to you to decide what, where, and why you want tourism development.

Second, this means that you need to get many groups together to make decisions. It is not up to the chamber of commerce, the hotel association, or a governmental agency, alone. It is up to you who live there and all the groups who would be impacted by tourism if it should expand. This action usually requires entirely new cooperation.

Third, you must recognize that there is a possible dark side to tourism and take steps to avoid issues. Tourism can be a positive force, but right in the beginning you will need to anticipate the possible environmental, social, and economic problems so that you can avoid them.

And, finally, you should have some planned program of tourism development. There should be an officially approved document that spells out the steps that will be taken and by whom. I say "officially" because all residents must have a clear picture of what is to take place--where and when.

I appreciate the invitation to meet with you and hope that these comments will be helpful. Tourism can be the greatest force in community development but only if you keep it under your control. One writer said, "Tourism is like fire; it can cook your food or it can burn your house down."