

Southern Gulf Islands

COMMUNITY TOURISM STUDY

PART 3: OPPORTUNITY OUTLINE

Visitor Education & Awareness Campaign

Prepared for the Capital Regional District

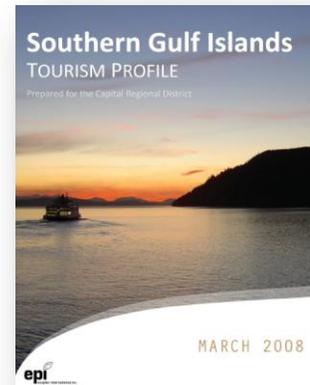
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1. INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

This report is third and final component of the Gulf Islands Community Tourism Study, a broad-based research study of tourism on the islands of Salt Spring, North Pender, South Pender, Galiano, Saturna and Mayne. The study is a joint effort by the Salt Spring Island Electoral Area and the Southern Gulf Islands Electoral Area of the Capital Regional District (CRD). The three study components are briefly summarized below.

1) Tourism Profile: The first study component provided a summary review and inventory of current visitor-related infrastructure, an overview of local visitor market trends, and a preliminary analysis of the general benefits and costs of tourism in the area. The Tourism Profile determined that tourism, or the visitor industry as it is more commonly referred to in this study, is one of the study area's principal industries and local economic drivers. It also confirmed several associated impacts associated with visitor traffic in the Southern Gulf Islands.

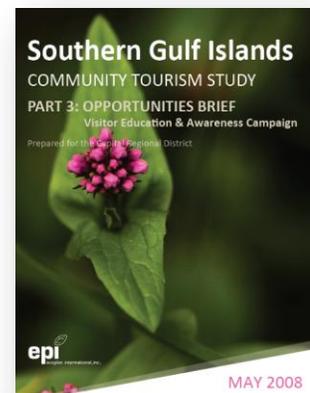


2) Strategic Analysis: The second study component built on the Tourism Profile by outlining nine potential visitor management options that could be considered (individually or in different combinations with one another) to help create a more balanced, year-round visitor industry in the study area and to help mitigate the impacts resulting from peak summer activity levels. The options were selected by the project Steering Committee and evaluated using their ranked community tourism goals and supporting objectives.



3) Opportunity Outline: After evaluating the visitor management options, the Steering Committee directed the project consultants to 'bundle' several (Visitor Code of Conduct, Social Marketing Campaign, Coordinated Marketing) into a single option called the *Visitor Awareness and Education Campaign*. This document:

- Summarizes the recommended opportunity;
- Provides a rationale for it based on the findings of the earlier two reports and Steering Committee feedback;
- Outlines an action plan for implementing the project; and,
- Discusses potential future steps in implementing additional visitor management activities.



2. OPPORTUNITY SUMMARY

Working together, the CRD, Islands Trust, island Chambers of Commerce and other major visitor industry stakeholders could jointly develop and implement a *Visitor Education and Awareness Campaign*. Central to the campaign would be the development and dissemination, or marketing, of visitor guidelines (sometimes called a code of conduct) that would build on the Islands Trust existing “visitors code” that is displayed on signs at the Tsawwassen and Swartz Bay BC Ferry terminals.

This project would further develop and expand the existing visitor signage so that it better addresses the community tourism goals identified in the Community Tourism Study and is more effectively marketed to reach a broader visitor segment. The *Visitor Education and Awareness Campaign* would raise awareness of the Gulf Islands’ community tourism objectives and encourage visitors to, among other things:

- Play an active role in protecting the area’s fragile marine and terrestrial environments;
- Conserve water while visiting the islands;
- Support local businesses and the local economy, including arts and culture;
- Respect the privacy of residents; and
- Use more sustainable means of transportation while visiting the islands (e.g., public transit where available, bicycles, walking) wherever practical and feasible.

A coordinated marketing campaign would be developed to ensure that the guidelines are included with major existing marketing materials (e.g., visitors guides) and at key points of entry and departure for the Gulf Islands (e.g., ferry terminals, sea plane terminals, commercial marinas, etc.). Multiple methods could be used to market the visitor guidelines including, among other methods:

- Outdoor signage at ferry terminals, sea plane terminals and at key community centres (e.g., Salt Spring Market)
- On-board signage on island-serving ferries
- Stand alone pamphlets distributed on ferries and visitors centres
- On-line at multiple sites, including the Chambers of Commerce, BC Ferries community profiles of the Gulf Islands, etc.
- Posters placed in the island businesses and commercial accommodations
- Ads in local papers and newsletters

Current Signage

Current visitor signage is posted in both the Tsawwassen and Swartz Bay ferry terminals. As illustrated (in Swartz Bay), the signage is poorly placed and likely seen and read by a very small percentage of visitors to the islands. The visitor guidelines are transcribed below.



Welcome to the Southern Gulf Islands

These islands are famous for their tranquil, beautiful scenery, abundant wildlife and rural nature. By following these tips you can help us protect the special environment of our islands while you enjoy your stay.

- Cars, pedestrians, cyclists, horses and wildlife share our narrow roads. Please be courteous and use caution.
- Water may be in short supply in the summer – please use water sparingly.
- Because of the fire danger, there is no outdoor burning during our long dry summers.
- Overnight accommodation may be limited – pre-arranging your stay is recommended.
- Campsites are not available on all islands – if you plan to camp, please check in advance.
- You can help protect our farm animals and wildlife by keeping your dog leashed
- Planning to buy? Please review local Land Use Bylaws as they differ for each island.

3. OPPORTUNITY RATIONALE

The rationale for a Visitor Awareness and Education Campaign is solid and defensible. Some of the key rationale is briefly summarized below.

- Helps meet multiple community tourism goals and supporting objectives:** As illustrated by the table, a Visitor Awareness and Education Campaign would help meet all five of the community tourism goals identified by the project’s Steering Committee and a large number of supporting objectives in each goal area. When compared to the original options, the new Visitors Awareness and Education Campaign would generate the third highest relative ranking (only the Strategic Tourism Plan and Visitors Bureau rank higher).

Table: Community Tourism Goals and Objectives Supported

Goals	Objectives
1. Protect the environment and enhance natural areas	1.1 Conserve, protect and enhance natural areas
	1.2 Support low-impact, green visitor activities
	1.3 Minimize high impact commercial visitor activities
	1.4 Increase awareness of island sustainability issues for visitors
2. Foster unique, rural island communities	2.3 Protect and maintain island culture and heritage
3. Improve effectiveness of tourism management	3.2 Support long-term, strategic visitor planning
	3.3 Improve collection, monitoring and evaluation of visitor data
	3.4 Link visitor marketing to community development objectives
4. Support economic diversity & year-round employment opportunities	4.2 Support local agriculture and value-added forestry
	4.3 Reduce seasonality of tourism
5. Distribute tourism benefits and costs broadly	5.1 Minimize visitor-related economic leakages
	5.2 Support development of appropriate commercial accommodations
	5.3 Nurture local and regional supply chains and economic linkages

- Quick Start or pilot project needed:** As a relatively straightforward and cost effective project to implement, a Visitor Education and Awareness Campaign qualifies as a “quick-start” project. A quick start is a type of pilot project or “first step” project that is used not only to meet project goals, but to build trust and better working relationships between project stakeholders. The need for a trust building project that all tourism stakeholders can easily and confidently rally around is evident in the study area, particularly between the Chambers of Commerce and the Islands Trust -- the two key project implementers for a Visitor Education and Awareness Campaign. Quick start projects are also important to generate momentum for future projects, put “results” of a study on the ground, and to provide a “learning by doing” opportunity for the stakeholders involved.

- **Straightforward and cost effective to implement:** The project would be relatively simple to develop and not require significant administrative or planning funds. While a main project organizer would be required, there are few steps required in implementing the campaign. Stakeholders would need to be identified and invited to a meeting where the ‘code’ would be developed (building on the existing Islands Trust signage) and a simple marketing strategy to ‘get the message out’ would need to be developed and then implemented. While some costs would be expected (e.g., graphic design, printing costs, publishing costs, etc.) these could be easily controlled and would be far less than other top-ranking visitor management options (e.g., Visitors Bureau, Strategic Tourism Plan). Including development, marketing and publishing costs (i.e., layout, printing, distribution, outdoor signage, etc.), a project cost range of \$15,000 to \$45,000 is estimated. These costs could be fundraised privately, through government avenues or, potentially, cost shared through existing Islands Trust and Chambers budgets.

- **Builds on existing work:** A Visitor Education and Awareness Campaign would build on, coordinate and improve similar visitor education and awareness work. Some examples of this work includes:
 - The Island Trust visitor signage, found in both Swartz Bay and Tsawwassen BC Ferry terminals (see picture on page 4);
 - The Salt Spring Island Chamber of Commerce’s visitor stewardship ad, found on the back page of their visitors guide; and,
 - The Waterscape Project, an education and awareness program to protect and conserve water on the Gulf Islands that includes a large information board on two ferries serving the Gulf Islands.

4. OPPORTUNITY ACTION PLAN

Any education and awareness campaign must happen in a coordinated manner and involve all stakeholders. This will help ensure that the messaging is consistent and supported by all stakeholders and that the final product(s) is distributed as effectively and efficiently as possible. Key action steps are briefly summarized below.

- 1) Identify a lead organization and establish a working project budget:** Identifying a lead organization or project champion is critical. There are two potential lead organizations who could manage the project – the Islands Trust and the islands Chambers of Commerce (probably via the Salt Spring Island Chamber of Commerce given their capacity and staffing). While the organizations can and should work to co-manage the initiative, it will be necessary to identify one administrative and organizational lead. At this stage it will also be important to determine a rough, working project budget (development and implantation) and to explore funding possibilities (e.g., cost-sharing with lead organizations, grant supported, private fundraising, etc.).
- 2) Identify and involve other stakeholders:** While the initial development of the visitor guidelines can be developed by the project’s lead organizations, the draft and final versions should include input from other visitor stakeholders. These stakeholders need to be involved in the development of the campaign marketing strategy, as they will be key distributing agents. Other stakeholders to include the Capital Regional District, islands Parks Commissions and relevant committees, islands water utilities, islands stewardship and environmental organizations, BC Ferries, Parks Canada and BC Tourism.
- 3) Draft preliminary awareness materials and distribution/marketing strategy:** The lead organizations can develop preliminary materials that build on existing work (i.e., the Islands Trust visitor signage) and incorporate the community tourism goals and supporting objectives developed through the Community Tourism Study. A simple marketing concept plan should also be developed at this stage, identifying key marketing channels, responsibilities (i.e., who does what, when) and potential costs (i.e., production and distribution).
- 4) Stakeholder meeting:** An introductory stakeholder meeting should be organized to introduce the project concept, summarize how it was generated (i.e., an overview of the Community Tourism Study project) and to review the preliminary materials and concept marketing plan. While this meeting could occur in person, a web meeting or other online tools could be used to reduce travel costs.
- 5) Draft materials and marketing plan review:** Based on stakeholder feedback, the lead organization(s) will revise the education and awareness materials and prepare a draft marketing plan. These will be reviewed by the Stakeholder Committee. At this stage, the materials should be professionally laid out and the marketing costs re-estimated (i.e., pamphlet printing, on-board ferry signage, outdoor signage, etc.)
- 6) Visitor Awareness and Education Campaign implementation:** Based on the final marketing plan, the Visitor Awareness and Education campaign should be put into action.

5. FUTURE STEPS

Based on Steering Committee feedback on the nine visitor options presented to the Steering Committee, two other options were highlighted for potential future examination. However, neither future step should be considered until the Visitor Awareness and Education Campaign has been fully implemented, monitored and evaluated. A formal evaluation should be undertaken after the campaign has been in place for one year and should assess both project process (i.e., what worked, what did not, what could have worked better in terms of project administration and implementation) and project outcomes (i.e., a quantitative assessment of awareness materials distribution and a qualitative assessment of visitor reaction to them).

The two options below would require a substantially greater effort to implement than the Visitor Awareness and Education Campaign and require additional due diligence. Both would help meet multiple community tourism goals and objectives, however. Additional information on the two is available in the Strategic Analysis component of the Community Tourism Study.

- **Visitors Bureau:** Salt Spring Electoral Area and the Southern Gulf Islands Electoral Area could jointly implement and fund a Gulf Islands Visitors Bureau or Visitors Centre to cooperatively and strategically market tourism in the area. Functioning as more than a basic destination marketing agency, it would, among other tasks:
 - research, facilitate and advocate for appropriate, community-based tourism in the Gulf Islands;
 - collect, monitor and evaluate visitor data;
 - participate in and help facilitate island and inter-island visitor management activities, and;
 - work with business, community and local government stakeholders to minimize tourism-related impacts on the islands.

The organization would also help support and coordinate the ongoing operation of the smaller visitor information centres currently operating in the study area.

- **Additional Hotel Room Tax:** In BC, a Hotel Room Tax (HRT) of 8% applies to all short-term (less than one month) commercial accommodations sold by operators who offer four or more units of accommodation. Provincial legislation allows for an additional surtax of 2% to be charged on the HRT. Revenues from the so-called Additional Hotel Room Tax (AHRT) are required to be used "*tourism promotions, projects and programs*" in the region they are generated.

Working with the CRD, Salt Spring Electoral Area and the Southern Gulf Islands Electoral Area could each implement an Additional Hotel Room Tax. Revenues from the tax could be 'pooled' or coordinated to support region-wide (i.e., both Electoral Areas) strategic visitor marketing efforts, projects and programs. Based on BC Stats Room Revenue Data for 2006, it is estimated that the Southern Gulf Islands and Salt Spring Island Electoral Areas generated HRT revenues of over \$830,000 in 2007. For the study area, it is estimated the AHRT could generate approximately \$200,000 annually. Over half of the AHRT would be raised by commercial accommodations on Salt Spring Island.