Experiential Tourism and the Cyprus Hotel Experience

A Canadian Perspective, with Suggestions, Ideas, and Opportunities

Presented for the Cyprus Hotel Managers Association

November 4, 2010

With Celes Davar, President
Earth Rhythms, Inc.
What is Experiential Travel?

Canada’s Minister’s Roundtable on Parks Canada provides a recent set of insights into accepted definitions of “experiential tourism” in the literature:

1. Experiential tourism is an outgrowth of a global movement toward experiential learning, whereby people create meaning through direct experience.

2. Experiential tourism is also tied to the evolution of mass customization and the experience economy. Companies are moving beyond services, to experiences. For the tourist, the experience includes, among other aspects, the people one meets, the places they visit, the accommodations where they stay, activities participated in and the memories created. For the tourism provider, it integrates all aspects of the visitor experience including pre-departure trip planning, basic and enhanced services and programs, post-trip follow-up and much more.

3. Experiential tourism encourages visitors to participate and promotes activities that draw people into cultures, communities and the outdoors.

4. Experiential tourism is the opposite of mass tourism that traditionally focused on package tours and vacations with low levels of personal involvement. Experiential tourism shows rather than describes. It encourages visitors to actively participate in the experience and promotes activities that draw people outdoors, and into cultures and communities. In this sense it is very personal and individual. Nature tourism, resource-based tourism, adventure tourism, eco-tourism, transformational travel, heritage tourism and other niche areas fit under the umbrella of experiential tourism. Essentially, experiential tourists seek memorable experiences.

5. Quality, memorable visitor experiences are a shared outcome between the visitor and the provider. The visitor invests their personal time and dollars while the provider gains an understanding of the visitor's interests and provides what is required to facilitate the opportunity for a memorable experience. The resulting interaction allows for personal growth and reflects the values and attitudes of the individual visitor. The evolving lifestyles and interests of travelers are increasingly focused on opportunities to connect with unique natural and cultural heritage. They seek diverse experiences that match their interests and provide a sense of personal accomplishment. Most importantly, these experiences allow visitors to create their own memories.

6. The change from active holidays to holidays as an experience is a significant shift for the tourism industry. The desired outcome is to achieve a complete participatory experience that provides new knowledge and authentic experiences. To remain relevant in this new reality it is essential to focus on the visitor experience. Those who deliver memorable customer experiences consistently create superior value and competitive advantages.

Experiencing Total Travel Immersion

One major reason we travel is to experience something different from what's offered at home. But, in our cookie-cutter world of fast-food restaurants, big-box stores, and one-look-fits-all hotels, those different experiences have become more difficult to find.

- Michele Sponagle, Travel Blogger
  January 9, 2009
Demand for experiential travel

Types of Experiences in demand

Tourism, by its very nature, is an experiential business. Visiting a rural community for the first time is an experience; attending a sugaring-off demonstration or taking part in a local workshop with an artist, or learning about archaeology or history, or boat-building with a local expert are also experiences. It could include a walk through a heritage orchard to taste apples with a taste found only here, or an encounter with a biologist to go behind-the-scenes to learn about local fish or local forestry practices. Many similar experiences or activities may be possible throughout the Chaleur region.

Creating experiences as a product to sell creates a business opportunity (a commercial product), which in the group tour business means consciously building, delivering, and marketing individual experiential travel activities, single or multi-destination packaged travel. (From CTC Research Bulletin 2004-7, Defining Tomorrow’s Tourism Product - Packaging Experiences, by Dr. Nancy Arsenault)

Clients meet the artist in the field where she is painting. Her studio is outdoors where she is inspired. The moment is real.

The Best Things in Life are not Things.

- Pine & Gilmore

Creating outstanding and memorable experiences has become central, not just to the leisure and entertainment industries, but to an increasing number of businesses, as companies seek to build the emotional involvement that goes with them.

What are some of the indicators of a shift to experiential travel?

1. The publication of Pine & Gilmore’s book - The Experience Economy, which documents the expenditures that are being spent by consumers as we shift from a goods and services economy to an experiential economy. This has been followed up by their newest book - Authenticity!

2. The growth of the number of experiential tourism providers on the web (Horizon & Co, Creative Tourism - New Zealand; Earth Rhythms; Crabbing on Tangier’s Island; Next Fork.com, Experience PEI, Cape Race Cultural Adventures, Hooking By the Sea Retreats)

3. The increased scope, scale, geographic setting, and the consequent higher selling price (yield) of various experiences available all over the world.

4. The means by which people share their travel experiences is now part of a variety of online web-sharing mechanisms (Web 2.0, C2C, or social media) using blogs, pay per click, Flickr, Facebook, syndication, user-generated content such as YouTube and Vimeo (video channels) and various online travel blogs, Twitter, and a host of other tools. The positive online shared comments drive the development of travelers seeking similar experiences.

5. The beginning of travel motivations research which is demonstrating the demands that travelers have for different kinds of visitors experiences. For example, EQ (Explorer Quotient research generated by the Canadian Tourism Commission) has profiled nine different types of travel motivations.

6. As rural communities experience a collapse or shift from traditional agricultural, forestry, fishery, or resource extraction economies, they are looking for different ways to generate incomes that meet changing visitor needs. And yet, these community residents do not want to leave the communities in which they live.
The Evolution of Experiential Travel in Canada

In 1999 …

The Canadian Tourism Commission struck a national task force of private and public sector tourism operators to examine the potential of positioning Canada as a learning travel destination. The need to create “WOW” experiences and new iconic products was established. Nine priority themes were identified:

• Performing and visual arts
• Culinary
• Gardening
• National and provincial heritage and nature
• Festivals and events
• Culture
• Schools/virtual learning
• Museum/galleries
• Craft skill development.

Product development criteria include:

• Authenticity
• Quality interpretation
• Themed experiences
• Creating a sense of understanding or accomplishment
• Resource specialist, experience provider
• Special or limited access
• Willingness to customise
• Cater to independent or group travellers
• Commissionable price structure
• Ideally operating in three out of four seasons and with some bilingual product.

During 1999, the concept of ‘experiences’ adding a new layer of business opportunity was being introduced and Canada was embracing this new possibility to raise the baseline for travel in Canada.

11 Years Later In 2010 …

There have been major developments across the country along with an increase in our collective knowledge and understanding of the business opportunities that are aligned with consumer interests. This includes, but is not limited to:

• The Canadian Tourism Commission has successfully repositioned Canada from ‘Moose, Mountains and Mounties’ with an experiential ‘Explore Canada’ brand that is receiving awards for marketing and market research
• The Parks Canada Agency created the Visitor Experiences Directorate and is diversifying the activities in Canada’s national parks and historic sites based on nine types of travellers identified by the CTC’s psychometric Explorer Quotient (EQ)
• The Gros Morne Institute for Sustainable Tourism has delivered 20 experiential travel training courses to 500+ tourism businesses and government employees in Atlantic Canada
• New Brunswick has launched new experiential market readiness criteria
• ACOA has supported two best practice missions to Manitoba, on experiential travel
• Rendezvous Canada in Manitoba incorporated six signature experiential itineraries to diverse locations and incorporating multiple experiences in May, 2010.
• The rise in experiential marketing and internet communications has evolved the opportunities for small and medium business to compete
• Tourism and hospitality business across Canada are offering dynamic visitor experiences designed to engage the senses, challenge the intellect and create an emotional connection with travellers.

The customer is changing and so is Canada’s tourism industry. We’ve come a long way and the best is yet to come!

- Adapted from Arsenault/Davar - Alberta LEET Workshop, January, 2010
Five Experiential Tourism Program Development Considerations

For over a decade now, Celes Davar, Nancy Arsenault, and Todd Lucier have been collaborating to deliver leading edge experience based tourism training and business development programs in Canada. In November 2006 they launched *The Tourism Café*, a blog ([www.tourismcafe.ca](http://www.tourismcafe.ca)) where they share information and insights beyond the programs they teach, and the businesses they coach. *Foundational to their approach are five basic considerations that are relevant to building capacity within tourism business and communities around experiential tourism.*

I. Business to Consumer (B2C)
B2C describes activities of a business or organization that serves consumers with products, services, and/or experiences. An example of a B2C transaction is a traveler booking a room at a hotel, a family purchasing a vacation package from a tour operator, or a visitor paying a fee to engage in a New Brunswick Experiences Collection program.

II. Business to Business (B2B)
B2B describes commerce transactions between businesses and organizations for direct commercial benefit to both parties, such as a tour operator purchasing access to an attraction within their package, a resort property partnering with a spa provider to enhance the overall guest experience on site, or a local bakery providing bread to a restaurant. There are far more B2B transactions than B2C, for the B2B represents the chain of companies that supply the materials or support to create an end product such as a meal, a program, or a festival. Government to business is another type of relationship.

III. Business to Community (B2CM)
B2CM describes the impacts and opportunities of business decisions on a community. For example, a new golf course requires new road access that then impacts the local community, the construction of a new attraction increases business, traffic and employment to a residential area, or the crafting of unique visitor experiences allows the community businesses to be profiled in a new way.

IV. Consumer to Consumer (C2C) or Peer to Peer (P2P)
C2C communications have always existed but the Internet gave them a new voice through third party media that enabled travelers to share their travel experiences via websites and online vehicles such as TripAdvisor, Facebook, or Twitter. Beyond extending ‘word of mouth’ to ‘word of mouse’ C2C communications allow for electronic commercial activities via sites such as Craigslist, on-line auctions, Amazon.com, and e-Bay.

V. Business to Experience Provider (B2XP)
B2XP describes the coaching and capacity building, business-development process between an operator (B) and an experience provider (XP). This business relationship could involve coaching, program development, sweat equity, brainstorming, establishing a working relationship (trust), and/or sharing information about business opportunities. The result of this relationship between an operator such as a hotel accommodator, a tour operator, or a Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) and the experience provider is the development of a new experience that features the experience provider. Together, the operator and the experience provider market, sell and deliver new experiences into the marketplace, with each partner benefiting from the relationship in new ways.
A World of Opportunity

Trends Impacting the Tourism Industry

The information era makes the availability of trends, data and statistics readily available and often a click away, or two clicks with a credit card, for studies that have a fee attached for access. The challenge lies in extracting the relevant trends (from credible sources) that you should pay attention to, that could impact your tourism or hospitality business. While there are many, here is a TOP 10 list of general trends\(^1\) that have been selected as being relevant and worth noting as you think at the macro level about your tourism potential globally.

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"The next generation of travellers is not defined by age, gender, income or status in life. Rather these travellers are defined by their attitudes toward technology as an enabler of travel experiences, a facilitator of transactions and a vehicle by which to share provocative insights, opinions and commentary on both destinations and travel service providers."

-Peter Yesawich, YPartnership
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1. **The tourism world has fundamentally changed** as a result of the financial recession, evolution of the internet, world security issues, and pandemic health issues.

2. **Electronic communications and e-commerce continues** to grow at phenomenal rates and with constant innovation. Advances in social media and online and hand-held applications are being introduced regularly, forcing customers and businesses to become more and more selective in which ones to embrace personally and professionally, to optimize the benefits.

3. **Sustainability** is now a household word, consumer awareness is steadily increasing (particularly with younger generations), yet government action and support to move towards more sustainable economies remains vastly different between countries. Canada remains highly criticized for its lack of commitment and inaction at the federal level.

4. **Re-thinking marketing** is an entrepreneurial imperative that is being driven by knowledgeable consumers who know what they want and when they want it. Traditional marketing methods are no longer enough. These methods are being met by a dearth of criticism as customers no longer want to be sold a product, they want to engage in conversations with companies. The paradigm has shifted and marketers must innovate in ways that are customized, personalized and networked.

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\(^1\) The trends listed are not cited to specific sources, rather a summary of trends identified as a result of monitoring multiple sources of information and research data.
5. Overall demand for travel is not expected to grow in 2010, therefore, the need to differentiate your programs, services and know your ‘ideal guest’ is imperative. This will likely continue into 2011.

6. Small business has finally arrived and is being accepted. No longer do SOHOs (small office, home office) businesses have to pretend they are ‘bigger’. The customer imperative for services, experiences, and ‘what I want, when I want it’ can often be met quicker and in a more personalized way with a small business that knows who its ‘ideal customers’ are. How can we be sure? SOHOs are now being targeted as a customer of big business, and major political powers such as Barack Obama have stated that small businesses are the core of business in America. We know in tourism that small business has always been at the heart of the visitor experience and providing cool things to do when travelling.

7. Executive management is being held publicly accountable at levels never before reported publicly, and the result has impacts on employees and consumers. The egalitarian recession has also impacted senior levels of government and business at much high levels than in the past.

8. Governments seeking new or expanded revenue steams will change their relationship with the private and not-for-profit sectors over the next decade to accommodate their need for increased revenue and public expense accountability.

9. Market fragmentation is all around us as the Internet creates new distribution channels and ways to reach niche markets, and niche customers.

10. Innovation, new business models, and marketplace collaboration will lead the knowledge economy as the customer life-cycle is carefully integrated and managed in ways that are of greater importance than in previous decades.

Tourism Trends Impacting Visitor Programming

Narrowing the scope and focusing on visitor programming, the invitation to attract the ‘right guest, at the right time, for the right reason and the right experience’ requires a tighter lens. Beyond the internet and digital technologies that are forever shaping our businesses and lives, eight trends have been selected for you to consider as you think about planning great visitor experiences and the invitation to your destination.

1. People will continue to travel, but they will take vacations differently. 85% will stay at less expensive hotels, 80% will spend less overall, 69% will stay with family and friends, 66% would rather drive than fly, and 61% will look for deals on the Internet.

2. Demands for experiential travel will continue to grow as travellers exchange their most precious commodity ‘time’ for meaningful vacations that provide them ‘exactly’ what they are seeking. Closely aligned with quality experiences is the consideration of the environment and the increasing consumer consciousness about sustainable, responsible travel.

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3. Human capital will be one of the most valuable resources in the next decade, both in terms of operating tourism and hospitality business as well as with succession planning.

4. Knowing your ‘ideal guest’ will become an imperative in order to craft experiences. Invitations to engage with tourism businesses and destinations on a personalized basis will be essential to differentiating your business in a crowded market. Niche marketing will be essential.

5. Customer loyalty will be built on communities of interest. This will extend beyond the traditional business-to-consumer relationship, but also include consumer-to-consumer, business-to-business, and business-to-community interests.

6. E-commerce and e-communications will become a critical component of tomorrow’s successful businesses. Many small and medium businesses already struggle to keep up with a mere internet presence, have limited online reservation systems, and many governments heavily restrict communications, yet the internet will drive conversations and purchase behavior, despite these limitations.

7. China and India will create new inbound and outbound opportunities for Canadians and Canadian businesses. The challenge will be responding with programs, services and experiences that meet their needs, respect their culture and engage them in relevant activities and stories that are of interest.

8. The 2010 Olympics has generated awareness of Canada with high quality, experience-based images and messages. Aligning with provincial and national marketing strategies will be important for leveraging opportunities, as will ensuring your business has the right social media tools and materials to collaborate.

Furthermore, key consumer lifestyle and demographic trends identified by ITB Berlin for 2009/2010\(^3\) that are worthy of noting for program and product developers including:

- The impact an aging population has on travel preferences, behaviors, activities and interests
- Increased consumer awareness about the environment and how their travel impacts issues such a climate change
- Lack of brand loyalty
- Greater focus on authenticity of destinations and experiences
- Demands for greater value for money at all levels in the market
- A search for simplicity
- Increase in short-haul travel, and
- Changes in the marketplace, compounded by businesses and destinations truly understanding their customers will require new responses to market research, marketing and product innovation.

Mass Markets, Niche Markets, Ideal Guests and the Long Tail of Opportunity

Planning for your ideal guest means NOT making things OK for everyone but making things PERFECT for your favorite guests; those who you most want to serve. Paint a clear picture of the age, interests, abilities, home town, lifestyle habits, income and education level, etc. of this person. What do they read, watch on TV, listen to, etc. These questions and more help you get inside the head of your ideal client and can help you craft a better holiday experience that matches the needs of your guest.

Todd Lucier, Owner & Operator
Northern Edge Algonquin & Corporate Quest Canada

A great deal of attention in tourism has always been placed on mass markets, attracting large numbers of tourists to a destination, attraction, festival or event and attempting to retain them as long as possible to optimize the benefits they bring to a business and community. Much of Canada’s destination marketing for years was centralized around this approach, but that has been changing. No longer is it just the ‘cultural explorer’ being invited to a destination, we are segmenting markets into smaller niches so that we can customize the offer and invitation for different types of cultural travellers. For example, people interested in culinary experiences combined with a desire to listen to, and interact with, local performing artists. Or people who want authentic experiences that combine learning travel, nature-based experiences and cultural immersion. Or perhaps free spirited individuals looking for exciting and exotic things to do, indulging themselves as opportunity presents itself!

The better you know your customers -- your ideal guests -- the more targeted you can be with your programs, services, experiences, sales and marketing.

Technology has provided the tools; our job as operators and destination developers is to know our customers so well, the tools and technology merely becomes an extension from us to them.
Long Tail of Opportunity

When Chris Anderson wrote his book *The Long Tail* describing the new economic culture and commerce based on the online sales potential for the music and publishing industries, he may not have realized how applicable the ‘thinking’ is to the mass and niche market potential for experiential tourism.

So what is the long tail all about?

Quite simply it is a retail concept for niche market selling. In a nutshell it is about selling a large number of unique items such as the single sound track from Susan Boyle’s CD to a specific audience of people who are interested in her. Rising to fame overnight on Britain’s Got Talent in April 2009, over 84 million people viewed her on YouTube before the release of her new CD before Christmas.

Her CD was an immediate hit with more than 3 million copies sold in the USA alone in the first month. By making the hit song “I Dreamed a Dream” also available as a single download, people who prefer to own just this single tract can do so - an option that didn’t exist a decade ago - and a second revenue stream without incurring increased production costs.

Extrapolate this thinking to tourism and how we have traditionally sold tours and packages. Like a CD we have products and services that meet the needs of a significant number of travellers - the mass market. But now with the demand for experiences and customized travel experiences, we can move down the long tail and create experiences for more niche markets. The volume and profitability from merchandise to programs and experiences of course differs, but the fact that building on our assets and attributes affiliated with our mass market visitor activities to create unique experiences for targeted groups of ‘ideal guests’ presents a real opportunity.

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<th>Experiential Tourism Ingredient</th>
<th>The Benefits and Value</th>
<th>Your Assessment</th>
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<td>1. Authentic local people and their stories are at the heart of any well-crafted experience.</td>
<td>Authentic, local people provide stories from their experiences, real history, and accurate information about local traditions and culture. These people are often seniors or elders in your community, who have a passion for sharing their stories and are credible. Shared stories bring out the magic and the memories of experiences.</td>
<td>What was authentic about the people in this program?</td>
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<td>2. The experience is supported by positive cues.</td>
<td>Positive cues are things you do to help the experience be congruent with the place where it occurs. E.g. In a park; in a museum; at a community historic building; at a picnic shelter. Doing this leaves indelible impressions in the minds of travellers.</td>
<td>What were some of the positive cues in this experience?</td>
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<td>3. Multiple interactive methods and tools are used to assist in the learning process.</td>
<td>Daily activities or traditions (berry-picking, wood-carving, ranching, restoring streams, cooking with local foods, making wooden boats, fly-fishing, glass-blowing, song-crafting) used to create an experience that guests can actually take part in activities – not merely watching a demonstration.</td>
<td>What were some of the activities you took part in that would be simply considered as being local and quite ordinary?</td>
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<td>4. Carefully thought out program themes and titles that intrigue visitors are very important.</td>
<td>Travellers are seeking unique themes and uncommon experiences: Lighthouse Picnics (walking out to have a picnic near Ferryland, Newfoundland; local food and whales) Morning Tea With Moose (canoeing and having tea in Algonquin Park, with moose nearby) Owner For an Evening (owning a race horse for an evening race at the Charlottetown Race Track, PEI)</td>
<td>What would your suggestion be for an innovative title (4 words or less) for any one of these experiences?</td>
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<td>5. Use of as many of the five (5) senses as possible will lead to better immersion and intensity for the traveller.</td>
<td>It is easy to look and see; it takes more creativity to find innovative and inexpensive ways to incorporate other senses. The more senses, the more memorable, and the more justification for a higher price point. “See, Smell, Hear, Taste, and Touch”</td>
<td>Which senses, and how were the senses engaged throughout these experiences and through lunch?</td>
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<td>6. Smaller groups provide better enrichment of hands-on learning.</td>
<td>Small groups provide better opportunities for: stories to be told, more authentic learning to take place, and often involve a higher price point.</td>
<td>What logistics were used to set everyone up for success?</td>
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## The Benefits and Value

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<td>7. Experiences involve a shift from dependence on a guide’s knowledge, to facilitation by the interpreter or resource specialist so that travellers are more dependent on themselves for their own learning.</td>
<td>What was done in these programs to help you become dependent on yourselves as learners and participants?</td>
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<td>8. Relevant takeaways (memorabilia) are provided during the experience. They are tangible reminders of the experience.</td>
<td>What are the takeaways or memorabilia (or strong memories) from these experiences?</td>
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<td>9. Simple activities, carefully planned, that focus on one or two main activities for travellers to take part in, are best.</td>
<td>What was done to deliver these programs in a simple and effective way?</td>
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<td>10. Techniques that tap into the different intelligences provide for deeper learning and a much more engaged participant.</td>
<td>What were some of the different methods used to create better learning?</td>
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<td>11. Develop and enhance with WOW aspects - integrate regional foods, a remarkable vista or place, talented storytellers, and interactive learning - together, they have a combined powerful effect.</td>
<td>What was done to increase the WOW factor of these programs?</td>
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<td>12. Personalization or customization of the experience leaves travellers feeling with a feeling of deep appreciation.</td>
<td>In what ways did you feel that the program you participated in was created “just for you”?</td>
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*Howard Gardner’s categories of multiple intelligences includes: visual, kinesthetic, interpersonal, verbal-linguistic, intra-personal (reflection), visual-spatial, musical, and naturalistic.*
Crafting Experiences

The following is a framework for understanding how guests expectations can be met through crafting great experiences that leads to transformative outcomes. They create a desire to tell stories, which provides a business or community with *word-of-mouth* or *word-of-mouse* marketing benefits. This type of marketing is greatly enhanced by social media channels. Momentum builds over time, with new bookings reflecting “the right customers” coming “for the right reasons” at the “right times of the year”.

**GUESTS BRING**
- Motivations
- Interests
- Prior experience
- Expectations of benefits
- Expectations for good service and quality
- Various perceptions of acceptable risks

**CONSUMER TO CONSUMER SHARING**
- Word of mouth/mouse
- Social media
- Referrals

**EXPERIENCES**
- Twelve (12) ingredients
- Attention to details
- Facilitated

**OUTCOMES**
- New insights
- AHAH moments!
- Personal transformation
- New values
- Deeper appreciation
- New relationships
- Fun
- Memories

**SALES**

**TRADEMARK**

**ENGAGEMENT**

**TRANSFORMATION**

**Memories**
The Value of Customization

**Shifting the Progression of Economic Value Up**

The ability of businesses to shift the economic value up on contingent on a number of variables and layering of the economic opportunities. Fundamental elements include:

- **Competitive positioning** based on the degree of differentiation of the offer, the more you customize, the higher the degree of differentiation
- Pricing and profits are impacted by the market in all cases, but as the more commoditized an offer becomes, the lower the price. *To retain premium pricing, customization is required.*
- Consider also the needs of the customer, the more basic the need, the less relevant the offer is, however *as the degree of relevance increases, so does the price.*

**Elements of Great Experiences**

Since the introduction of the experience economy, many sectors and authors have written and researched elements of a great experience. Here are a few to think about as you design visitor programs for travellers:

- Theme the experience
- Engage all five senses
- Harmonize the environment
- Mix in memorabilia
- Pay attention to detail
- Incorporate the element of surprise
- Include hands-on, participatory activities
- Provide special access, behind-the-scenes opportunities or exclusivity
- Stage opportunities to learn and discover, escape or reflect
- Incorporate local people, places and stories
- Be able to respond to the ‘unexpected’
- Price for value, not cost
- Strive for authenticity
- Understand what is relevant to your ideal guests
- Craft touchstones for memorable moments throughout the experience.

**Moments to Memories**

“Crafting great customer experiences means knowing your customer so well that you understand their needs from the moment they think about travel, until the time they share stories with their friends and families before, during and after they travel.”

*Nancy Arsenault (2008), Arsenault Project Solutions*
Guest Experiences: Value, Price Point, and Volumes

![Diagram showing types of visitor experiences and program prices](image-url)

Adapted from ©Celes Davar & Nancy Arsenault

www.tourismcafe.ca
Five (5) Strategic Experiential Tourism Opportunities

For Cyprus Hoteliers and Tourism Industry Partners
Five (5) Strategic Experiential Tourism Opportunities for Cyprus Hoteliers and Tourism Industry Partners

The following are suggested key strategic opportunities that may be useful for hotel managers and their tourism industry partners to consider, when examining how to invest in, and develop experiential tourism within the hotel industry.

These are areas that require very little financial investment, but they do require an investment into staff training, new ideas, a renewed service culture, and a fundamental shift to celebrating “the Cyprian experience” at each hotel, each city, each community. By working as a destination focused on the celebration of what makes Cyprus unique, you provide more choices for travelers to select Cyprus as a destination that is different from Majorca, or The Canary Islands, or Cancun, Mexico.

The fundamental key to this shift is understanding that experiences that provide opportunities for travelers to experience Cyprian culture, art, nature, and cuisine are exactly what today’s group, niche, and global travelers are looking for. They don’t want more of the same. They want different. Experiences are new forms of programs that generate new revenues.

1. **The Customer Experience can be the “front entry” to the Cyprian experience:**

   i. The staff at the front desk reflect the culture, language, and welcoming nature of the Cyprian people. They can be knowledgeable about the unique experiences that arriving travelers can take part in - local music, local markets, local foods, local art, local culture, a trip to a country festival. *How do you train them to do this?*

   ii. The staff at the hotel have experienced the experiences that they are recommending to the guests who arrive and stay at your hotels. *What can you do to invest in their training, to ensure that they are all knowledgeable of the unique Cyprus experiences that they are proud of, and can share with travelers?*

   iii. The concierge has to be a special person - not only good at customer service, but able to be an ambassador for recommending travelers to take part in unique Cyprian experiences. This position is critical. It is not a sales person. It is an ambassadorial role. *What needs to be done to train and recruit the best concierges who are the hotel ambassadors inviting all arriving passengers to take part in “the Experience of Cyprus”?*

   iv. It is very important that guests at your hotel encounter local people within your hotel. These could be front desk, cleaning staff, waiters and waitresses, or the concierge. This provides a feeling of being “in Cyprus, with the people of Cyprus” in your hotel. *What needs to be done to ensure that local people are at the front line at your hotels?*
2. Build on your strengths with existing infrastructure, systems, and staff

i. Your hotels already manage events, have a central reservation system, and manage functions. *How can you use these systems and add “new programs and experiences” that have new price points?*

ii. You already have multiple spaces within your hotels - conference rooms, hotels, lobbies - that could serve as “community stages” for local music, art, culture, art galleries, and showcases for local artists, craftpeople. Invite the local community to present and share their art in special themed events that are controlled by you. *What kinds of changes in policies, programming, schedules, and partnerships are needed to enable your hotels to serve as “the stage for Cyprian experiences”?*

iii. Your hotel can serve as a hub, with some experiences taking place within the hotel, and many others taking place outside the hotel in your local communities, towns, markets, and in the countryside. Make it easy for travelers to leave the hotel and return. *What can you do to invent a new a la carte menu of experiences that can be purchased before and after arrival, that answer the question “What is there to do?”*

3. Experiences are programs that generate new revenues.

These revenues can be significant, are scalable, and can be provided both within the hotel or resort, but also in the community.

Experiences can be added to your hotel product mix, as a value-added. Create a new section on your website and in your hotel directory that are about Cyprus experiences. Create new business to business opportunities with your industry partners and develop a menu of new experiences that could be sold from your hotel. You have many ways to benefit from these new experiences:

- Your sales director has new options that are interesting.
- Your sales team has many new ways to provide different experiences for different markets.
- You can choose to sell experiences for your partners, and get a commission on sales.
- You can serve the group market, conference market, and incentive market with many new high yield programs and experiences, increasing your profits.
4. Experiences offer opportunities to customize and innovate for niche markets

Hotels already know how to customize and personal service - for conference markets, weddings, large and small group functions. As markets fragment from mass to niche, hotels are well positioned to start looking for new ways to serve niche markets with experiences that will entice them to choose your hotel, or stay longer.

*What are some new experiences that reflect Cyprian culture, art, nature and music, that can be offered for?*

- The group market
- Conference markets
- Niche markets (small groups of women, sales teams, history buffs, spa enthusiasts, birders, photographers traveling in small groups and wanting a different experience)

5. The Hotel is the Gateway to the Experience of Cyprus.

This represents an incredible opportunity to partner with other hotels, local experience providers, other communities, others in the travel industry. *The key is to work together, to collaborate, to cross old boundaries, and see each other as partners, not competitors.* What are you willing to do to use the hotel as a hub, as a gateway, and as a place of access for your guests? Don’t leave this to government or to destination marketing agencies. As hotels, you have a great opportunity to do this yourselves.
Tactics:
Implementing Experiential Tourism within your industry

For Cyprus Hoteliers and Tourism Industry Partners
The following is a short synopsis of suggestions, ideas, and recommendations that may be relevant for hotel managers and tourism industry operators in Cyprus, as they consider how to shift and add “experiences” to their product offerings.

1. **Develop a strong collaborative culture within your hotel, within your hotel management team, and with other hoteliers to develop experiences as a key B2B (business to development win:win long term approach).** Examine the potential for
   i. Small clusters of hotels focusing on specific themes (Cyprian arts, Cyprian culture, Live folk artists, The Music Hotel,
   ii. Partner with other tour operators (international and domestic) that are already offering Agrotourism experiences on Cyprus.
   iii. Develop themed packages that can be sold as “premium experiences” by which your guests can purchase experiences that are found only on Cyprus. This does not include golfing, parasailing, and other activities found in resorts all over the world. Rather, these premium experiences could include any of the following:
      • Learn to play the bouzouki with a local bouzouki player
      • Cook with coriander, with one of your chefs
      • A day as an archaeologist in one of the world’s wonders - with local foods created by your chef as a picnic basket.
      • A day in the world of wine - going to vineyard, learning viniculture, and tasting wines and cheeses from Cyprus. This is not a tour. Hands on activities to touch, taste, feel, and walk are part of an overall new wine experience: Commandaria, the King of Wines in the Villages of Cyprian Peoples. A walking, tasting, and conversations day long experience.
      • Learn to make Lefkara lace and Fytiotika embroidery - a program for families and small groups of women.
      • Make pottery with a local potter.
      • Try to blow glass, at the glass-blower’s studio.
      • Visit a local wood carver, at their studio, and learn the art of local wood carving.
      • Creating a dinner made entirely from Mediterranean ingredients - a conference experience, adventure or spousal program. You get access to the executive chef for an entire day to shop for local foods, learn how to make the meal, taste local wines, and share the meal together. Learn. Taste. Experience.
      • Before a theatrical production or a musical production, take your guests behind the scenes - in North America, we call it a Backstage Pass. Exclusive opportunity to meet the artists or actors or musicians - either before the show, or after. Learn from them. Experience their passion.

**IMPORTANT:** The key to being creative in the development of these programs is learning how to work with your experience partners both within your urban and rural settings. And, not being afraid to offer experiences and activities that are off-property.
2. **Research new niche markets. Share this research within your industry.**

Find niche markets based on “travel motivations”, not on demographics. What kinds of experiences might these niche markets be interested in? Develop your own proprietary travel motivations research. Use this to drive the development of new niche products. Find out their propensity to spend on premium experiences that reflect exclusivity, small group, and special interests.

*You might want to explore what potential the following niche markets might represent as having good potential for new experiences:*

- Women traveling in small groups
- Amateur artists looking for unique new places to learn about art, be tutored by a well-known artist, and combining art with cuisine.
- Culinary tourists - tourists wanting to learn how to cook foods from other countries.
- Conference groups wanting to experience Cyprus art, culture, music, and cuisine in half-day trips away from the hotel
- Leisure travelers wanting to combine 2 days in a resort hotel and 2 days in a villa in the countryside. The best of resort and countryside.

3. **Identify what role you, as a hotel manager, would like to adopt in creating, developing, selling, or offering experiences.** Which one of the following are you most interested in offering your hotel to be? Or, can you handle a hybrid model of some of the following?

- Booking agent?
- Sales?
- Experience broker?
- Coach?
- Ambassador?
- Themed experiences with specific partners?

4. **What can you do, with very little cost, to change the customer engagement process** (telephone, web, front desk, concierge, cleaning staff, food services) to be more experiential when your guests arrive? Some of the following may be appropriate:

- Greet them in both languages - your own, and in their language or English
- Have one day of the month, which is a day in which all staff dress in Cyprian folk dress
- For extended stay guests, provide something that they can take away with them that reflects Cyprian culture or cuisine.
- Create a new section on your hotel website which provides access to saleable experiences.

5. **Pool your resources and invest into training new Experiential Product Development trainers or coaches** to develop new experiences.

They can start to work with both your sales staff and local experience providers to develop new experiences integrating product development, marketing, CRS, sales, and quality control. Bring in people like myself who can train your local trainers so that they can teach others locally how to create, cost, price, and deliver high quality experiences.
6. Analyze and assess where high yield experiences fits into your revenue model and your product mix from your hotel, and from within the overall tourism industry. This will be important, so that the product offer of “experiences” can be seen by your sales team as a whole new offer. They can be scalable from large to small groups. For example, an entire 200 person conference could easily have an evening cuisine experience in which your chef’s team puts together a tasting experience instead of a sit down dinner. This is a customized offer, with a higher price point. But, the value proposition is clear - it is about a personalized approach to being with your chef, tasting local foods, and being educated about local foods as part of the evening.

7. Analyze how your web presence and social media collateral and your web offer needs to change, to shift from photos of rooms, conference rooms, beds, and other features, to photographs, video, interviews with staff and visitors enjoying themselves. For example,
   i. Instead of only having photos of bedrooms and conference rooms, spas, and swimming pools, have photographs of your guests taking part in experiences that you offer from your hotel, or in partnership with others.
   ii. Instead of trying to have all activities take place at the hotel, show your hotel as a gateway to experiences that can take place in many offsite locations.
   iii. Instead of treating the hotel as a brand unto its own, see the hotel as a collection of legendary stories that you share with your guests - stories about staff, cuisine, local culture, local traditions, and nature within Cyprus.

8. Invest in training, developing, and having high quality guides who are facilitators, specialists, and can be paid a high wage for their services. These people will be the “heart and soul” of the personalized or customized small group experience. They will facilitate language barriers, enable your guests to get to out of the way locations in the country, or to exclusive engagements with behind the scenes experiences. South and Central America have done a very good job at developing a certified guide culture, in which guides to places like Ecuadorian villages, the Machu Picchu Inca Trail, the Galapagos Islands all require the services of paid local guides. This has potential for selected Cyprian experiences in which history, archaeology, bird-watching, nature, marine diving, and culinary tourism are options for new experiences.

9. Experiences are value-added. Build them slowly and carefully, with a long-term approach to sustainable tourism.
   i. Make sure that they exemplify a low-carbon, responsible tourism approach.
   ii. Demonstrate leadership, attention to detail, and high quality in every aspect of these experiences.
   iii. Make these experiences easily accessed by visitors, with flexible pricing for groups, and with a clear positioning of the value of these experiences.
10. **There are many new career track opportunities within the hotel industry and the tourism industry on the island of Cyprus, when you start to include experiential tourism as a distinct economic product and offering.** Some of the ones that may emerge and could be developed, include:

**For hotels:**
- A new position in some hotels or hotel clusters - Director of Experiences
- A section within the sales department focused only on high yield product
- Concierges with a new mandate for showcasing Cyprus experiences
- Coordinators of onsite experiences
- Hotel-certified experiential tourism guides

**For the Cyprus tourism industry:**
- Industry trainers and coaches
- Experiential tourism product development coaches
- A new group of Cyprus Experience guides - could be a certification and training program to achieve this status.
- Web content writers, videographers, photographers shooting marketing collateral that focuses on the experience of Cyprus.
- Destination marketing organizations including new experiences within the marketing efforts
- Leading the development of new packages that are focused only on the Cyprus experience - Cyprus culture, art, nature, and cuisine. Not golfing. Not Biking. Not water sports. Not Squash. Not Tennis. Not Go-Karting. Rather, they are a new offer for niche markets and returning markets to provide access to Cyprus cuisine, local food markets, local music, crafts and workshops.
The Earth Rhythms Experience

Helping others to use other senses, be out at night, howl for wolves, and “star stitch” while night snowshoeing

Crafting experiences that engage

Earth Rhythms service promise has evolved and developed over the years to be fairly tightly crafted.

“... Earth Rhythms creates meaningful and sustainable encounters in inspiring natural locations and innovative cultural and community settings, engaging the human experience in a deeper appreciation for nature, heritage, and each other resulting in inspired people, meaningful actions, and small steps for a healthy planet....”

We create small group programs that are customized, experiential and educational.

Our marketing is accomplished using primarily the following methods:

• Strong, long-term, sustainable B2B relationships with key distribution channels (Elkhorn Resort, Team Winnipeg, Great Canadian Travel) that reach unique markets more efficiently than we can
• Our website
• Earth Rhythms’ Facebook Page
• Twitter
• Experience Riding Mountain blog (about the people and places in this area)
• Word of mouth and our award-winning reputation

We seek to take “the ordinary” in our backyards, and make it accessible for our guests, who perceive and value it to be “extra-ordinary” because these experiences are not part of their traditions, community, nature, or cultural context.
Celes Davar is a member of the Tourism Café Consortium providing the following experiential tourism services (www.tourismcafe.ca):

- Experiential tourism product development workshops
- Train the trainer workshops to train local trainers how to create and deliver experiences
- Social media development to reflect experiential tourism criteria
- Customer relationship management to emphasize “the customer engagement process”
- Creative program development - ideas that reflect the local experience
- Cluster marketing opportunities identification, with a focus on experiences
- Tourism operator coaching to help local operators partner and develop experiences and packages emphasizing experiential themes, including itinerary development, costing, pricing, and positioning the experience for web sales.