

It's all about culture

Burnett Thorne engaged EDCO members with the importance of cultural tourism

Members of the Economic Developers Council of Ontario (EDCO) were treated to a provocative tourism presentation at the recent EDCO conference in Toronto. "Surf's Up! Catch the Cultural Tourism Wave!" was presented by Stephen Burnett and Steven Thorne, principals of Toronto-based Burnett Thorne Cultural Tourism. Both urged EDCO members to "catch the wave" of cultural tourism interest that is sweeping across North America, and has long been a mainstay of Europe's tourism industry.

Burnett Thorne describes cultural tourism as, "tourism that is motivated by an interest in other peoples, other places, other cultures." Typically, cultural tourism focuses on the arts and heritage attractions of a region, including its cuisine. Examples in Canada include winery tourism in the Niagara Peninsula, the Stratford Shakespeare Festival, and Ottawa's national museums and galleries. Each destination capitalizes on its cultural assets to lure culturally oriented travelers. Although many Ontario municipalities are successfully discovering and promoting their culture, Burnett Thorne believes that many others are not realizing their cultural tourism opportunities.

Burnett Thorne presented EDCO members with compelling evidence of the popularity of cultural tourism. Most of the 650,000 tickets



Steven Thorne of Burnett Thorne Cultural Tourism presents his portion of the session.

sold annually to the Stratford Shakespearean Festival are sold to tourists. The annual economic benefit of all the goods and services associated with the Stratford Festival is \$170-million. In 1995, the Barnes Exhibit at the Art Gallery of Ontario generated \$38-million in incremental spending (i.e., spending that would not have occurred but for the presence of the exhibit). In Western Canada, the 1998 Leonardo da Vinci exhibit at Victoria's Royal B.C. Museum generated \$32-million in incremental spending, thanks to 200,000 visitors who came to Victoria expressly to see the exhibit.

What is driving the market demand for cultural tourism experiences? According to Steven Thorne, the aging of the baby boom tops the list. The best salaried and educated generation in North American history, boomers "seek learning and enrichment when they travel — the precise travel rewards that cultural tourism provides," notes Thorne.

Women are another factor in the growing popularity of cultural tourism. Key players in travel deci-

sion making, women typically have a greater interest in arts and culture than do men.

Thorne cites a 1992 Lou Harris and Associates (LHA) poll that asked frequent American travelers about key motivators in their trip planning. Topping the list was, "understanding culture." Among ten other travel motivators that were examined in the poll, six that were linked to cultural enrichment also rated highly. In terms of appeal, historic sites, museums, live theatre, art galleries, and heritage festivals lead the list of most-popular cultural tourism attractions.

Meanwhile, in Canada, total domestic spending by Canadian cultural tourists now exceeds \$3-billion. Moreover, cultural tourists spend 50 per cent more in the destinations they visit than do non-culturally oriented travelers.

The interest is evident. The problem, says Thorne, is that Canada's tourism industry isn't capitalizing on that interest. "The Canadian tourism industry treats cultural tourism as a niche", notes Thorne. In fact, according to Thorne, "cultural tourism is a



My Fair Lady was a Stratford Festival production in 2002. The City of Stratford emphasizes theatre as its main cultural tourist attraction.

major market segment."

Thorne predicts this tourism segment will only grow in importance during the next 20 years. Citing evidence that the U.S. is ahead of Canada in realizing its cultural tourism opportunities, Thorne challenged his EDCO audience — and the Canadian tourism industry — not to "remain a captive of its own success." Best known for its scenic environments and nature-based experiences, Canada ranks number nine among all nations in the volume of tourists it enjoys. "That's a terrific achievement," says Thorne. "But we can't afford to rest on our laurels."

Among other factors, Thorne believes that cultural tourism has been slow to develop in Canada because Canadian communities often fail to recognize their cultural riches. "We often don't see what is under our nose. Every community has history, artists, and authors — and unique stories to tell."

The other half of the Burnett Thorne duo, Stephen Burnett, followed Steven Thorne's presentation by citing the example of Ed Deming — the American who fought to bring innovative engineering processes to the North American automobile industry. Largely ignored by the Big Three, Deming took his ideas to

Japan, where he revolutionized Japanese auto production and sales and became a national icon. According to Burnett, Deming's focus on quality control, innovation, and consumer-oriented product development offers instructive lessons for Canada's tourism industry.

Just as the Big Three had great difficulty seeing beyond the gas-guzzling, poorly engineered vehicles of the 1960s and 70s, "Canada has a hard time seeing beyond its magnificent outdoors and nature-based tourism assets," said Burnett. Moreover, "paternalism and complacency abound." As a result, Burnett noted, Canada's share of the global tourism market has been declining for some years.

In the view of Steven Thorne and Stephen Burnett, economic developers and tourism specialists can play a key role in advancing cultural tourism, and diversifying local economies through cultural tourism.

Burnett Thorne Cultural Tourism is a Toronto-based firm that specializes in planning, developing and marketing cultural tourism destinations. Contact Burnett Thorne Cultural Tourism at (519) 272 - 2706, or email burnett.thorne@sympatico.ca.

Source: Burnett Thorne Cultural Tourism

Breaking down tourism in 2003

Data released on effects of SARS and Iraq War on Ontario accommodation industry

PKF Consulting released a survey in December 2003 revealing figures on the effects of SARS and the Iraq War on Canada and Ontario's accommodation industry in the first three quarters of 2003.

Canada's accommodation industry was off to a good start in 2003. Room revenue was 3.4 per cent above what it had been in the first quarter of 2002. SARS hit just after the second quarter opened. The impact of the outbreak on the second quarter alone was \$320-million in lost room revenue.

The third quarter was hit nearly as hard as the second, with a \$287-million, year-over-year decline in room revenue. Demand in the third quarter across Canada was off by 6.4 per cent, bringing room revenue down by 10 per cent over the summer months. In the third quarter alone, \$154-million was lost in room revenue in Ontario with \$75-million in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), and \$56-million was lost by hotels in downtown Toronto.

In the second and third quarters combined, as many as 3.2 million room nights were lost across Canada and \$605-million in room revenue compared with 2002. However, Ontario accommodation properties took the brunt of the impact, losing \$339-million over both quarters.

In September, demand for accommodation was only down by 4 per cent compared with the 11 per cent low in April. Room revenue improved in September, however there was discounting in many markets.