

The Power of Storytelling in Tourism

By Sam Cowan, Tourism & Event Coordinator, Meewasin Valley Authority

Storytelling is a powerful tool that helps businesses stand out in the tourism industry. It creates intangible value, increases visitor loyalty, and builds cultural connections. Visitors who share their experiences with others act as organic word-of-mouth marketers, further amplifying a destination's appeal.

This document is designed to explore how you can use the power of storytelling to bring your Saskatchewan experiences to life—making them not just memorable but truly unforgettable

Why Storytelling in Saskatchewan Matters

Saskatchewan's rich cultural heritage, diverse landscapes, and unique traditions provide ample opportunities for compelling storytelling. Whether it's Indigenous stories and art, military history, settler tales, or insights into grassland ecosystems, it's the stories that bring Saskatchewan's tourism experiences to life.

The Key Elements of a Good Story

A strong story structure is essential to keeping audiences engaged and ensuring the narrative has a lasting impact. Effective storytelling has the power to transport listeners into an experience, allowing them to connect emotionally with the destination. The combination of setting, characters, and plot creates a compelling journey that leaves a deep impression on visitors.

1. **Setting:** Immerse visitors in the environment with vivid descriptions.
2. **Characters:** Create relatable figures who transform throughout the story.
3. **Plot:** Use engaging hooks, conflict, twists, and resolutions to captivate audience

Bonus Tips:

- **Engaging the Senses:** Incorporate sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch for a memorable experience.

- **Tone and Emotion:** Adjust storytelling tone (serious, humorous, playful) to connect with diverse audiences.

Examples from Saskatchewan:

- **Saskatchewan Dark Skies Experiences:** Dark Sky tour programs across the province use the stunning night sky to engage the senses—visitors feel the cool night air, hear the rustling prairie grasses, and see the brilliance of the stars. The tone is one of awe and wonder, making for a deeply moving experience. [\[More info\]](#)
- **Han Wi Dinner at Wanuskewin:** This immersive dinner experience blends storytelling, traditional foods, and Indigenous teachings. Through tone and emotion, guests feel a sense of reverence and connection to history, while the scent and taste of the meal create a full sensory experience. [\[More info\]](#)

The Science Behind a Good Story

A Stanford University study found that people are 22 times more likely to remember information presented in a story than in a list of facts ([Source](#)). This is just one of many examples that show the impact a story has on our brains, and how it can be quantifiably measured.

This research shows that storytelling activates multiple areas of the brain, making information more memorable and engaging. When emotions are triggered, the brain releases dopamine, which enhances retention and recall.

For tens of thousands of years, stories have been deeply rooted in human cognition.

From what we've learned from case studies like those at Stanford, information conveyed in a story format will:

- Engage the Brain: Stories activate neurons linked to imagination and emotion.
- Build Memory: We retain stories better than isolated facts.
- Create Connection: Emotional and imaginative stories build trust and deepen audience engagement.

How to Get Started

Getting started with storytelling in tourism requires a thoughtful approach. Storytelling should not be an afterthought but rather an integral part of designing visitor experiences. To create compelling narratives, consider your audience, the uniqueness of your offering, and how you want people to feel when they leave your destination.

Practical Steps:

1. identify your unique selling point: What makes my destination, business, or experience special? Example: Naughty By Nature at Meewasin focuses on uncovering nature's untamed beauty while engaging guests in immersive storytelling experiences.

2. Draft your story:

- Start with a hook (Can you start with an engaging question, a bold fact, or take-your-breath-away scene?). Example: What if nature wasn't always as peaceful as it seems? Meewasin's [Naughty By Nature](#) program invites guests to see the wild, unexpected side of nature.
- Build tension in the middle (conflict or challenge). Example: Naughty By Nature Guests experience hands-on activities like tracking nocturnal creatures on a sunset hike, deepening their understanding of nature's duality.
- End with an emotional takeaway that leaves a lasting impression. Example: Meewasin wants their Naughty guests to leave with a newfound appreciation of nature's delicate balance and their role in its conservation. Better yet, Meewasin wants them to tell their friends.

3. Adapt storytelling to diverse audiences by:

- Practicing storytelling.
- Testing stories with colleagues and gathering feedback.
- Refining your narrative based on responses.

Call to Action

Storytelling is a skill that can be refined with practice and education. Whether you're new to storytelling or looking to strengthen your existing techniques, structured learning can make a significant difference. By investing in storytelling training, tourism professionals can create deeper connections with visitors and drive meaningful engagement.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sam Cowan is Meewasin's Tourism & Experiences Coordinator. She has spent most of her career as a tour guide working with Canadians around the world - most notably Europe, Central America, and South East Asia. Originally from Toronto, Sam moved to Saskatoon while working with The Battlefield Tours of Canada where she explored Canada's military heritage both at home and abroad.