

The Growing Popularity of Experiential Travel

By Eva Gutsche, Founder, STEM Consulting

Experiential travel is gaining momentum as today's travelers seek more than just sightseeing, they're looking for deeper connections, hands-on activities, and meaningful encounters with people and places. From storytelling and local cuisine to outdoor adventures and artisan skills, the province offers endless opportunities to create travel moments that truly resonate.

"Broadly speaking, the concept of experiential travel refers to immersive experiences — the kind that aims to forge a deeper connection with a destination than can usually be had from traditional leisure holidays." Source National Geographic Article - Sean Newsom - December 19, 2023

A lot of travel talk these days centers around terms like "immersive" and "meaningful". But what does a "meaningful" travel experience really look like to you?

- 80% say making lasting memories is what makes a "meaningful" travel experience.
- 60% Trying something I've never done before.
- 59% Learning new things that stay with me after the trip.
- 49% Going beyond sightseeing to more hands-on interaction with a destination.

Source -<https://www.toursbylocals.com/travel-blog/toursbylocals-2025-travel-trends-report>

Elements of Experiential Travel include

- Local experiences
- Authentic
- Memorable
- Learning component
- Immersive
- Cultural awareness
- Personal connection

Key considerations

When designing unique tourism products in Saskatchewan include leveraging local culture, heritage, and natural landscapes.

- What stories, businesses, people, skills exist in your community? These could include An indigenous story, culinary or unique food component, existing events you can build upon, artisans, natural outdoor space and other people and places.
- Immersive, hands-on, engaging activities for the traveller translates into memorable experiences.

Benefits for tourism operators, include attracting new market segments, driving repeat business, and extending the tourism season, keeping staff employed longer and creating a unique advantage for your business.

Benefits for travelers, such as learning opportunities, personal connections, and the potential for life-changing experiences.

What to consider when designing an experience?

- What is the broad concept?
- What components/assets do you have?
- What components should be included that you don't have?
- Who could you partner with?
- Who would this experience appeal to?

Consider Timing

- When would you like to drive additional business?
- Is this something past customers might return for?
- What audience would travel when you would like to attract business?

Checklist

- Is it authentic?
- Is there a human connection?
- Does the experience highlight local assets, treasures, people?
- Is there something for the traveller to do (versus just observing)?
- What makes this experience memorable?
- Will the traveller learn something?
- How unique is the experience?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Eva Gutsche, founder of STEM Consulting has extensive experience in the hospitality and training industry and brings 20 years' experience as a facilitator, moderator, workshop designer, and presenter.

Eva's direct hospitality and tourism background includes hotel sales, marketing, sales management, revenue management and leadership. Eva has worked extensively in the area of tourism experience design assisting destinations and tourism businesses in looking at their offering differently, forging new partnerships and creating unique immersive experiences to welcome back past visitors and attract new travellers.