



The Power of Connecting with Local Community Partners

By Eva Gutsche, Founder, STEM Consulting

Strong local partnerships are the backbone of vibrant, sustainable tourism. When tourism operators collaborate with nearby businesses, cultural groups, and organizations, they create richer, more authentic experiences for visitors while supporting the local economy.

These partnerships also open the door to new ideas, extend the tourism season, and make each business offering stronger and more appealing. By aligning values and goals, partners can deliver experiences that are truly memorable and rooted in place.

The Importance of Connecting with Local Community Partners

The value of connecting with local community partners Local experiences

- Strong partnerships make tourism in the community, more vibrant and connected.
- Collaboration fosters connection with each other and with the visitors.
- Teaming up with local businesses and organizations creates more authentic experiences.
- Partnerships allows each business partner to add to the overall guest experience.
- Everyone wins—tourists get a better experience, businesses grow, and communities thrive!

Defining local community partnerships with a tourism lens

- Local community partnerships could be businesses, cultural groups, or non-profits organizations - anyone working together to grow tourism in the community or region.
- It's all about shared goals: bringing in visitors, preserving local culture, embracing diversity and growing the community.
- Examples:
 1. Hotels teaming up with local experience providers.

2. Restaurants featuring local farm ingredients.
3. A lavender farm partnering with a spa to make essential oils for treatments and for sale.
4. Referring each other's business – cross marketing.
5. Offering incentives to your guests to experience your partner's business (and vice versa) – value add for the guest – new customers for each of the partners.
6. Selling each other's products and each business - i.e. restaurant selling sauces or jellies made by a partner business.

Benefits of building strong local partnerships

- Gives visitors something real and local—something they might not find anywhere else.
- Keeps tourism dollars in the community, thereby boosting the local economy.
- Builds trust with residents and visitors, making tourism more sustainable.
- Opens doors for new ideas and creative collaborations.

What to Consider When Partnering

Key to Successful Partnerships

- You need a clear understanding of what each partner is responsible for delivering.
- Ensure each partner knows exactly what is expected and that they agree to their role.

- You need compatible product(s) and experiences.
 - Strong partnerships are built on an alignment of business ethics and values.
 - A compatible business philosophy is very important.
- Shared values
- A commonality in the vision for the community
 - Honesty & Trust
 - Quality of product

Understanding Shared Goals and Values

Find common ground—what is important to both parties and what you want to achieve?

- Cross selling – referring each other
- Enhanced business offering – adding new products and experiences to make the overall offering more appealing to the visitor.
- New experiences to fill shoulder seasons, off seasons and need periods

Considerations from Communication to Drafting Agreements

- Keep communication clear and open.
- Define who does what to avoid confusion.
- Consider a simple agreement to keep things on track.
- Set measurable goals and check in regularly to stay

aligned.

- Develop a letter of agreement or memorandum of understanding.
- Have each partner involved in development of the agreement.
- Clearly define each person's role and contribution.
- Note - You may need to consider legal counsel based on the complexity and potential liability of the partnership.

Leveraging Each Other's Assets and Skills

Contribution in Skills and Knowledge

- Established marketing channels
- Digital marketing skills
- Overall business skills
- A helpful craft or skill – i.e. photography
- A craft or skill that would add to a visitor experience

Defining mutual success

- How do you measure success? Think visitor numbers, revenue growth, staffing, giving back, environmental sustainability etc.
- Track what's working (and what's not) so you can adjust as needed.
- Celebrate wins together—partnerships should be rewarding for everyone!



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.