



NATURE IN TOURISM

Telling the Story

Just as a good book requires more than an eye-catching cover, successful nature-based tourism requires more than a beautiful location.

A best-selling novel relies on a well-written, intriguing and entertaining story to keep readers turning the pages until the very last sentence.

Successful tourism is the same. It relies on tourism operators providing interesting, enjoyable and relevant information and activities which connect emotionally with visitors.

In the tourism industry, this is often referred to as *interpretation*. But in simple terms, it is story telling.

Tell the story well and visitors will understand it, remember it, be excited by it, and be emotionally moved by it. They will be more likely to come back for a return visit, or just as importantly, tell their friends and family about their experience.

A well-presented, interesting, unique and memorable commentary has the power to connect with visitors and cause an emotional response which can turn a short-break into a lifelong memory.

How to Successfully Tell the Story

All nature-based and cultural tourism operations have a story to tell. It is how well *you* tell the story that sets your destination and experience apart from the others. To prepare the story you need to take account of:

- Research
- Folklore
- Social history
- Botanical/zoological facts
- Personal anecdotes
- Authenticity and accuracy

To present the story you need to:

- Avoid jargon and slang.
- Be culturally sensitive to the group.
- Avoid contentious political and religious issues.

To provide information, activities and commentary which connect emotionally with your visitors, your presentation should be:

- Pleasurable, entertaining and different
- Relevant
- Organised, and
- Have a theme





NATURE IN TOURISM – Telling the Story cont'd

Pleasurable, Entertaining and Different

People on holidays are there by choice. They are not a captive audience and they are usually paying for their experience. They therefore don't want to be lectured or made to sit through a boring or complex presentation. Help make your commentary pleasurable, entertaining and different by:

- Smiling, maintaining eye contact and interacting with your guests.
- Having fun and utilising humour where appropriate (but don't be the class clown!). Often an anecdotal story, filled with humour, can be what visitors remember most.
- Speaking from the heart to show your belief in what you are saying.
- Incorporating personal experiences into your commentary.
- Treating your visitors as guests.
- Daring to be different, and organising unique activities and opportunities which will set your destination or experience apart from others.
- Arriving early so you have time to meet and greet your guests before the planned activity.

Keep in mind that people learn better when they are using as many senses as appropriate. It is generally recognised that people retain approximately 10% of what they hear, 30% of what they read, 50% of what they see and 90% of what they do.

Relevant

Make your content personal and relevant to your visitors, by linking your information to something your guests know and care about. They will then be more likely to understand and remember what you tell them. Make your information relevant by:

- Talking to visitors informally on their arrival to find out about their backgrounds, interests, and experiences.

- Pointing out similarities between what is being discussed/demonstrated, and something well-known.

e.g. After rain and when the river is flowing at capacity, the rapids have the power to carry an 8-person raft at speeds of up to 60 km/hour – that's as fast as you are allowed to drive in many suburban streets.

- Compare what is being discussed to something of specific interest/knowledge to your visitors.

e.g. Operator explaining height of a cliff about to be abseiled by visitors from New York: "Abseiling down this cliff-face will be like abseiling from the top of the Statue of Liberty."

Organised

It is important that the information and ideas you are communicating are easy to follow and are presented logically. Ideally limit the number of topics to five or less. Your audience will tune out if they have to concentrate too hard to understand and follow what you are telling them. Providing well-written and interesting printed material will help visitors follow what you are saying.

Have a Theme

The theme is the main point you are trying to communicate to your visitors. It might be about the need for ongoing protection of a sensitive environment, or the need for continued protection of endangered wildlife. To help you develop your main theme, construct one sentence that sums up the essence of what you want your visitors to remember when they leave. This main message is your theme. Your theme should be:

- The overarching idea/message you want visitors to remember.
- Stated as a short, simple sentence.
- Contain one idea.
- The overall purpose of the presentation.
- Stated in an interesting manner.



NATURE IN TOURISM – Telling the Story cont'd

Evaluating Your Success

Every story teller needs to continually evaluate their performance - that is, assess how well they connected emotionally with their audience.

For an author, book sales provide a clear indication about their success as a story teller.

For tourism operators, your success as a story teller can be measured through talking with visitors, observing their response to their experience, and importantly, by keeping track of return visits or word-of-mouth recommendations.

If you have successfully told your story, you will have connected emotionally with your visitors, and the benefits will flow.

Ongoing evaluation is crucial to enable you to fine tune your program and ensure that visitor expectations are being met.

Ways to evaluate the success of your presentation or activity include:

- Evaluating visitor book comments.
- Peer/staff/self evaluation.
- Visitor observation (including assessing size of groups, behaviour, and specific use of time).
- Booking numbers and trends (including numbers of repeat visits and recommendations).
- Written visitor surveys (on departure, via mail after visit, or via telephone after visit).

Answer the following questions for a Quick Check on how effective you are in telling the story and connecting with your visitors.

- Was the presentation or experience enjoyed by your visitors?
- Did it attract and hold their attention?
- Did you dare to be different and provide experiences which set you apart from others?

- Did your commentary clearly convey your main theme?
- Did it result in interaction and improved visitor understanding of your theme?
- Did this improved understanding prompt any behaviour changes from your visitors?
- Did you have interesting signage and written material which reinforced your main theme?
- Have you had repeat visits or word-of-mouth bookings?
- Did you seek feedback from visitors, and where necessary, fine-tune your program to better meet visitor expectations?

If you answered "yes" to all these questions, you are well on the way to producing a best-seller!

For information on Nature in Tourism go to Tourism New South Wales' corporate website: www.tourism.nsw.gov.au/corporate