

Heritage Tourism Market Ready Standards

What is Heritage Tourism?

Heritage tourism is travel to experience the places and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present. Heritage tourism includes historic, cultural and natural resources. A heritage resource reflects or conveys tangible or intangible elements of local heritage. A heritage tourism experience occurs where a heritage resource is made available and interpreted for the visitor, when this is done as a business transaction it is a heritage tourism product.

Categories of heritage tourism products and experiences include:

- Heritage Sites
 - Historic sites
 - Museums
 - Interpretive Centres
 - Ranches & Farms
 - Wineries
 - Aboriginal & Cultural Centres
 - Lighthouses
 - Castles
- Heritage Services
 - Accommodation
 - Retail
 - Dining
 - Services
- Tours (Guided, Group)
 - Aboriginal Tours
 - Driving Routes
 - Historic Sightseeing Tours
 - Factory Tours
 - Farm and Winery Tours
 - Military Tours
 - Walking Tours
- Historic Districts
 - Neighbourhoods
 - Architectural
 - Main Streets
 - Historic Districts
- Heritage Landscapes
 - Parks and Trails
 - Gardens and Landscapes
- Historic Routes
 - Driving Routes
 - Trails
 - Historic Routes
- Heritage Products (made using traditional materials and methods)
 - Art & Craft
 - Food & Wine
 - Heritage Products/
Demonstrations
- Events
 - Fairs
 - Markets
 - Re-enactments
 - Festivals
 - Interpretive
 - Entertainment
- Other
 - Products not captured elsewhere

FOR MORE INFORMATION, please contact Heritage Tourism Alliance interim facilitator Ursula Pfahler at ursula@podacomm.ca

Frequently Asked Questions

Why are MTCA and the tourism industry developing these criteria?

The Heritage Tourism Market Ready Standards have been developed to assist BC's heritage tourism operators to better understand consumer and travel trade expectations in marketing and communication.

The standards are intended to provide an overview of the requirements needed for operators who may want to market their services and programs through cooperative marketing programs. Consumers and travel trade require different approaches to communication and marketing; both expect a level of professionalism reflecting a commitment to providing client satisfaction. Today's consumers expect certain minimum standards when doing business with tourism operators, accommodation and transportation service providers.

In order for BC's tourism industry to remain competitive nationally and internationally, the Ministry of Tourism Culture and the Arts (MTCA), through consultation with the Heritage Tourism Alliance of BC (HTA) and BC's tourism industry have developed minimum criteria necessary for those businesses accessing both organizations' marketing programs.

These industry standards focus on proper licenses and permits, timely responses to enquiries and facility requirements to meet the needs of the visiting public. The standards manual will provide BC's heritage tourism operators with basic industry standards to maintain their competitive position in today's aggressive tourism marketplace, and to increase consumer confidence in BC's heritage tourism operators, who will be promoted through the HTA.

What do Visitor Ready, Market Ready and Export Ready mean?

Visitor Ready: Refers to a business that has all its licenses, permits and insurance in place, in order to operate legally.

Market Ready: Refers to a business that markets to potential visitors in the planning stages, communicates with potential visitors year-round, and is ready to accept advanced reservations.

Export Ready: Refers to a business that markets to and through travel trade distribution sales channels, understands commission or net rate pricing, and agrees to trade bookings and a cancellation policy.

Why do I need to be "ready"?

Today's tourists are far more complex than in the past, in terms of their expectations of services and experiences. Today's tourism shoppers are web-savvy and have the world at their fingertips. In order for BC's tourism industry to remain competitive, operators must ensure proper communication and service to potential visitors.

What are the benefits of being market or export ready?

Access to the cooperative marketing programs and initiatives offered through local and regional tourism organizations, the HTA and MTCA's Consumer Marketing Division. The standards also provide increased credibility in the eyes of the consumer, as well as the tour operator, by maintaining proper licensing and sufficient insurance. In addition, collaborative marketing of heritage tourism experiences within the province strengthens our entire sector and benefits both the businesses and travelers, through the delivery of a strong heritage tourism sector.

Will these standards affect how we conserve, steward and interpret the heritage resources in our care?

Heritage tourism market readiness standards relate only to the business side of operations, and focus specifically on how heritage properties interact with the tourism industry. They do not address how to conduct core business. Other agencies can assist with this; for instance, the Aboriginal Tourism Association of British Columbia has recently announced its standards to determine the authenticity of tourism products based on First Nations culture (for details, please see http://www.aboriginalbc.com/Corporate/Info/Authenticity_Program).

How does being market and export ready affect my business?

In order for a tourism business to participate in the MTCA's and HTA's cooperative marketing initiatives, it must be market and/or export ready. The degree of readiness of each business will determine in which programs it is eligible to participate.

What if I don't want to become market or export ready?

Becoming market or export ready provides access to the cooperative marketing programs provided by MTCA and HTA. These programs are typically offered for a minimal fee and extend the reach of each tourism operator's marketing impact.

Visitor Ready

These criteria will be used by the HTA to determine whether a heritage tourism supplier is ready to offer “visitor ready” product to consumers.

Visitor Ready: Refers to a business which has all its licenses, permits and insurance in place, in order to operate legally.

Criteria

The following criteria must be met if a business is to be classified as “visitor ready.” The business must:

- Maintain good standing of all applicable business licenses, insurance and legislative requirements.
- Maintain a staffed business location with a set schedule of operating hours.
- Provide a contact telephone number or email contact year-round. If closed for the season, provide automated response through voicemail and or email.
- Have branded on-site signage.

Comments:

This is the basic level required to legally conduct business in a British Columbia community. Meeting this standard means the operator/facility qualifies for a business listing, but not necessarily cost-shared promotions.

Market Ready

These criteria will be used by the HTA to determine whether a heritage tourism supplier is ready to offer “market ready” product to consumers.

Market Ready: Refers to a business that markets to potential visitors, communicates with potential visitors year-round, and is ready to accept advanced reservations.

Criteria

The following criteria must be met whether a business is to be classified as “market ready.” The business must meet visitor ready criteria plus:

- Provide a published pricing policy.
- Have a published consumer billing, payment, and cancellation policy.
- Have marketing materials such as brochure, rack card or website.
- Have site-based parking in close proximity.
- During operating season, maintain a 24- to 48-hour response time or less to enquiries, and a 24-hour response time to reservation/booking requests.
- Be prepared to communicate and accept reservations by telephone, fax and/or email and provide same day confirmation of booking arrangements.
- Have high-resolution images and video footage for promotional and training purposes.
- Be a current member or eligible to become a member of the local tourism association.

Comments:

This is the basic level of readiness to conduct tourism operations. Meeting this standard means the operator/facility qualifies for a business listing, is entitled to participate in cost-shared promotions for local and regional markets, and is entitled to participate in out-of-province marketing programs, but not overseas markets and/or the travel trade.

Export Ready

These criteria are consistent with MTCA's export ready standards and will be used by the HTA to determine whether a heritage tourism supplier is ready to offer "export ready" product to consumers.

Export Ready: Refers to a business that markets to and through travel trade distribution sales channels, understands commission or net rate pricing, and agrees to trade bookings and a cancellation policy.

Criteria

The following criteria must be met if a business is to be classified as "export ready." The business must meet "market ready" criteria plus:

- Be in business at least one year, with a proven track record for safe and professional operation.
- Demonstrate an adequate budget and marketing plan that includes international tourism operators.
- Understand the roles played by receptive tour operators, tour operators/travel wholesalers, and retail travel agents, and understand rack or retail pricing, agent commissions and wholesale net rates at each level.
- Be willing to include receptive tour operators in your marketing and sales plan. Be willing to provide contracted wholesale net rates to receptive tour operators.
- Provide detailed pricing and program information to tour operators at least one year in advance of selling season.
- Be prepared to set up billing arrangements with the operator, agency or receptive tour operator.
- If plans include the pursuing group business, ensure an ability to accommodate and adapt to the needs of the market (e.g. tour bus access and parking, washroom facilities, maximum group size, and frontline staff who speak the language of target markets).
- Carry adequate insurance (discuss this with your receptive operator, as sometimes he/she can add suppliers to existing policies at nominal cost).
- Provide support (free or reduced rates) for international media and travel trade familiarization tours.
- Offer currency exchange rates consistent with industry norms.

Comments:

This is the highest level of readiness required to reach overseas markets. Meeting this standard means the operator/facility qualifies for a business listing and is entitled to participate in all cost-shared marketing programs, including programs directed at overseas markets and/or the travel trade.