



Is there a future for regenerative and edutourism in the Southern Gulf Islands?

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November 4, 2022

Introduction

The Southern Gulf Islands Community Resource Centre (SGI CRC) is seeking engagement with its 5 island communities - Galiano, Mayne, Saturna, and North and South Pender Islands, in the co-creation of a strategic plan around the delivery of both regenerative tourism and edutourism programs.

These programs are aimed at mitigating negative tourism impacts while amplifying new opportunities for tourism that are in favour of the 5 local communities and aligned with the values of the Southern Gulf Islands.

Key terms:

- Regenerative tourism aims to restore the harm that our system has already done to the natural world, and by using nature's principles, to create the conditions for life to flourish. It views wholes and not parts, and is a very different way of looking at the world. A regenerative approach to tourism starts at home within ourselves, then our workplaces and our communities, and depends on caring hosts willing to ensure their destination is healthy and full of life.
- Edutourism is a tourist activity whereby learning is the primary driver for the in-destination experience. It is travel for the purpose of formal or informal education and lifelong learning in unique natural, historical and multicultural environments.

The Problem

Tourism is a significant economic activity within the Southern Gulf Islands Electoral Area. It yields positive economic outcomes and local opportunities. Yet it is not without consequences. In a great many instances, tourism creates adverse environmental impacts with a heavy seasonal load that is known to strain local infrastructure and challenge the local quality of life.

"Although tourism is an important and growing industry on the Islands, there are concerns among residents and governing bodies regarding the impact of unfettered tourism on the environmental, social and economic well-being of the islands. These concerns have been highlighted by the global pandemic and the accelerating consequences of climate change."

- Southern Gulf Island Community Resource Centre, 2022

In acceptance of the above points, we turn to a growing body of global examples as inspiration for reimagining tourism initiatives. Initiatives that achieve better outcomes and help solve local and societal problems. We recognise that a new tourism future must be locally inspired, locally driven, and locally delivered. To best apply, and in turn, localise these examples, we must first engage with the 5 island communities as means to measure resources, capacity and unique needs and interests. This is the basis for this stage of the project.

It is essentially a deep look at the available resources, capacity and interests of the 5 unique islands and their ability to chart a new tourism future in their favour. Separately and concurrently, we will look at the demand for tourism that could operate under this new ethos and value set.

We also recognise 'better' as being a subjective term. That said, for clarity, and within the scope of this problem and project, 'better' is seen to be an outcome that reduces harmful social/ environmental impacts while at the same time improving opportunities for more people, inclusive of local First Nations communities, and is in line with actions towards authentic reconciliation.

Some possible deliverables that would/could be regenerative and/or educational in delivery, are programs anchored around:

- Citizen Science and Eco-volunteering
- Local First Nations' History and Language
- Local First Nation's Food, Culture and Customs of Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow
- Medicinal Plants
- Health and Wellness
- Music and Culture
- Skills Development
- Agriculture & Gardening
- Food Security
- Climate Action
- Local Governance
- Island Natural History

Outcomes

Comprehensive community engagement using community forums, social media and focus groups to create a strategic plan for Regenerative Travel and Educational Tourism on the Southern Gulf Islands.

A strategic plan that supports shoulder-season employment for many island residents (ecotourism businesses, local instructors, food service provisioners, venue operators, accommodation and transportation providers, etc).

Strategic direction for local government (Capital Regional District – CRD, the Islands Trust and the WSÁNEĆ Leadership Council) to meet the social, economic and environmental needs of the Southern Gulf Islands concerning tourism.

A framework that supports our communities and local businesses as they adapt to external changes such as over-tourism in the peak season, global pandemics and the climate crisis.

Support for the aspirations of local First Nations to take a more active educational role in their traditional territories as part of their Cultural Resurgence.

The Ask

The project requires the advice and guidance of a selected committee to help define the qualities of effective community engagement while helping remove blind spots.

This committee will help the project better define:

- Who is the community?
- What are the right questions to ask the community?
- How should we best deliver these questions to the community?

The plan is to have a recorded virtual boardroom meeting with the selected committee members to discuss the project in greater detail, including a walk-thru of proposed offline and online tactics and how to best inform and narrate their delivery.
