



PROJECT PROFILE

PACIFIC RIM KNOWLEDGE AND INNOVATION STRATEGY



EDUCATION AND LEARNING ARE A NEW FOCUS FOR PACIFIC RIM TOURISM

COMMUNITIES AND FIRST NATIONS

on the Pacific Rim have long known that there is a ‘shadow market’ of people coming to the region for educational opportunities. What was not known was the size and origin of that market, and what infrastructure, amenities, and services they might need.

“Education and learning are key components of traveler motivations, particularly here on the west coast of the Island. With that in mind, we’re working together to understand and enhance opportunities for increased international educational tourism, particularly in the off-season,” said Tofino Mayor Josie Osborne.

“
EDUCATION AND LEARNING ARE KEY COMPONENTS
OF TRAVELER MOTIVATIONS, PARTICULARLY HERE
ON THE WEST COAST OF THE ISLAND

A diverse group, ranging from high school students on field trips to post secondary students doing research as well as international visitors seeking First Nations and Cultural learning experiences and guided Elder College tours have been identified as educational visitors to the region. To foster a regional approach to expanding educational, cultural and ecological tourism opportunities, the *Advancing Pacific Rim Knowledge and Innovation* project successfully brought the Districts of Ucluelet and Tofino, and the Tla-o-qui-aht and Ucluelet First Nations together in a collaborative research and planning process.

Simply put, the project is about understanding the market, evaluating and understanding the region’s infrastructure and capacity to deliver and developing an action plan that works for all communities. Market research determined that people wanted the learning opportunities that the communities had identified: education about ocean and coastal environments; surfing and yoga lessons; and the opportunity to learn more about the Nuu-Chah-Nulth cultures in the area.

Kati Martini, Program Coordinator with Remote Passages Marine Excursions, said that building on the existing

market makes sense. “Schools and learning institutions are already an important part of our early season business,” she explained. “Growing the educational tourism market will allow marine tour operators to provide increased employment in the shoulder seasons.” Samantha Hackett, Director of Operations at Long Beach Lodge echoed those comments: “Educational tourism means an increase in visitation and awareness, and a way to keep our staff interested.”

The project found that in order to meet the needs of high school and university groups visiting the region, more affordable accommodation and conference space needs to be created, or existing facilities need to adjust their rates during the off season to accommodate youth. “People want to come to the west coast to learn about the environment and enjoy the amazing recreation opportunities, we just need to make it easier and more affordable for them,” said Tawney Lem, Manager of West Coast Aquatic, the project’s coordinating body. Visitors are unsure of how to access cultural tours and experiences with local First Nations, and this process has identified the need for a central point of contact for visitors.

The process has done more than develop a joint economic strategy. An open community session was held — the first ever of its kind — to discuss regional development and 44 different organizations attended with very diverse interests present. It signals a change to cooperative regional development, sharing the opportunities rather than competing for the same markets.

Moving forward, the region is now looking at the creation of a central administrative hub, which may be a new enterprise or expansion of an existing association. Work also includes coordinating efforts with the Destination Marketing Organization to ensure that the focus stays on the less busy fall and spring seasons. Lem said that with the assessments and research completed, communities are ready to move forward.

“Everyone is excited about the opportunity to work together to launch new economic opportunities.”