

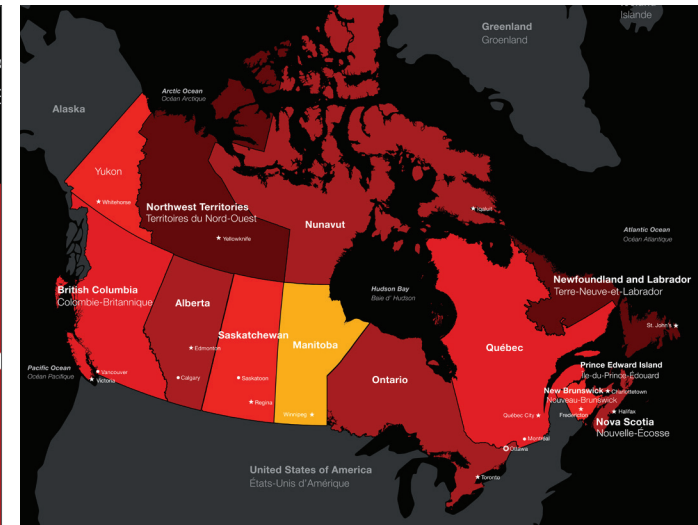
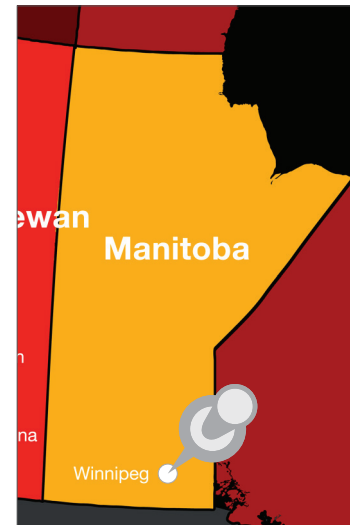
# Signature Experiences Collection® Case Study Series

## Heartland International Travel and Tours

Winnipeg, Manitoba

<http://www.heartlandtravel.ca/hermeticcodetours.htm>

March 2013



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## The Hermetic Code Tour of the Manitoba Legislature

### Leading by Example

What do hidden symbols, mystical architecture, a legislative building, a trail of occult clues, and a charismatic storyteller have in common? They combine to create a magical conduit and a transformative visitor experience that invites and delights guests while simultaneously drawing media attention and marketing partners.

Join Don Finkbeiner, the owner and operator of Heartland International Travel and Tours, as he shares insights on his company, experiential travel and their Canadian Signature Experience.

### Tell Us About Your Company

We are a tour operator, receptive tour operator, and destination management company all in one. As a tourism company, operating year-round in the city of Winnipeg, Manitoba, we attract group tour business for leisure and business travel, and our small three-person team is always looking into our community for that next unique idea to launch a new product that will delight our guests. Meeting Frank Albo, the creator of the Hermetic Code, is an excellent example of this. He's one of the storytellers in our community who can touch your soul and ignite your imagination, and he's the perfect person to partner with.

### What does “Experiential Travel” mean to your business?

It means finding something that is uniquely Manitoban, and which sparks curiosity in people based on how we bring it to life.



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## What makes a “Memorable Travel Experience”?

It has to be unique, something you cannot find anywhere else. It's about taking ideas and creating the personal interaction that gets people thinking, asking questions, engaging, and connecting.

## Are you seeing any increase in demand for experiential travel?

Yes, we are. We know that when people go to an area, they want to learn what makes it tick, to do as the Romans do! Our goal is to find creative ways to immerse the traveller in the culture of our province. We also are finding a push towards interest in agri-tourism opportunities and that's what we in Manitoba do better in the world than anywhere else.

## What's important to your company?

Continually innovating and being willing to try new things for our guests. We believe that if you don't go out and meet people, and get into the culture, you are not really able to experience a destination. We try to design our tours so our guests can walk a mile in somebody's shoes and feel what it was like to have been there.

## Describe your ideal guests.

Our guests are people who want to learn, are looking for something beyond the norm in travel and they want something unique. It's not like sky-diving or climbing Mount Everest; it's more like they are looking for the '*Everest of the Mind*'. We get curious people from all over the world, many arrive who are visiting family and friends. Ninety percent of our business is group travel, 75% of this is Canadian and the remaining 25% comes from the USA or international travellers.

## Tell us about your key partners.

Frank Albo, an architectural historian and doctoral student is our key partner for our Signature Experience, along with the Free Press who published his book, the Hermetic Code. We actively seek out people who can contribute to our tours and provide that authentic connection to our city. For our marketing initiatives we partner with Tourism Winnipeg, Travel Manitoba and the Canadian Tourism Commission.



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## What are your main sales channels?

- Group travel represents 90% of our business and the majority of what is booked online or on the phone.
- The main Canadian tour operators we work with are: Frontiers North Adventures, The Great Canadian Travel Company and Great Canadian Holidays.
- The main USA tour operators we work with include: Tauck Tours, Bergen Travel, Mountain Outin' Tours and Tourco Travel.

## Tell us about your marketing.

Word-of-mouth is very important to us, plus we've had lots of media interest in the Hermetic Code tour which has strengthened the profile of our company. Travel Manitoba and Tourism Winnipeg help a great deal in promoting our company and we support their FAM trips. We maintain a website, have a newsletter and are on Trip Advisor, Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. We attend Rendez-vous Canada and, periodically, the Free Press, our provincial newspaper, promotes us.

We actively market in the UK, France, Germany, Australia, Japan, South Korea, China, India and the USA. We are finding guests from China and India are intrigued by our tours, and the Americans love a great story connected to some aspect of history they can relate to from their country.



## Your Canadian Signature Experience

Unlock the mysteries of Canada's most unique architectural landmark! If you love history and suspense, you won't be the same after architectural historian Frank Albo guides you through the Manitoba Legislative Building revealing a trail of occult clues, with coded messages and secret teachings that reflect an ancient temple.

Your journey uncovers the mystical secrets of the building's architecture; secrets so cleverly masked they escaped historians and visitors for nearly a hundred years. Hidden hieroglyphic inscriptions, numerological codes and secret teachings inscribed in a Masonic language, once considered too risqué to share with the general population, are revealed. Discover why Egyptian sphinxes adorn the building and how the famous Golden Boy that tops the dome is connected to mysteries of alchemy. Examine carvings that reveal where the "goddess" Manitoba is honoured through Roman symbolism. Get exclusive access to the "Holy of Holies" – the room where the Queen holds ceremony during her visits. As you uncover the mysteries of this sacred building – with evil-repelling icons and ancient symbols intended to affect morality and influence behaviour – you'll never look at architecture the same way again.

Winnipeg is a city steeped in history that was once home to more millionaires per capita than New York City. Open year round. Dress appropriately for weather as part of the tour is outside. Accommodates groups from 10 to 40.



### Who does your Signature Experience appeal to?

Curious travellers, people who love to learn and want something that is special to Winnipeg. We call it academic travel because it engages people in thinking. Whether it is a leisure group, convention or business group, or school children, they are all intrigued by the mystique this tour offers.

According to the Canadian Tourism Commission, our Signature Experience appeals to Cultural Explorers.

### How does your Signature Experience contribute to Canada's competitive landscape?

There is only one Manitoba legislative building, one Hermetic Code story, and you can only get it in Winnipeg. We share a fascinating element of Manitoba's history that cannot be found or replicated anywhere else in the world.

When can I go again? From the first moment Frank starts speaking his school boy enthusiasm for sharing the secrets to the buried treasure draw you in for an exciting and entertaining 1 1/2 hours ... in a legislative building - how can that be? Secrets hidden in plain sight will be revealed and leave you wanting to return ... it did for me and I did not like history (until tonight) ... a must attend for everyone. Thank you Frank for sharing this passion!!

Trip Advisor Guest

“The tour has made me think about things differently at my point in life, like architecture telling stories. It has made me more intelligent, civilized and well-balanced.”

Guest feedback



## How do you sell your Signature Experience?

We sell our tours online, to individuals, groups and people looking for custom experiences. We do not have a store front office that invites travellers in, rather we respond quickly by phone and online.

## Tell us something we don't know.

I can tell you two things you don't know.

First, when I first went to Rendez-vous Canada, I wasn't really well known, especially internationally but I knew this tour was an idea that could work. I went to talk to the folks at the Canadian Tourism Commission to see if they were interested and they jumped on it. I was very encouraged as it's not my story, but our company is the catalyst that can bring it to market while our key storyteller works on completing his PhD. The tour has now been in market three years.

Secondly, we don't discount our Signature Experience. We have a direct booking system online and are rarely asked by an agent to pay commission.

## Insights for Others

### Have you made any changes to respond to the demand for experiential travel?

We offer more tours! There has been pressure in our public tours to increase the group size from 40 to 60, but we intentionally keep it at 40 people, and occasionally, 45 to retain the intimacy. As we are connecting people to a quite complex story of a building, the ability to move comfortably through the building, allowing time for people to engage with the storyteller is essential to the experience.

### Any marketing challenges?

When you have a really creative offering like the Hermetic Code, it is often difficult to communicate how special the tour is to guests. It takes a lot of explaining, yet after people have finished the tour, they know and we know they will never look at architecture the same way again! This tour is transformative and that is hard to convey in marketing materials.

To illustrate, we offered the program to a corporate group of engineers here for a conference. Only four people pre booked. When the lunchtime speaker didn't show up, Frank Albo was asked to fill the void and within the day, 60 people signed up and came on our tour.



## Any benefits of being in the Signature Experiences Collection?

We have seen an increase in business and are now working with the CTC to promote the tour. We always tell all our guests that the Hermetic Code Tour is a Signature Experience, recognized by the Canadian Tourism Commission and marketed around the world. This adds real credibility. At Rendez-vous Canada, even as a small company, we are trusted because of this designation. I like the fact that this program has set a new benchmark that companies are striving to be part of. It forces companies to re-evaluate their old position within the trade, rethink what they are doing and work to improve their product for a win-win for everybody.

## Any tips for others?

- While the story may not be ‘yours’, the ability as a tourism operator to find the stories and bring them to market in ways that benefit you and people in your community, such as Frank Albo and his publisher the Free Press, respects that we all can contribute in different and important ways.
- You need a charismatic storyteller and to find the way to capture some of the energy people have, then and bring it together. Honestly, 99% of the people who come on this tour are WOWED because they have never thought about the legislative building this way. It’s a win-win outcome because the tour changes the way people think.

“I’ve been in business since 1974 and never have we done something as successful as this. When the tour is over, Frank becomes a rock star and it’s really interesting to watch. As he says, ‘you must go down the rabbit hole with me on this one, this is Alice in Wonderland stuff, and when you are there, it’s really cool.”

## Any final words of wisdom?

If your product isn’t unique to your community, province or history - don’t do it. Find those special opportunities that are truly ‘yours to share’ with your visitors.

Story authored by:

Don Finkbeiner, Owner and Operator, Heartland International Travel and Tours

Researcher: Dr. Nancy Arsenault, Tourism Cafe Canada.