

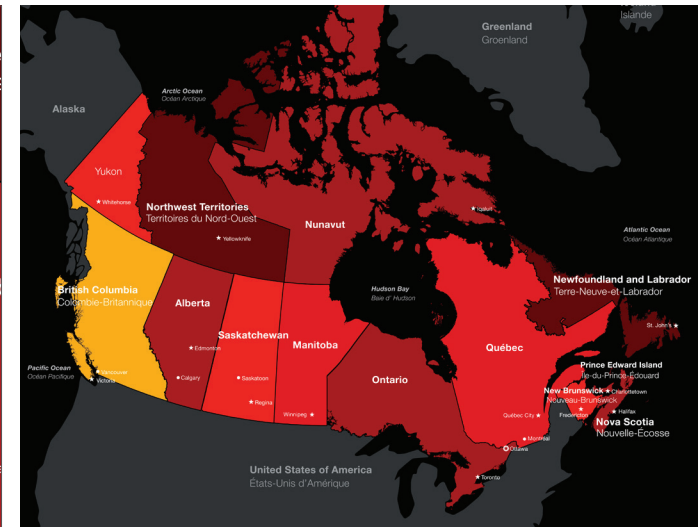
Signature Experiences Collection® Case Study Series

Barkerville Historic Town

Barkerville, British Columbia

www.barkerville.ca

December 2012



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The Legacy of British Columbia's Gold Rush

Leading by Example

Enter a world of intrigue and theatre built on the foundation of the rich history of British Columbia's Gold Rush. Discover how a single story, rooted in its historical authenticity and importance, is all that is needed to set the stage and to script engaging visitor experiences that ignite people's interest. Barkerville has created a sense of nostalgia that transcends generations and results in a very strong base of repeat visitation. Barkerville's Chinatown has one of the largest Chinese archival collections in Canada that accompany the incredible story of people who travelled halfway around the world in search of their fortune.

Join James Douglas, Barkerville's Visitor Experiences Manager, and Dirk van Stralen, Marketing and Communications Specialist, as they share insights about their approach to experiential travel and their recent membership in the Signature Experience Collection program.

Tell Us About Your Company

Billy Barker "struck paydirt" in 1862 when he pulled more gold from the earth than people had ever imagined. Barkerville was named after him and his claim became a catalyst for the political and economic developments of the future province of British Columbia. It was for these reasons, that this site was declared a National Historic Site of Canada in 1923. Today thousands of visitors flock here annually to enjoy a glimpse of what life was like for the men and women from around the world - including many from Guangdong, China - who travelled through forested trails and up river beds in search of their fortune.

The site is managed by the Barkerville Heritage Trust; the struggle to keep this unique and highly interactive site alive requires the same tenacity, passion and commitment once exhibited by the miners while searching for gold.



What does “Experiential Travel” mean to your business?

It's about immersing visitors in a world of discovery. When guests pass through our gates, they enter the past, complete with unpaved streets, and a sense of history of bygone days. Everyone who works within the Barkerville site dresses in period costume, stays in character and lives life as it would have been in the 1860s, adding to the authenticity of the immersive experience.

What makes a “Memorable Travel Experience”?

The most important element is authenticity. The second is the accuracy of the stories, the facts and the activities that engage visitors. By sharing stories of the people who lived in the community, a connection with the many special characters of the past is made. The third is having time to enjoy. A site like ours is big and there are so many things to do that the best memories are created when people take the time to explore, linger, talk with people and participate.

Are you seeing any increase in demand for experiential travel?

Yes, we believe so. A 2009 economic impact survey really opened our eyes to the cultural and experiential travel tourists who are specifically coming to Barkerville.

What's important to you as a company?

Ensuring that Barkerville is efficiently managed, entertaining and educational to visitors, and financially stable as the premier heritage resource and tourism attraction for the Cariboo is extremely important. The aim is to maintain and enhance Barkerville's position as a nationally significant heritage resource and tourism attraction for British Columbia and Canada.

Describe your ideal guests.

They are highly motivated people and interested in learning about the gold rush history. Many travel relatively long distances to get here so we know that we are the reason for their trip.

“The greatest thing Barkerville has to offer is authenticity. Year after year we get American visitors that say they are breathing fresh air, enjoy the fact there are no roller coasters, no giant Billy Barker heads and overt commercial enterprises.

Authenticity is the key element we hammer home with our interpretive staff, actors and community to create a world where visitors can feel what it was like to be living in a town built on dreams of gold.”



Tell us about your key partners.

The Cariboo-Chilcotin Coast Tourism Association, our regional destination marketing organization, is an important partner of ours, as is the Golden Raven Cultural Project, a cultural tourism marketing organization based out of the Fraser-Fort George Regional District. A few years ago we began to partner with Fort St. James National Historic Site. Even though we are out of their catchment area, we realized that similar visitors were attracted to both sites.

What are your main sales channels?

The majority of our sales are direct to the consumer, with approximately 65% occurring at the Barkerville Reception Centre and 35% at the Wells Visitor Centre.

The main tour operators we have worked with to date include Jonview and Titan Tours which deal with the UK market. We are seeing an increase in Vancouver-based companies that deal with the Chinese market, and this is a new international market we want to pursue given the historical connections between Barkerville and China.

Tell us about your marketing.

Approximately 80% of our visitors are Canadians, with 60% of the domestic traffic coming from British Columbia and Alberta. The US market has been low for over a decade, but in the past few years there has been a small increase. Internationally, we recently began direct marketing campaigns in Germany, and we also promote in the USA and the United Kingdom.

Our main tactics include: hosting media and trade FAM Trips, attending international trade and consumer shows, print advertising, regular photo and video shoots, and working with our provincial and regional destination marketing organizations. Our social media tactics include maintaining a website, blog, and micro-blogging on Twitter and Trip Advisor. We produce many professional videos that are available on YouTube (<http://youtu.be/0qMvhkz33as>) after all a large part of our interpretive team are professional actors!

Who does your Signature Experience appeal to?

People who are looking to enjoy an authentic and surprising glimpse of the golden beginnings of British Columbia and the famous gold rush.

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

"I enjoyed a fabulous day exploring around historic Barkerville. There was so much to see and do I really wish I'd stayed an extra day. I got there by shuttle from Quesnel which was convenient as I was solo traveling with no car. If I'd had time I would have stayed at one of the B&B's right on the site. The whole day was full of amusing, informative and pleasant experiences. This little Cariboo gold rush town should be a 'must' on everyone's to-do list if you live in or visit British Columbia."

TripAdvisor Guest



Your Canadian Signature Experience

What was it like to live during the Gold Rush? Step back in time in Barkerville Historic Town and discover the compelling legacy of BC's Gold Rush era. Immerse yourself in the activities of the town and interact with "local" characters, gaining an insider's understanding of Canada's gold-panning past.

Wandering through this living history museum, you'll be exploring historic buildings and displays still in their original location. You're greeted by local residents, in authentic period clothing, who share stories of their families and livelihoods. While panning for gold, feel a sense of excitement at discovering that shining nugget. Tour the restored town by stagecoach while your driver engages you with stories of fortunes found and lost. Discover one of the oldest Chinatowns in the country, where the people from Guangdong, China survived the perils of traveling around the world in search of fortune. Struggle with the decision of whether to invest in a claim as the representatives from the Sheepskin Claim entice you to hand over your fortune at the Cornish Waterwheel. Sitting in court, hear the latest verdict from "hanging judge" Matthew Begbie, shuddering at the prisoner's fate. Take a miner's night off and enjoy a vaudeville show. Feel as though you're walking alongside Billy Barker, the town's namesake, and sharing the thrill of striking gold in 1862.

Barkerville Historic Town is a National Historic Site with over 100 historic buildings and displays. Pre-booked tours are available in English, Mandarin and Cantonese. German, Dutch and French are also spoken. Open from mid-May to late September. Barkerville is located 81 km east of Quesnel, 730 km from Vancouver, 920 km from Edmonton or 960 km from Calgary, has ample parking for cars, recreational vehicles, and motor coaches. The experience is worth the journey!

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

We are a unique example of early multiculturalism in Canada and British Columbia, which is part of our national identity as a country. Barkerville is also the site of the first recorded Dominion Day of Canada celebration. It happened right here in Barkerville three years before British Columbia became a province! As a result, our annual Canada Day celebrations are very special to us and our guests.

How do you sell your Signature Experience?

Because our entire site is *the designated Signature Experience*, we don't have any additional ways to sell the program. We are very keen, however, to find ways to leverage our membership in the Collection to reach international markets.





Tell us something we don't know.

Barkerville's interpretive staff are actors and talented professionals in their own right who spend their summers engaging and entertaining guests. Many of them live in the nearby town of Wells which is a mecca for talent and, despite its small size, has a thriving arts community.

We are part of the Grade 5 and 10 school curriculum in BC, so often students visit here as part of a school trip and then return years later with their own families. We also have families that come every year, some have been doing so for more than 10 years. There is a sense of nostalgia here that calls people back to re-experience this special place in time through multiple generations.

Insights for Others

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

Not really, we have always been in the experiential travel business. What is great for us is that this type of travel is being recognized, valued and marketed.

Any marketing challenges?

Our relative isolation is both our Achilles heel and our greatest strength, because the experience you get here is thoroughly unique as you step back in time without any reminders of modern civilization.

Most of the tour operators in BC focus on other areas of the province rather than the Cariboo-Chilcotin and Northern BC regions. One of our goals with the Signature Experiences program is to reach out to the other eight regional businesses in the Collection, and work together to create itineraries to present to tour operators and entice them to add us in.

Any benefits of being in the Signature Experiences Collection?

It's a big endorsement for us to be part of the Collection and we covet the potential to gain international market exposure through the program. We like the approach the CTC is taking to profile all types of businesses, big and small, city and rural.

For us, being in the Collection is like going to the Fringe Festival! There are 140 acts but as a visitor you only have time to see 20. Being selected to be in the Collection is like getting a five-star review as an exemplary cultural and heritage experience and will help visitors focus on experiences that differentiate Canada and tell our story. On the business side, we are anticipating include using the Signature Experience badge on our marketing materials to build credibility and align with the CTC internationally.

Any tips for others?

Be authentic and accurate. Engage visitors in your stories, and take them on a journey into your world.

Any final words of wisdom?

Have confidence that what makes you unique will be of interest to a segment of the travelling public. Be honest, be yourself, and have faith that the value of your story is all you need to continue to evolve the guest experience.

Story contributed by: James Douglas, the Visitor Experiences Manager, and Dirk Van Stralen, the Marketing Manager, for Barkerville.

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