

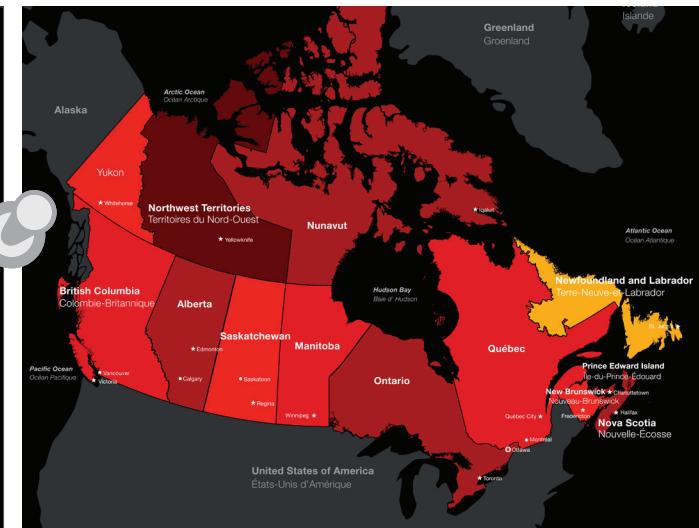
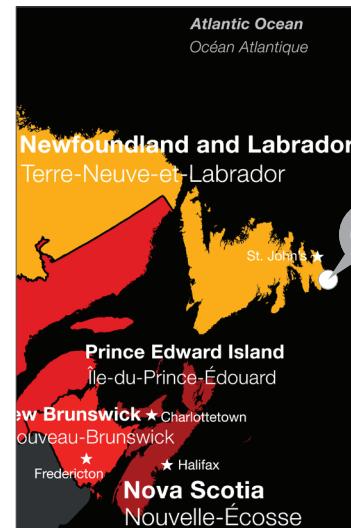
# Signature Experiences Collection® Case Study Series

## CapeRace Cultural Adventures Inc.

Cape Race, Newfoundland

<http://www.caperace.com/adventures/caperace-eco-culture-experience-newfoundland-travel-vacation/>

March 2013



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## Eco-Culture Experience™

### Leading by Example

How do you become recognized as one of the “Top 50 Tours of a Lifetime” by National Geographic when you don’t sell tours ... at least not the traditional type?

Join Ken Sooley, Owner and Operator of CapeRace Cultural Adventures Inc. As he provides a glimpse into their world to a new concept their company calls “Guidance without a Guide” and you discover why this company has been selected as one of the Canadian Tourism Commission’s Signature Experiences.

### Tell Us About Your Company

CapeRace is about personalization, celebration, and setting the stage for experiencing Newfoundland in ways that create authentic connections with the people, culture, and coastal treasures.

We are different by choice, and proud of it. Our four, seven, and 10 day trademarked Eco-Culture Experience™ trips are highly customized journeys that take our guests into the heart of Newfoundland’s culture. Catering to small groups of two to 12 people, everyone is equipped with their own Traveller’s Diary, a self-published customized guidebook that is unique to every group that visits. We design individual journeys based on a series of online questions and telephone calls about their travel preferences and interests.



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

Creating a situation to spontaneously discover the culture and natural wonder of Newfoundland on a small, intimate basis. Eco-Culture Experience™ trips are micro adventures carefully designed to ensure guests arrive at the right places and meet charming people who will invite them into their hearts and homes. Experiential travel to us is about immersion, exploration, discovery, and waiving the ‘no touch’ rules that come with mass tourism.

## **What makes a “Memorable Travel Experience”?**

In our experience, the best memories are created when travellers meet the locals on their own accord. Our job is to increase the odds of this happening. Every guidebook we write has a hidden agenda. For example if we recommend they visit a certain general store to pick up supplies, we try to provide the information that will have guests arrive when they have the greatest probability of meeting one of the colourful employees. While peppering their guidebook with the element of surprise has its risks, our community partners soon come to realize that we are sending them business and are passionate about supporting local communities so things work out.

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

Yes we are. Our key measure of success is how much fun people are having when they travel with us. We survey each guest when they return, but the real feedback comes when they send emails, handwritten notes, they tell stories of specific staff members and they even share parts of their travel journal. People wouldn’t do that if they didn’t have a fantastic time. We also track three other key metrics, the number of trips sold annually, revenue, and customer satisfaction.

## **What’s important to your company?**

Three areas that are paramount to our company are our: 1. Customers; 2. Local Communities; and 3. Employees.

## **Describe your ideal guests.**

They are people who love nature and culture and love to get off the beaten path and into the heart of a community, without changing the sense of place. They want to spend the entire day seeing nature and wildlife and the entire night experiencing local food and music. They are willing to pay for what is really a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to connect with people, in a safe yet spontaneously adventurous way, when travelling.

We had a letter from a lady who visited us from New York. She was wealthy and had travelled all over the world. She told us that their most memorable moment was when Ray and Hazel (our maintenance and customer care staff) just came over and chatted. They shared stories and it created a real human connection.

Ken Sooley, Owner/Operator



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## **Tell us about your key partners.**

We work with lots of non-traditional partners. Because an Eco-Culture Experience™ trip is personalized, we have relationships with hundreds of people in St. John's, through to Bonavista, all through the Avalon Peninsula. Our partners are mostly made of local residents and small businesses.

Establishing these relationships is key to our chance meeting approach as the ultimate connection and experience occurs when both parties are not expecting to meet each other. It's also a tool to deliver economic benefits to areas that would not generally see this type of traffic. The art of connection that we have cultivated over the years is really a science if you have the right partnerships in place. To a certain degree it's a numbers game and we slightly change the odds. Once we hosted a mom with children aged 8 and 14. As part of their journey, we arranged for them to hang out for a day with a local mom and her same-aged kids. Our partners allow us to personalize experiences without influencing the real experience.

The National Geographic article, written in 2009, provides a glimpse into how our guests meet our partners, which are the heart of the experience:

[http://www.caperace.com/images/uploads/Tour\\_of\\_a\\_Lifetime\\_CapeRace\\_Cultural\\_Adventures.pdf](http://www.caperace.com/images/uploads/Tour_of_a_Lifetime_CapeRace_Cultural_Adventures.pdf)

## **What are your main sales channels?**

Direct sales through website inquiries and via phone. Roughly 80% of our guests are Canadian and 20% from the USA and around the world. Word of mouth is important to us. We currently don't work with any tour operators on a regular basis, nor sell through the travel trade channels but we plan to make significant changes to our business model for the 2013 season. We are willing to provide retail pricing or commissions as we look to grow our shoulder season and look to finding tour operators interested in the higher-value customized self-guided travel packages.

## **Tell us about your marketing.**

Our international marketing is targeted to the United Kingdom, Australia, and the USA. With time we would like to begin attracting guests from France and Japan as well. We have successfully garnered terrific media and travel writer reviews, maintain a quality website, an active Facebook page, and invest in targeted social media. In 2009 we won awards as a National Geographic Tour of a Lifetime and Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador's Innovator of the Year and have been nominated for five more since 2009.

While this type of recognition pushed through social media channels and web-based marketing efforts has served to provide much-needed credibility, it is not a sales lead generator. We find marketing to be a challenge as we grow the business internationally given our niche status and uncertainty in the embryonic development of social-media.

We know that prospects have turned to the web to conduct their own travel research and we constantly try to capitalize on this. It's an ongoing effort to keep the website current. We believe this is important in competing for travellers who are in the process of making a decision to come to Canada vs. the traveller that has already decided to come to Newfoundland. In this regard we see the CTC as a valuable partner and have aligned our marketing messages to dovetail into the Signature Experiences program.

## Your Canadian Signature Experience

For the curious, culturally inclined traveller! Immerse yourself in Newfoundland's culture through a ten-day self-guided tour, providing you with exclusive access to three architecturally unique homes with CapeRace Cultural Adventures. Set your own pace for exploring the beautiful Newfoundland coast, creating spontaneous, authentic experiences with Newfoundland's people and places.

Provided with a car, a customized guidebook, and sample itineraries, you explore Newfoundland's beautiful Avalon and Bonavista Peninsulas. Our personalized journeys are created based on our guest's traveling preferences. Depending on their passions they can discover biking and kayaking routes, coastal hiking trails with views of icebergs and puffins, and learn where to buy or sample the best seafood. Dropping in to a local pub to discover a fiddling jam in the works, or accepting an invitation to a neighbour's "kitchen party" await our guests. The journey includes staying at three historic coastal Newfoundland houses, each reflecting Newfoundland history. Our goal is to help travellers make deep connections with local people that will create lasting memories.

Self-guided, self-catering tours are available April through October, and come with an unlimited-km full-size vehicle. Trip includes a customized guidebook, written and demand-printed specifically to suit the traveller's travel interests. St John's is where the journey begins and they conclude in Bonavista. Travellers need to be equipped with all-weather clothing. Personal insurance is not included.

### Who does your Signature Experience appeal to?

The curious traveller. People at the intersection of wanting to experience the culture of Newfoundland, learn about the history, and discover our amazing scenery and wildlife. According to the Canadian Tourism Commission, our Signature Experience appeals to Cultural Explorers, and we add to that Authentic Experiencers and Free Spirits.



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Things you (Cape Race) have done involving people are truly trailblazing. I don't know of anyone, anywhere that has figured out such a great way to get tourists in contact with local people.

Jonathan Tourtellot, National Geographic Centre for Sustainable Destinations



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

We offer a truly unique, authentic connection to the world-renowned hospitality and charm of the Newfoundland people and their culture.

## How do you sell your Signature Experience?

Principally, our sales are direct via the Internet and phone.

## Tell us something we don't know.

Creating ways for guests to become involved in the communities they visit in a self-guided, unstructured travel mode is how we differentiate our company. While there are endless self-guided tours and touring books, these only tell you where to go, they don't create the "optional opportunity" of the exact type of interactions that are important to an individual guest. That's the CapeRace difference. Our 100-page, hardcover Traveller's Diary is like a story written *just for you*.

Each neighborhood had so much to offer and all the neighbors are so welcoming that we felt we belonged. They answered questions, told directions, told us about the history of the areas, about the fishing history and seemed genuinely interested in us. We know the BBQ was just good timing but we will never forget it--to be invited to be part of something that is for the people who live there was one of the things that sets you apart.

Except from a guest's letter to CapeRace

## Insights for Others

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

Not as is relates to our product because we are an experiential travel company, we live and breathe creating memorable travel. In terms of being a seasonal business however, we are looking to expand into the spring and fall to accommodate more guests and entice more international travellers so we have some changes planned for seasonal differences such as weather and activities.

## Any marketing challenges?

Marketing experiences is a real challenge for us, especially because the type of value we bring and the way we organize travel. Because of individual travel preferences and spontaneous decisions made by the traveller, each of our trips are different.

A great memorable travel experience is personal and cannot be captured on any type of media. To this end we can't predict the great experiences people will have in Newfoundland, only that they will have them. Marketing intangibles is risky for all parties involved. That being said we do sell out for the summer months, so are now looking to expanding into April and May, or October and November. We'd love to attend Rendez-vous Canada and connect with tour operators that might have a solution we may not have considered, but it is just too expensive for a company of our size. We are willing to invest in marketing collaborative initiatives, but we need to see how those dollars spent contribute to our bottom line, especially since we work so much with non-traditional tourism partners and small, rural communities.

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

Yes, because our business model is different and our volume low, every trip we sell matters. Carrying the Signature Experiences designation along with the National Geographic recognition combines to give our company a stamp of approval that helps the buyer consider going out of their norm and invest in a trip that is innovative and different. The Signature Experiences Collection provides credibility and celebrates our uniqueness as a small, niche company.



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## Any tips for others?

- When you reach your operating capacity or as your specific market matures, invest in innovative ideas that develop your product rather than cutting costs. At the very least, undertake both in tandem.
- Be careful with how your marketing funds are spent, especially online. Rapid change in technology and web-based marketing ideas creates fads as nobody has the ability to see too far out these days. It's also difficult to measure the effect a hit on a website or a comment on a blog has on your organization. Should you invest in a print advertising campaign, be sure to have a plan to measure the results.
- Look ahead. Try to understand how people will want to travel ten years from now, not how they traveled ten years ago.



## Any final words of wisdom?

Be credible, be unique, and adhere to the corporate values of your company.

Story contributed by:

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