



Sustainable Storytelling & Business Case

BC Tourism
Sustainability
Network



The BC Tourism Sustainability Network gratefully acknowledges that we live, work and play on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territories of the 204 First Nations in British Columbia.

Image: Petroglyphs along the Nass River in Village of Gitwinksihlkw, Nisga'a Nation.

4VI



**KOOTENAY
ROCKIES
TOURISM**

TOTA
THOMPSON OKANAGAN
TOURISM ASSOCIATION

**CARIBOO
CHILCOTIN
COAST**

VCM
VANCOUVER, COAST
& MOUNTAINS
TOURISM REGION

**INDIGENOUS
TOURISM BC
CORPORATE**



Ministry of
Tourism, Arts,
Culture and Sport

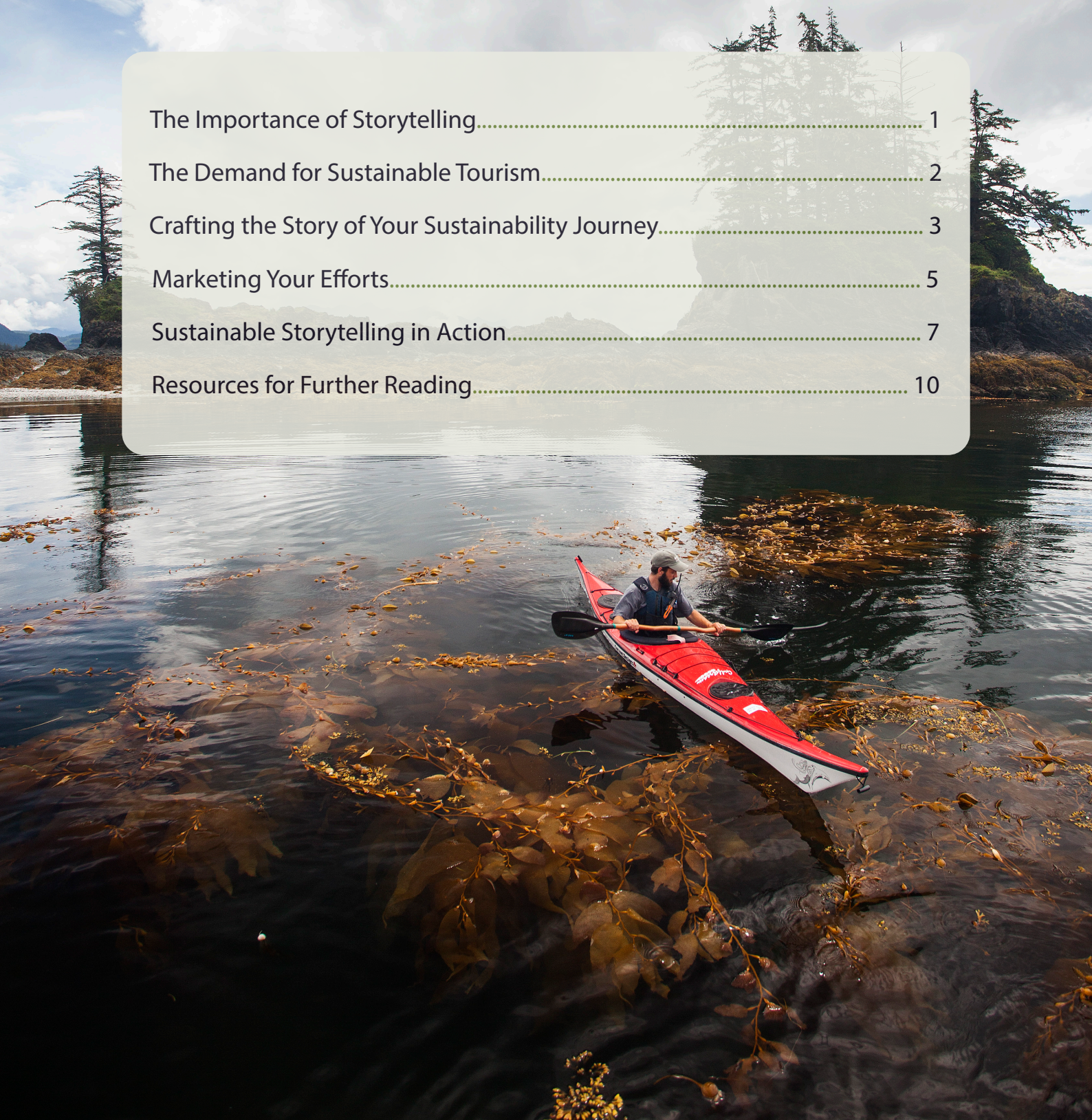


**DESTINATION
BRITISH COLUMBIA®**



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The Importance of Storytelling

CREATING MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES

Storytelling has been part of human communication since time immemorial. By sharing stories, we learn, connect and bond. Stories are made to captivate audiences and evoke emotions. By telling their unique stories, businesses can convey their mission and values, and connect with their guests on an emotional level. They create memorable experiences and generate a connection with their guests. Should it be a discussion over a coffee, a walk around your property, or an outdoor experience, your guests will learn about what makes your business different and authentic. Storytelling is a powerful tool to showcase a business' unique value proposition.

CONNECTING WITH VISITORS THROUGH AUTHENTIC NARRATIVES

For tourism and hospitality businesses, storytelling plays an important role in the development of their communication and their brand identity, showcasing their services through the lens of authenticity and connection. A recent study by [Booking.com \(2023\)](#) found that 69% of travelers want the money they spend when traveling to go back to the local economy. Visitors are seeking more meaningful experiences, and want to know that their travels are supporting communities and local people. This highlights the importance of including partnerships with local organizations within a sustainability story to communicate to visitors that they are making a positive impact and contributing directly to local economies.

SHOWCASING LOCAL CULTURE AND HERITAGE

By showcasing local culture and heritage, and connecting with visitors through authentic narratives, your audience engages with the experience in a more meaningful way. Storytelling helps to humanize the experience and brings it to life, making it more relatable and personal. By weaving a compelling story into your visitors' journey, an emotional connection will emerge, and your audience will be more likely to come back, therefore creating legacy customers.





The Demand for Sustainable Tourism

Travelers expect more and more sustainable practices from tourism operators, with a recent study showing that “[76% of travelers](#) express a desire to travel more sustainably”. Sustainable practices and sustainable storytelling are growing in popularity and have become a marketing trend in the tourism industry. However, a story can only resonate if the audience understands it. It is important to begin marketing efforts by identifying the ideal target audience, their interests, and their values. Analyzing your audience’s needs and wants is a key component of sustainable storytelling.

Part of creating a transparent and powerful sustainability story includes mentioning the struggles and barriers that tourism businesses may have faced along the way. A perfect story doesn’t inspire change nearly as much as an honest reflection, and communicating these struggles allows guests to see a more vulnerable view of the sustainability journey. Transparency and accountability lend themselves to the credibility of a tourism business’ story and build trust with guests, partners, and stakeholders.

From an economic perspective, businesses should recognize the importance of implementing strong sustainable practices as an integral part of their marketing strategy. Businesses have a crucial role in fulfilling this new demand, and storytelling can help develop authentic packages and identify unique selling points.



DID YOU KNOW?



3 in 5 consumers have opted for more environmentally friendly lodging



7 in 10 have avoided a destination or transportation due to skepticism that commitment to sustainable practices was real



65% would opt for more environmentally friendly lodging on their next trip



40% stayed in lodging that is actively lessening environmental impact

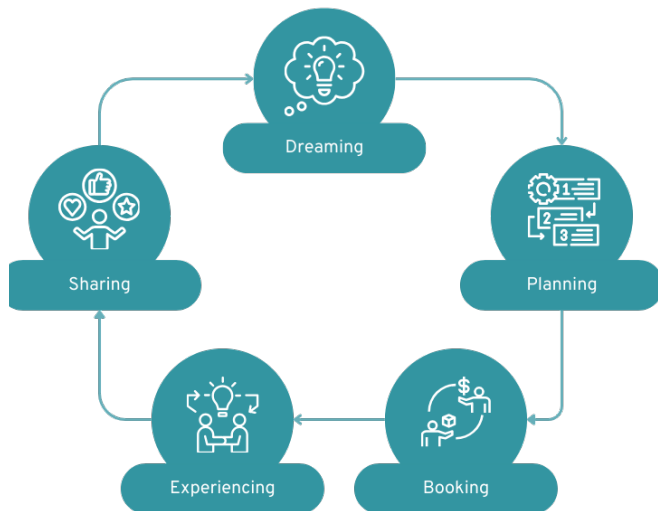


2 out of 3 consumers want to see more sustainability information from lodging providers

Crafting the Story of Your Sustainability Journey

Connect the Journey to the Experience

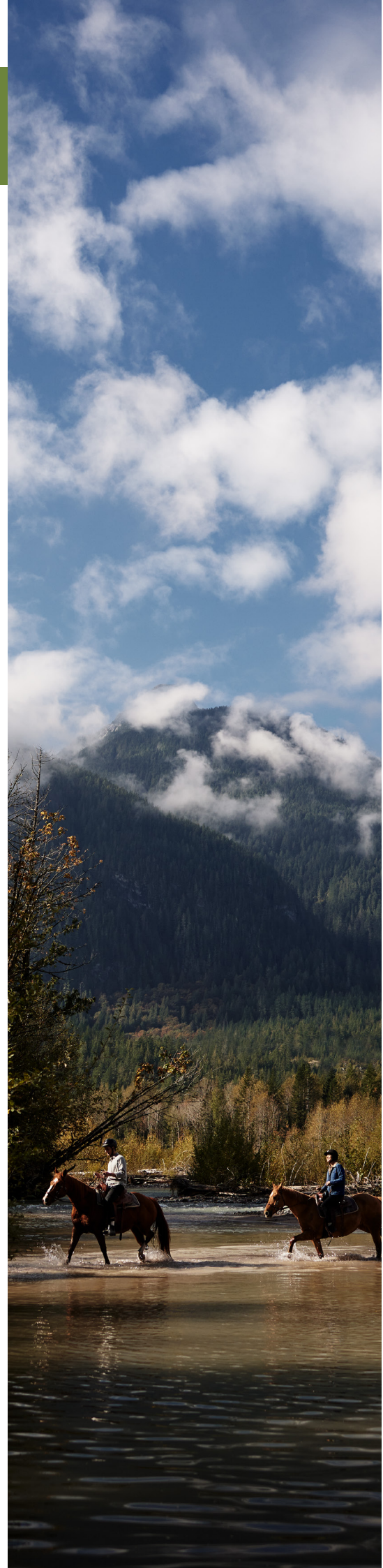
The five stages of the traveler's journey are: dreaming, planning, booking, experiencing and sharing. Tourism operators should take the opportunity to incorporate their unique sustainability features at every stage. For dreaming and planning stages, determine all your sustainability initiatives (recycling, solar initiatives, local partnerships, etc.) as well as your certifications, and craft a story that travelers will dream about and want to contribute to. Share this story on your website and social media platforms. Once at the destination, travelers want to have their fair share of discoveries and bring back home memories of their travels. This is where the experience phase starts, during which your guests will discover and learn new perspectives, and have fun while doing it. This phase is probably the most crucial for businesses and where the emotional connection will be the most important. This is where the feedback you receive from guests will help you improve your sustainability practices. After engaging in your story, travelers can become a change agent as their travel experiences will transform into knowledge they will share with others.



Source: [EarthCheck & Tourism Australia](#)

"Put the customer at the centre of the sustainability experience, and tell them how they will have more fun. But do it honestly and without exaggeration."

Xavier Font
Professor of Marketing and Sustainability,
University of Surrey





Environmental Stewardship: Share the Sense of Place

With the rise of regenerative tourism, many travelers value the emotional connections they form as they discover new destinations, and they may develop a strong sense of place associated with these areas. National Geographic describes the sense of place as “the emotions a person attaches to an area based on their experiences, and is not confined to one scale or fixed time and space”. Tourism businesses can tap into these emotional connections and highlight them in their sustainability story.



DID YOU KNOW?

An example of raising guest awareness of the strong history and local heritage of a place is the [Haida Gwaii Pledge](#). This pledge outlines to visitors the importance of respecting Haida Gwaii and Haida Ways of Being during their visit, and the collective responsibility to care for the air, ocean, land, and people. The website offers resources and a list of four things to do before planning to visit Haida Gwaii, including: review the Visitor Orientation provided by the Council of Haida Nation, sign the Haida Gwaii Visitor Pledge, contribute to the Stewardship Fund, and to arrive prepared and tread lightly while visiting. Providing this information to potential travelers supports the conservation of the natural environment and the culture of these sacred lands.



Indigenous Tourism BC works to showcase the culture and traditions of Indigenous peoples across British Columbia. From guided tours of ancient villages and historic sites to immersive cultural experiences like drumming, dancing and storytelling, the website encompasses authentic and sustainable tourism experiences that showcase the region's natural beauty while preserving traditional knowledge and practices.

Engage Local Communities: Amplify Indigenous Voices

As the tourism industry explores how tourism can amplify and enhance the resources and values of destinations, it is important to include all voices and viewpoints that make up the complex and interconnected nature of communities. Tourism operators should take opportunities to engage local Indigenous communities and businesses as they have deep knowledge of a unique sense of place, culture, and connections with nature. As visitors to a destination may also be exploring traditional territories of Indigenous peoples, it is important that they are aware and respect the history of these lands and the rights of Indigenous peoples to govern and steward their traditional territories.

Marketing Your Efforts

✓ ONLINE PLATFORMS

Many social media platforms and content formats can be used for marketing purposes. Leveraging these platforms creatively will ensure that your sustainability story reaches a broad audience. Providing “micro-stories” about sustainability successes or goals on social media, on your website, or in newsletters keeps guests engaged and brings their focus to the sustainability efforts of a business.

✓ EMPLOYEE TRAINING AND GUEST FEEDBACK

Providing educational and training opportunities to all employees can ensure that they feel comfortable communicating sustainability efforts and goals to guests. This also helps empower employees and motivates them to engage in sustainability initiatives. Equally important, don't hesitate to incorporate your guests' feedback into your sustainability story. They will feel seen and valued, and will be more likely to come back.

✓ MEASUREMENT AND IMPROVEMENT

Last but not least, always remain honest and transparent when incorporating sustainability practices into marketing. Providing goals and sharing progress so that your audience can see measurable results and also sharing challenges or areas for improvement all lend themselves to the credibility of a story.

✓ GREENWASHING VS. GREENHUSHING

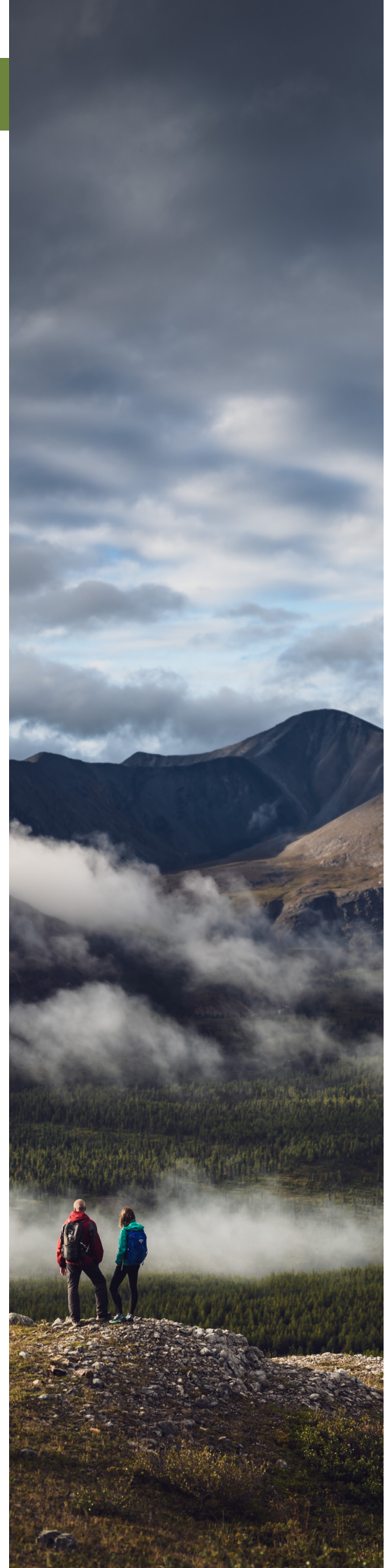
It is important to avoid “greenwashing” (a term used to describe exaggerated or misleading sustainability claims). Ways to do this include seeking independent sustainability verifications or certifications, showing long term commitments. Alternatively, avoid “greenhushing” (the practice of undermining your sustainability efforts) and don't hesitate to communicate about your accomplishments.

BIOSPHERE SUSTAINABLE PROGRAM

[Biosphere Sustainable](#) is a tourism management system aligned with the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals, helping businesses to commit to sustainability through a comprehensive methodology of management, recognition and certification.



BIOSPHERE



Takeaways



FOCUS ON YOUR BUSINESS VALUES

- Your sustainability story should reflect your business values: stay true to your voice and your story will be more genuine.



LEVERAGE SOCIAL MEDIA AND ONLINE PLATFORMS

- Join a professional network to help share your story.
- Create micro stories on social media, website, newsletters to create engagement.



LEAD WITH HONESTY AND TRANSPARENCY

- Share your sustainability goals and aspirations, with clear and simple metrics, and show measurable results.
- Talk about the challenges you have encountered and how you overcame them.



BUILD SUSTAINABILITY LEGITIMACY

- Seek independent verifications or certifications (e.g. Green Key certification, Biosphere program, BC Green Business, etc.) for more credibility.
- Partner with environmental organizations to create joint sustainability initiatives (e.g. Surfrider, 4Ocean, etc.)



SHOW LONG-TERM COMMITMENTS

- Communicate about the frameworks, policies and plans that will help you achieve your long- and short-term sustainability goals (e.g. sustainability pledge, priority SDGs, sustainability action plan, responsible purchasing policy, etc.)



EMPOWER YOUR EMPLOYEES

- Empower your employees through education and training to make sure that they can confidently convey your sustainability goals.

Sustainable Storytelling in Action:

Tyax Adventures

[Tyax Adventures](#) is a pioneer of floatplane accessed backcountry mountain travel in the South Chilcotin region of British Columbia. They have been flying, hosting, and guiding bikers and hikers for over 20 years on inspiring backcountry adventures through the South Chilcotin Mountains Park. Tyax Adventures has a great appreciation for this sacred wilderness area and are committed to sustainable recreational practices and operate with conservation and environmental stewardship as top priorities.

[Why is sustainable storytelling important to your business?](#)

Tyax Adventures is one of very few commercial operators in the South Chilcotin Mountains and Big Creek Provincial Parks. This means that our impact and how we operate could have an immense effect on the area and what it may be for future generations. Having respect for the land we operate



on and the trail we utilize is a huge part of our storytelling. We see each client as an opportunity to educate them about the land, its rich history, and the importance of showing it respect, enabling us to share its wonders with future adventurers.

[How did you begin your sustainability journey?](#)

Responsible backcountry travel has always been at the forefront of our operation. When the number of Tyax Adventures clients began to increase, it became obvious that to ensure our goals were met, we needed to step up to the plate and become an educational resource for our clients. Since then, we have hosted thousands of backcountry enthusiasts and collaborated with multiple like-minded local groups to share our story.

[What benefits have you seen from sustainable storytelling for your business?](#)

The largest benefits for us have been the educational opportunities, community support, and brand differentiation.



How does your business promote environmental stewardship?

We provide clients with educational materials and briefings about the local environment, wildlife, and conservation efforts. We encourage responsible behaviour, such as staying on designated trails, minimizing waste, and respecting wildlife habitats. We emphasize and practice “Leave No Trace” principles during guided tours.

We have implemented eco-friendly practices into our daily operations, such as the clean products we use. We also utilize solar panels at a number of our facilities to minimize our environmental impacts. Worth noting, Tyax Adventures offsets 100% of company emissions. This includes our offices, employee commuting, waste to landfill, and flight hours (fuel burn).

In terms of maintenance & preservation, Tyax Adventures is one of the sole trail maintenance providers in both Parks. We regularly inspect trails for erosion and other signs of environmental degradation, and coordinate with local authorities and land managers to implement sustainable trail management practices.

How do you market your sustainability efforts? What do you find has been most effective to raise awareness to your consumers?

It is important to us that clients understand our purpose from the moment they find us—that we offer an opportunity to explore and experience this incredible region in a responsible and sustainable manner. Whether it is through an online search, seeing an ad in a magazine, or in person at Tyaughton Lake, the environment and landscape is at the forefront of our marketing. This allows us to reach clientele that align with our (and the community's) values of honouring the land as it is with little human impact while still being able to experience doing an activity that we love.





How have your guests responded to your sustainability story?

The responses from guests have been and continue to be positive. Our sustainable storytelling has enriched our guest experience by adding depth and meaning to their backcountry excursions. By sharing stories about the natural history, cultural significance, and conservation efforts, we have created more immersive and memorable experiences for our clients.

What have been some successes you have experienced? What about barriers? Lessons learned?

Throughout this journey we have had the opportunity to build relationships with Indigenous people, the local community and stakeholders. Alongside these relationships, we have experienced continued positive client engagement. However, regulatory barriers have impacted recent business operations. This primarily includes challenges related to obtaining permits for background access.

The lessons we have learned from our experience are to ensure your business is adaptable and resilient in overcoming challenges, and to collaborate with other groups within the community to overcome barriers and achieve shared goals.

What are your future aspirations for sharing your sustainability story?

Our goal is to continue to work with other brands in the industry that share our story of sustainable backcountry travel, and continue to educate our guests on the importance of respecting the local environment.

Image credits: Tyax Adventures.

Resources for Further Reading

[BCTSN Stories of Sustainability](#)

[Indigenous Tourism BC](#)

[Biosphere Sustainable Program](#)

[Mightybytes - Sustainability Storytelling Checklist](#)

