

Local News



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Tourism+Cyclists=an ideal partnership

By Dawn Lalonde
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With recent challenges to Ontario's tourism industry, individual businesses are looking for new opportunities and the competitive edge needed to reach out to a new market. Cycle tourism fits the bill.

Last Tuesday, October 18th, Louisa Mursell, Project Manager of Welcome Cyclists held a two-hour information workshop, at the Espanola Recreational Recreation Complex. There were a dozen people in attendance, some from local area businesses, others interested in improving the area's tourism industry or cycling as a recreational past time. The goal of the Welcome Cyclist project is to create a network of businesses that enhance a region's cycle tourism.

Mursell holds a Bachelor of Business Administration from Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, has worked on sustainable, green and new tourism initiatives for a number of years, and is responsible for launching the Welcome Cyclist Network and workshops series, in 2010. She has worked on special projects for Transportation Options since 2008, as the Greenbelt Express and Operations Manager for the Bike Train Initiative and as the Assistant Coordinator of the Ontario Cycle Tourism Forum. With her, she brought a vast amount of knowledge of the cycle tourism industry in Ontario to the evening's workshop.



Louisa Mursell explains to those in attendance how cycle tourists are beneficial to the tourism industry. Photo by Dawn Lalonde



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The Welcome Cyclists workshop is designed to certify and promote bicycle friendly businesses and cycle tourism in a growing number of regions across Ontario. Any business can join the network, such as food service providers including restaurants, cafes, food shops, and tourist attractions like museums, natural heritage sites or other areas of interest. Additional businesses which may find interest in cycle tourism are accommodations from hotels, inns, motels, bed and breakfasts and campgrounds, along with many other cycling related businesses or other organizations currently involved or wanting to become more involved in cycle tourism.

The program is first launched in each region with an informative workshop bringing forth data, which specifically focuses on the particular region. Espanola being part of the Manitoulin Island and LaCloche Foothills area and already seeing a heavy flow of cyclist during three of four seasons, was considered a great town to host the workshop. After the workshop, local businesses could register on-line, at no charge, allowing them to participate and connect with the growing number of cycle tourists within Ontario.

A growing consumer green-shift, more people looking for an active, outdoor driven adventure vacation and the increase in staycations, cycle tourism in Ontario is surely going to continue to grow, according to Mursell. The Ontario Ministry of Tourism has already recognized the potential in cycle tourism and that many businesses and services are already experiencing growth due to an increase in sales to cycle tourists. 10.1% of Canadian adults have previously gone on a cycling trip. In 2007, 1.5 million visitors participated in cycling activities in Ontario and 305 million dollars was spent by Ontario visitors participating in cycling activities.

Mursell and Welcome Cyclists recognize that Manitoulin Island and LaCloche Foothills are an attractive destination for cyclists. Scenic lakes, unspoilt shoreline, small towns and lush forests allow cyclists to experience unique attractions and connect with the area's rich cultural heritage and First Nations communities.

The LaCloche Foothills offer long distance touring cyclists an excellent opportunity to experience the beauty of the North Channel. The developing North Shore Bike Route is going to attract a large number of cyclists travelling from Sault Saint Marie to Sudbury or those coming down through Manitoulin Island and utilizing the ferry service.

Mursell said, "Over the past five years, the number of ferry passengers using bikes as their primary transportation ranges from 750-850 crossings," which does not include the tourists with bicycles on racks.

The proposed North Shore Bike Route connecting Sault Saint Marie to Sudbury is still in the planning a development stages, which is approximately 70% complete and will allow cyclists to venture away from the busy Hwy 17 to a more scenic, quieter route. This would increase the cyclists' access to the towns and the North Channel shoreline while improving safety. This route is considered almost perfect for long distance cyclists and those wanting to experience a single day or overnight excursion, within Northern Ontario.

By joining the ever growing Welcome Cyclist Network, a local business can reach the end user, the cyclists. When they work as a part of a larger network, business benefits and so does the network as a whole. Businesses would also be visible on their detailed online map and their logo could also be displayed at the local business.

There are also the communications and marketing strategies your business could profit from, websites, links, e-newsletter, social media or maybe the publications that are distributed at events, tourism information centers and bike shops.

Since 2010, Welcome Cyclists Network included businesses from the Region of Niagara, County of Frontenac, Southern Ontario Greenbelt areas such as Hamilton and Durham Region, Eastern Ontario, Manitoulin Island, LaCloche Foothills and many more. Welcome Cyclists is constantly starting to expand and strengthen the network by holding information workshops, like the one in Espanola.

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The evening would not have been possible without funding partners, such as LAMBAC, Community Futures Development Corporation, Government of Canada-FedNor, or their event partners; Town of Espanola, LaCloche Foothills Chamber of Commerce and Manitoulin Chamber of Commerce, or many other supporting partners.

"Community and partner support is key to the success of developing the area as a destination for cycle and growing the Welcome Cyclists Network," Mursell said. "Cycle tourists spend more and stay longer!"

"Cycle tourists are young families, couples, groups of friends, and cycling clubs, they may be single riders or retired persons. Either you're a long distance road racer or a first time tourer there is fun to be had for everyone!"

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