

Adventure travel a major draw

Ecotourism as well. 'People are graduating from regular mass tours'

BY MISTY HARRIS, CANWEST NEWS SERVICE JULY 10, 2010

A sweeping tourism study of developed countries around the world has ranked Canada in the Top 10 both for adventure opportunities and being a "safe and welcoming" place in which to experience them.

Canada placed seventh out of 28 nations for its combined scores in tourism entrepreneurship and adventure activity resources, and eighth for the collective elements of sustainability, safety, natural resources and health.

The report, jointly issued by George Washington University, the Adventure Travel Trade Association and Xola Consulting, is based on detailed data from government and private-sector agencies internationally.

"People are graduating from those regular mass tours where they find themselves on a bus with 20 people from the same town that they're from," says Philippe Duverger, research director for the Adventure Tourism Development Index. "Adventure now represents about 20 per cent of why people travel -and it's growing."

Where Canada stumbled in the rankings was in what Duverger calls "readiness," which incorporates scores for tourism infrastructure, cultural resources, image and humanitarian development.

Despite high marks for our image -nearly nine out of 10 possible points -a dismal rating of 4.76 in the humanitarian area, which evaluates a country's partnerships with non-government and aid organizations, pushed Canada to 24th in this category.

By contrast, some of the nation's most impressive scores were in factors that can't be created -think rare natural resources, open spaces and opportunities for ecotourism.

Arctic Kingdom in Nunavut, for example, allows travellers to experience the thrill of floe-edge diving.

Manitoba's Sea North Tours provides the chance to snorkel with beluga whales.

Visitors to Newfoundland can go iceberg kayaking through Stan Cook Sea Kayak Adventures.

In Quebec, ice-canyoning and waterfall rappelling is offered through Canyoning Quebec; there's heli-hiking and ziplining in British Columbia, through CMH Summer Adventures and Ziptrek Ecotours, respectively; and the exhilaration of caving lies in wait at Canmore Cave Tours in Alberta.

"If you're an adventurer, welcome to heaven," said Elyse Mailhot, media relations manager for the

Canadian Tourism Commission.

"This is what we're promoting now. ... You don't come here just to look at the pretty mountains anymore; you come here to hike them," Mailhot said.

The worldwide adventure index, now in its second year, was designed to get policy-makers around the world to take a more holistic view of the tourism market, looking not just to the promotion of natural assets but also to issues of sustainability and conservation.

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