

## **RMOW Information Brief – Cultural Tourism Development Strategy**

Latest update: October 26, 2011

### **Background**

*A Tapestry of Place – Whistler’s Cultural Tourism Development Strategy* was the result of an eight-month process that involved Steven Thorne Consulting engaging with the Cultural Tourism Advisory Group (CTAG), which was composed of representatives from Whistler’s arts, culture, and heritage community including artists, writers, and performers, as well as representatives from the Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW), Tourism Whistler, Whistler Blackcomb, and the Chamber of Commerce. The 81-page report was funded by the Government of Canada as part of the \$500,000 grant secured by the RMOW when Whistler was designated a 2009 Cultural Capital of Canada grant.

The RMOW facilitated the development of the report and acted as chair of CTAG. The findings in the report were presented by CTAG at a workshop for Mayor and Council on March 15, 2011.

The report revealed that place-based cultural tourism represents a significant economic opportunity for Whistler. The report defines cultural tourism as “the full range of experiences visitors can undertake to learn what makes a destination distinctive — its lifestyle, its heritage, its arts, its people — and the business of providing and interpreting that culture to visitors.”

*A Tapestry of Place* is now championed by the new Alliance for Cultural Tourism (ACT), an informal group that evolved from CTAG. ACT was established in part through a recommendation in the report to have a group committed to moving cultural tourism forward in the resort community.

ACT currently includes community leaders and representatives from The Point Artist-Run Centre Society, Squamish Lil’wat Cultural Centre, RMOW, Tourism Whistler, Whistler Arts Council, Whistler Chamber of Commerce, Whistler Blackcomb, Whistler Film Festival Society, Whistler Museum & Archives, and the Whistler Writers’ Group.

The RMOW is represented on ACT by the Manager Village Animation & Events, and the Manager Strategic Alliances.

### **Key points**

#### **Why cultural tourism?**

- *A Tapestry of Place* is part of the resort-wide strategy to increase room occupancy to an annual average of 60% and beyond, from the current rate of 52%. For example, even a 1% increase in occupancy during a typical Whistler summer could result in an additional 10,000 to 12,000 overnight visitors.
- Cultural tourism is divided into two separate streams: attraction-based and place-based.
  - Attraction-based cultural tourism sees visitors traveling for a specific event such as a festival or art gallery.
  - Place-based cultural tourism is more holistic, presenting place as product and marketing an immersive tourism experience that capitalizes on the unique character and sense of place.
- While place-based cultural tourism appeals to all ages, the majority of its fans are more than 45 years old, well educated and have higher than average disposable incomes. In fact, 22% of American cultural tourists report annual household incomes of \$100,000 plus.



### **Cultural tourism in Whistler**

- Cultural tourism has long been part of Whistler's economic fabric with top tier events and festivals such as the TELUS World Ski and Snow Festival, the Whistler Film Festival and the food and beverage spectacular, Cornucopia.
- *A Tapestry of Place* reveals that while Whistler offers more than 150 cultural experiences, the community itself is not recognized as a cultural destination. To achieve this, some cultural experiences may need to be developed, while cultural tourism products currently in place will need increased promotion.

### **Moving forward with cultural tourism**

- ACT is drafting a governance model to identify development priorities and funding sources as well as programming and promotional opportunities.
- ACT is helping to define and articulate the priorities for building cultural tourism, and providing a level of community direction.
- ACT is planning to come before Council early in the new year with an update regarding their recommendations moving forward.
- Moving forward, the RMOW will continue to support cultural tourism through its role as one of many stakeholder groups involved with ACT. Through its ongoing programs, product and funding initiatives, the RMOW is a significant contributor to cultural tourism.

### **RMOW support of arts, culture & heritage and of cultural tourism**

Examples of support that the RMOW provides to arts, culture and heritage and cultural tourism include (some of which were identified in *A Tapestry of Place* as recommendations to move cultural tourism forward):

- Development of Whistler Olympic Plaza including the pavilion, the various Games mementos, the Susan Pointe art project etc.
- Production of the Whistler Presents concert series program (with execution by Watermark and Mobilize Strategies), plus \$86,000 to TW to market and promote the program.
- Public art program including banners and other juried public art projects.
- Whistler Arts Council annual funding through a fee for service agreement. This year we provided \$536,800 (including \$160,000 new funds this year to supplement the street entertainment program as part of Whistler Presents, previously funded at \$140,000 bringing 2011 total to \$300,000). We also have the Millennium Place management agreement with Whistler Arts Council.
- Whistler Museum and Archives annual funding through a fee for service agreement. This year we provided \$150,000.
- Whistler Film Festival Society annual RMI funding of \$50,000. Additional funds of \$146,000 were provided this year as part of a one-time contribution to ensure the success of the 2011 Festival.
- Rainbow Theatre renovation: grant application to the Government of Canada, plus, if successful, \$354,000 of RMI funding.
- Provision of the hostel site on Alta Lake for The Point.
- Provision of the Alta Lake Station House for artist in residence and Art Workshops on the Lake programs.
- Tax relief to the Squamish Lil'wat Cultural Centre.
- Community Enrichment Program grants for 2011: Whistler Writers Collective - \$3000; Dance Whistler - \$1600; Whistler Children's Chorus - \$3000; Whistler Secondary School Drama Club - \$3000; and Whistler Singers - \$1500.