

# **Black Cultural Tourism in Nova Scotia**

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## ***Market Readiness and Tourism Potential Analysis***

### ***Executive Summary***

**July 2008**

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## **I. Study Background and Purpose**

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In 2007, the Black Business Initiative (BBI) initiated a study to assess the tourism potential and market-readiness of Black cultural experiences in Nova Scotia and to develop strategies to enable those attractions/experiences to realize their full promise as part of the Nova Scotia tourism product mix. The contract was awarded to a multidisciplinary team consisting of A. L. Arbic Consulting, Genesis Consulting, Tourism Solutions and Carmelita Robertson, guided by a Steering Committee consisting of representatives of BBI, the Nova Scotia Office of African Nova Scotian Affairs, Nova Scotia Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage, Parks Canada, and ACOA.

## **II. Market Trends and Research**

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### **A. Global Tourism Trends**

The report identifies and discusses a number of major tourism trends that characterize the global tourism market:

- Growth in global tourism;
- Increased competition and demand for quality by increasingly discerning travellers;
- Increased demand for experiential tourism and the move away from “mass” or impersonal tourism;
- Emphasis on authentic travel experiences or opportunities to experience cultures first hand by engaging directly with communities;
- Growth in cultural/heritage tourism as “anthro-tourists” seek new and more direct forms of cultural encounters;
- The world’s aging population resulting in a larger than ever market of those most likely to travel;
- Demand for customization where travel experiences are tailored to personal interests;
- Concerns about safety/ external threats, which many recent surveys show has become the number one factor considered by travellers;
- Increased environmental awareness and concern about the impact of tourism on the environment driving demand for sustainable tourism;
- Move to shorter, more frequent trips;
- Increased importance of technology in trip preparation;
- Increased interest in combining spirituality with travel experiences.

## **B. National and Provincial Tourism Trends**

Statistics reviewed in the study show that inbound tourism to Canada declined from 2002 to 2006, as a result of a variety of external forces, with only small signs of recovery in 2007. At the provincial level, tourism trends in Nova Scotia mirrored those nationally, with provincial tourism numbers dropping between 2004 and 2006, and rebounding by just 1% in 2007. The most marked drop in visitors by origin was a 5% decrease in American visitors during this period.

## **C. Comparable Black Tourism Initiatives**

Providing an important context for future plans in Nova Scotia is the report's research into the experiences of black cultural tourism initiatives in other parts of Canada and in the United States, including: sites in Ontario's Underground Railroad in the Niagara-St. Catharines-Hamilton area and in Southwestern Ontario; the African American Heritage Trail in Washington, DC; and the African American Heritage Program in Virginia. As well, the history and operations of three regional tourism networks, including the Bay of Fundy Experience, the Atlantic Canadian Acadian Tourism Commission and the Aboriginal Tourism Association of British Columbia, provide insights into the development and promotion of a network of market-ready tourism experiences.

Ontario's Underground Railroad includes approximately thirty sites. Eleven key sites are located in the Niagara and Southwestern regions near the US border. These sites, which include Uncle Tom's Cabin, Buxton National Historic Site, and the R. Nathaniel Dett British Methodist Episcopal Church, are presently drawing a total of approximately 30,000 visitors annually. Site and tour operators suggest that the experience has universal appeal in the story of seeking freedom and escaping tyranny, while, for many, visiting the Underground Railroad completes a part of a more personal history. While these sites have experienced a significant downturn in their attendance rates since 2002, the sites offering a more developed experience remain optimistic that visitor numbers will begin to grow once again.

Experiences of African American Heritage trails and Canadian tourism networks suggest that: the market-readiness process can be lengthy; sources of funding are critical to support the development and promotion of market-ready products; dedicated coordinating bodies/human resources play a key role in setting goals, establishing standards, and building awareness and market-readiness; and businesses and the community must be committed to the process of market-readiness.

## **D. Research and Identification of Potential Markets**

Research into the potential markets for Nova Scotia's Black cultural tourism product identifies the following markets as having the greatest potential:

- The African American Leisure and Business/Leisure Market, which grew at double the rate of American travel as a whole between 2000 and 2002;<sup>1</sup>
- The African Diaspora, a potentially large, but emerging market which links Nova Scotia's African-American communities to the world community of people of African descent living outside Africa;
- The family reunion market, which has now become a multi-million dollar industry and which would build on African Nova Scotians' historical ties to the United States, the Caribbean and other parts of Canada;
- Faith-based tourism, which the World Tourism Organization named one of the fastest growing segments of the tourism industry and is expected to double over the next five to ten years.

## **III. Current Provincial Black Cultural Tourism Product**

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The project included an extensive inventory and analysis of cultural, heritage and tourism resources that could serve as the basis for a Black Cultural Tourism initiative. This inventory and analysis indicate that Nova Scotia's Black Cultural Tourism product is characterized by a number of strengths and areas of great opportunity, but also a number of weaknesses and threats that must be addressed in order for the broader product to become fully tourism market ready, according to current tourism standards.

### **A. Strengths**

- The rich and compelling history of African Nova Scotians;
- Historical and contemporary connections between African Nova Scotian communities and Black communities in the United States, Africa, the Caribbean and other parts of Canada;
- Churches, including the community infrastructure they provide;
- Contemporary African Nova Scotian culture, in the form of music, theatre, literature and film;
- The Preston area, as a 200 year-old, living example of contemporary African Nova Scotian culture.

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<sup>1</sup> The most recent date for which data on African American travel figures are available.

## **B. Weaknesses**

- Lack of awareness of African Nova Scotian history and culture;
- Limited investment in Black cultural tourism product development, resulting in a limited number of existing Black cultural tourism products;
- A cultural/heritage infrastructure that is limited to a small number of attractions;
- A lack of human and financial resources for existing Black cultural/heritage attractions and events;
- A low priority placed on tourism by existing Black cultural/heritage attractions, resources and events;
- A lack of communication/links between groups working on Black cultural/heritage projects;
- A lack of coordination/strategic approach to the development of Black cultural/heritage initiatives.

## **C. Opportunities**

- Creating awareness among African Nova Scotians of the potential benefits of tourism;
- Capitalizing on the growing interest in Black heritage;
- Building on shared bonds that exist between African Nova Scotian communities and communities from which African Nova Scotians originated or traveled to after leaving the province;
- Emphasizing universal themes, such as the search for liberty;
- Building on existing events, such as well-established sporting events and family reunions;
- Partnering with other existing heritage/cultural organizations to interpret/promote African Nova Scotian heritage and culture.

## **D. Threats**

- Depopulation of historical Black communities;
- Aging population in Black communities;
- Loss of Black heritage resources as a result of development and other pressures;
- Continued lack of a profile of Nova Scotia's Black heritage/culture.

## IV. Market Readiness and Appeal

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Based on site visits, interviews, and reviews of marketing materials and initiatives, and measured against industry standard tourism market-readiness criteria, Nova Scotia's existing Black cultural tourism product is not currently market ready. However, there is considerable interest in Nova Scotia's Black cultural tourism product among tourism professionals and ***a well-developed mix of tourism-ready Black Cultural Tourism experiences in Nova Scotia holds potential appeal to the tourism industry, particularly those who specialize in niche markets.***

## V. Recommendations

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The report outlines a series of recommendations for the development of Black cultural tourism in Nova Scotia, including:

### A. Support Strategies

- ***Present results of Nova Scotia Black Cultural Tourism Market Readiness and Tourism Potential analysis to key stakeholders;***
- ***Confirm support for the plan and its recommendations*** from key government stakeholders.

### B. Product Development Strategies

- ***Form a Black Cultural Tourism Product Development Working Group;***
- ***Create a Black Cultural Tourism Division and Tourism Development Officer position within BBI*** to coordinate research, product development, networking, partnerships and packaging of Black cultural tourism products in the longer term;
- ***Create a Black Cultural Tourism Product-Development Fund*** for helping existing and new Black cultural attractions, events and projects to reach tourism market-ready status and local tourism operators to package these products;
- ***Create a Black Heritage Interpretation Fund*** to encourage and support the interpretation of Black heritage at existing institutions;
- ***Facilitate networking opportunities among African Nova Scotian attractions*** to encourage information-sharing, mentoring and partnerships;
- ***Initiate a Nova Scotia Black Cultural Week*** that builds around an existing event and includes a range of other events and activities, such as scheduled open houses at churches, Black visitor attractions and community facilities in historical Black communities around the province, as well as concerts, performances, community meals and sales of local craft;
- ***Develop quality packages that include a mix of cultural and non-cultural activities*** that will appeal to the target markets;
- ***Support the development of the Africville Interpretive Centre*** to add to the critical mass of high quality Black cultural attractions needed to make Nova Scotia a Black Cultural Tourism destination;

- **Initiate a Nova Scotia Black Genealogy Research Project,**
- **Develop a Family Reunion Planning Toolkit** containing practical tips and tools for organizing successful family reunions;
- **Create a website with a directory of dates and locations of upcoming family reunions;**
- **Work with churches in Black communities to develop opportunities for tourists** that combine religious, cultural and community experiences.

### C. Awareness and Marketing Strategies

- **Build on interest generated by the study** by following-up with organizations and individuals who have expressed interest in Nova Scotia's Black Cultural Tourism product and keeping them aware of progress on implementation;
- **Begin to develop baseline data on the number of Black visitors to the province** by adding a question to the 2009 Visitor Exit Survey asking visitors to identify if they belong to a visible minority group;
- **Develop a road signage program** in consultation with Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal to create greater awareness of the history of African Nova Scotian communities;
- **Encourage interpretive signage programs** in African Nova Scotian communities commemorating key institutions, events, and people;
- **Promote Nova Scotia as a Black tourism destination** through attendance/presentation at key professional conferences;
- **Organize FAM tours of tourism ready attractions** for tourism operators and travel writers who specialize in the African Diaspora to create greater awareness of Nova Scotia's Black heritage and experiences;
- **Join the International Faith-Based Tourism Association** and attend the World Religious travel Expo;
- **Work with the AUBA** to make connections between local Black churches and church groups in other parts of the world;
- **Investigate publishing articles on Nova Scotia Black Cultural Tourism and promote Nova Scotia through speciality industry publications/organizations** such as *Black Meetings and Tourism Magazine*, Minority Professionals Network and the African Travel Association;
- **Investigate the potential of creating Sister City status with a community in Tanzania**, through the Bradford Group, New York;
- **Reprint the Destination Liberty brochure** and ensure that it is widely available at Nova Scotia Tourist Information Centres and featured sites;
- **Upgrade and promote the Destination Liberty Web Site** through bulk internet E-messaging via available distribution channels targeted to reach travel related organizations;
- **Investigate speaking opportunities at specialty conferences** such as the National Coalition of Black Meeting Planners, to promote Nova Scotia as a Black tourism destination;
- **Join the African Travel Association** to promote Nova Scotia as a Diaspora travel destination.

## D. Training Strategies

- ***Link Black cultural tourism attractions/events with the Tourism Industry Association of Nova Scotia (TIANS)*** to help develop business and HR best practices, professional development and networking;
- ***Engage in Best Practices Trade Missions to successful black cultural destinations;***
- ***Enrol staff of Black Cultural Tourism initiatives in tourism training programs;***
- ***Encourage more African Nova Scotians to work in the tourism industry.***

## VI. Estimated Visitation and Impact

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Based on comparable, market and contextual data, ***it is estimated that between 15,000 and 20,000 annual out-of-province visits could be generated if the study's recommendations are implemented. This level of tourism*** would translate to an annual combined direct and spin-off ***economic impact range over five years of a low of \$11,000,000 to a high of \$25,000,000.***

In addition to projected economic impact, the social impacts of a developed Black Cultural Tourism Initiative include preservation of vulnerable tangible and intangible heritage in the Black community, broadening and strengthening historical and cultural ties, increased community pride and awareness and increased opportunities for African Nova Scotian owned businesses.