

New tourism initiative earning kudos; Georgian Triangle lauds Grey plan

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Local News - A new initiative by Grey County tourism is being praised by the head of the Georgian Triangle Tourist Association.

The county launched its "Getaway to Grey" promotion last week to an audience of tourist and business officials from around the Southern Georgian Bay region.

That included Nancy Kindler of the Georgian Triangle Tourist Association. She enthusiastically embraced the concept which will rely heavily on Scenic Caves Nature Adventures and Blue Mountain Resort, the county's two biggest tourist attractions.

"I think it's fantastic," Kindler said. "It's exactly what tourists are looking for. There are suggested outings, bonuses, and it encourages people to go places."

Scenic Caves, she said, is the "number one attraction in our area." The contest offers participants a chance to visit seven different travel routes and destinations in the county, Grey County tourism co-ordinator Bryan Plumstead said. That includes the popular waterfalls tour - although none of those stops are located in the immediate area. It also includes black history landmarks, scenic lookouts and winter stops that are quite relevant to the Collingwood area, he said.

"We have great attractions like Blue Mountain and the Scenic Caves," Plumstead said. "With the impact that Blue Mountain is having, people are realizing there's a lot to do there. We also have a lot of really authentic back-road communities that have a lot to offer. There are lots of artisans and museums."

On the "doorstep" to the Blue Mountains are also natural attractions like the Beaver Valley and the Georgian Bay shoreline, he said.

The contest offers a pocket-sized handbook to the region with a detailed and professionally-produced map suggesting destinations and attractions, Plumstead said.

"We want to get people up and out of their arm chairs and exploring the county," he said.

That kind of precise information has been lacking, Kindler said.

Often, tourists show up in the Collingwood-Blue Mountains region knowing vaguely that it's a good place to visit, but they have no specific idea of what they can do to keep busy, Kindler said.

Promotions like the "Getaway" contest have recognized the need for that kind of grass-roots information and are tapping into it. She said "every product has a market, and our market is looking for this kind of product."

"They show up in our visitor centre and say 'what is there to do here'," Kindler added.

"They come because they hear wonderful things but they don't know the specifics. This is exactly what we need to give them specifics on how to enjoy their visit."

The contest also includes discounted coupons to visit attractions around the region.

Kindler said that's another component, since visitors are looking for ways to stretch their dollars.

"They're more likely to take advantage of that," she said.

So far, the tourist season is shaping up to be a frenzied one. Visitation is already well ahead of last year, Kindler said, and that's with the busiest component of the season just ahead.

Many people without children or with grown children have been visiting for the last two months. Now that school is out for the summer, tourism will only increase.

"The numbers are just huge. I don't know what's going on. I think we're getting famous. June's been extremely busy for us. Blue Mountain's doing a really good job of promoting weekend events."

Many of those people aren't coming from too far abroad either. Kindler said a report issued this week on national tourism showing that people aren't travelling far from home "isn't big news for us." "Americans are not travelling externally as much as they used to," she said. "And I think a lot of people are taking more frequent vacations. There's a certain percentage of the population that will always be world travellers."

More frequent vacations often add up to shorter and less expensive trips, she added.

The contest runs until Dec. 31 with the grand prize draw to occur on January 16, 2008.

Prizes including a ski lesson with "Crazy Canuck" Todd Brooker, sailing in the Georgian Bay Regatta on the official race boat, Fly like Billy Bishop over the skies of Grey County or spend a day in the army at Land Forces Central Area Training Centre in Meaford

"The prizes are very unique once in a lifetime experiences which capture some of the excitement we have in Grey County" Grey County Warden Bob Pringle said.

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