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BEST

Business Enterprises for Sustainable Travel

P r a c t i c e s

Great Canadian Railtour Company

Category:	Railroads
Ownership:	Private
Product:	Railtours
Area of operation:	Western Canada and the Canadian Rockies
Affiliations/ Awards:	Members of the World Travel & Tourism Council and the Ocean Blue Foundation. Voted one of the "20 Best Experiences in the World" by The International Railway Traveler in 1991 and 1998, and "Best Attraction" by the American Association of Travel Writers in 1998.
Practice keywords:	Customer satisfaction, staff motivation, heritage protection, environmental awareness, local community support, strength in partnership

Great Canadian Railtour Company: Caretakers of Canada's Passenger Rail Heritage

The challenge facing the Great Canadian Railtour Company (GCRC), operator of Rocky Mountaineer Railtours since 1990, has been how to expand its activities – increasing passenger numbers and revenues – without putting excessive pressure on the environment in which it operates.

Reflecting its commitment to service excellence and leadership in the tourism and passenger rail industries, GCRC has developed and implemented sustainable operating policies and practices that create minimal environmental impact and promote environmental awareness of Canada's natural resources to tourists from around the world.

GCRC's sustainable policies and practices have specifically helped to:

- Preserve the natural assets of the mountain national parks in which it operates;
- Maintain positive relations with all public- and private-sector stakeholders;
- Motivate and retain employees, despite the seasonal nature of its operations;
- Increase visitor awareness of the meaning of Canada's national park designations; and,
- Grow an increasingly international customer base.

GCRC's continued investment in training, health, safety, sustainable tourism, and environmental practices reflects the leadership role the company has assumed in helping to preserve Canada's passenger rail heritage.



Company Snapshot

Formerly Mountain Vista Railtour Services Ltd., the Great Canadian Railtour Company (GCRC) purchased the routes and equipment of VIA Rail's Rocky Mountaineer daylight service when it was privatized by the Canadian government in April 1990.

In the 10 years since then, the number of departures between Vancouver and Jasper, or Banff/Calgary, has increased from 20 to 148 – an increase of 740 percent – scheduled passenger capacity is up 800 percent, and the number of passengers carried annually has risen 830 percent.

A new winter tour program in December escorts both leisure and corporate groups. Independent tour packages of up to 15 days have been added to complement the two-day, all daylight train journeys. These include city stopovers, sightseeing tours, and rail/drive programs.

GCRC's president and chief executive officer, Peter Armstrong, who heads a team in season of about 350 staff, has committed to a comprehensive program of sustainable operating policies and practices for the benefit of future generations, as well as in the present. To this end, the company has:

- Endorsed the Heritage Tourism Strategy, conceived in the Canadian mountain national parks as a mechanism for balancing tourism with national park protection;
- Worked closely with other public-sector and industry partners to promote awareness of the importance of sustainable tourism development;
- Undertaken extensive training programs to orient onboard attendants to the nature, history, and culture of the national parks, as well as training in environmental and heritage issues for sales, marketing, and executive teams;
- Adopted health and safety measures for the protection of staff and local communities;
- Implemented a waste disposal management system for 100 percent of its rolling stock; and,
- Donated leftover food to local food banks and charities.

In addition to hard-copy brochures available directly from GCRC and from travel agencies selling Rocky Mountaineer Tours, the company has a very extensive Web site (www.rockymountaineer.com) which includes a company history, details of its environmental achievements, its staff, and other interesting information. An interactive forum, *Train Talk*, lets train buffs chat with other rail enthusiasts.

Great Canadian Railtour's Policies and Practices

In 1990, the Canadian federal government decided to drastically reduce the heavily subsidized service of VIA Rail, Canada's national passenger railway, and to privatize the Rocky Mountaineer daylight service that had been launched in 1988 as a product for tourists. The Great Canadian Railtour Company (GCRC) made the successful bid.

As the company expanded, both in terms of frequency of operations and passengers carried, so did the commitment of president and CEO Peter Armstrong to responsible business practices and corporate citizenship.

GCRC is dedicated to setting the standards for social and environmental practices and good corporate citizenship in the tourism industry. The company's investment in an environmental policy and comprehensive waste management system was born from a concern for the environment, the health and safety of its employees, and the local people who live and work in the communities in British Columbia and Alberta through which the Rocky Mountaineer trains travel.

In December 1997, GCRC unveiled its *Environmental Policy and Procedures Manual (EPPM)*, a 308-page document containing policies and practices that have minimal environmental impact and promote environmental awareness of Canada's natural resources to tourists from around the world. The EPPM provides employees with practical information on how to operate and maintain company facilities in an environmentally sound manner, while meeting or exceeding government regulations and company policy. It provides for a consistent approach to environmental protection throughout the company and allows for the measurement and evaluation of environmental performance. The EPPM serves as an effective tool for increasing environmental awareness among GCRC contractors and suppliers.

The program introduced some specific environmental measures: reusable silverware replaced disposable plastic onboard its trains, recycled materials are used wherever possible, and trains have been designated smoke-free. These measures enhance the onboard environment, and the smoke-free trains greatly reduce the risk of forest fires, which threaten and destroy wildlife habitat, forests, and communities throughout western Canada and the Canadian Rockies.

In April 1999, after three years of research and development, GCRC completed the implementation of a waste disposal management system for 100 percent of its rolling stock (60 cars) at a cost to the company of C\$4.2 million (approximately US\$2.8 million as of August 2000). No laws exist in Canada governing or discouraging the dumping of untreated human waste directly onto the tracks, so GCRC has effectively set the benchmark in this area. In 1999, some 180,000 gallons of raw sewage was prevented from entering the ecosystem – 100 percent of the waste is contained in retention tanks until it can be disposed of properly. The annual cost of operating the system is estimated at C\$140,000-\$160,000.

Plans for the future include the development of an integrated infrastructure allowing the waste to be directly deposited in the local municipality sewage system, eliminating the current intermediate step of transferring it by truck.

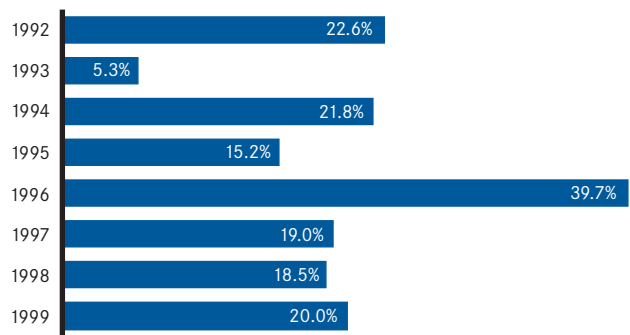
Increased staff motivation – as a result of the different environmental, health, and safety policies and practices introduced by GCRC – has contributed to sharply increased staff retention. In 1999, for example, more than 94 percent of the onboard guest services attendants who were working for the company the previous season returned to their jobs.

The measures have also led to a number of suggestions for workplace improvements from employees through the company's Valued Idea Program. In 1996 the President's Award was presented to an employee who initiated a program to donate unused food to local food banks, rather than disposing of remaining meals at the end of a train trip. This is now an ongoing commitment.

Results

GCRC's investment in sustainable policies and practices was originally motivated by a concern for the environment and the health and safety of its employees and local communities. Yet experience has proved that the environmental and social benefits are easily matched by the business returns.

Annual Growth in Passenger Numbers, 1992-1999 Rocky Mountaineer Railtours



Benefits

To Great Canadian Railtour Company:

- A successful business, showing almost 800 percent growth in passenger rail tour capacity in 10 years and 830 percent growth in number of passengers carried
- Increased visibility through accreditation by the Mountain Parks Heritage Interpretation Association
- Significant goodwill in the local communities, within the travel industry, and the public sector
- Enhanced reputation as a conservation-minded rail tour operator and an example for other operators to follow
- Motivated employees, leading to increased loyalty and a higher retention rate

To the Destination:

- Protection and enhancement of the environment
- Promotion of western Canada and the Canadian Rockies as a tourism destination
- Support of local charities through food donations to local food banks
- Stimulus to other railway companies in Canada and abroad to adopt similar conservation efforts and waste disposal management systems

To the Traveler:

- A more enriching travel and tourism experience
- The opportunity to travel in a healthier internal and external environment
- Increased environmental awareness and respect for the national heritage and local communities
- Preservation of the mountain national parks for their future enjoyment, as well as that of their children



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About BEST

Business Enterprises for Sustainable Travel (BEST) is an initiative of The Conference Board, the world's premier business membership and research network, in association with the World Travel & Tourism Council, the travel industry's global business leaders' forum. Support is provided by several foundations, including the Ford and Charles Stewart Mott Foundations.

BEST's mission is to create and disseminate knowledge for the travel and tourism industry and the traveling public on business practices that enrich destination communities, enhance travelers' experiences, and promote economic prosperity. BEST identifies practices that contribute to the long-term sustainability of the communities in which the travel and tourism industry operates. If your company has practices that we should be aware of, please contact us.

BEST Practices highlights successful business practices adopted by travel and tourism companies that advance their business objectives while enhancing the social and economic well-being of destination communities. Examples featured in this series are drawn from BEST's extensive and ever-growing database of the latest sustainable travel and tourism practices.

About the World Travel & Tourism Council

The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) is the global business leaders' forum for travel and tourism. Its 112 members are chief executives from all sectors of the industry, including accommodation, catering, entertainment, recreation, transportation, and other travel-related services. Its central goal is to work with governments to realize the full economic impact of the world's largest generator of wealth and jobs – travel and tourism.

