

Moccasin Trails

Video Clip 3: Accessibility

Q: As far as the packages go, I was also wondering about accessibility types because I imagine some customers that would really like to experience those experiences but are not able to.

A: That's an awesome question, and I'm so glad you asked that because it's-- We had a situation last year where we ran into that. And it's made us change our way of thinking, how we want to change the visitor's way of thinking with the Indigenous lens. We actually had that with an accessible lens, and it's actually changed the way we operate, and it's changed the way we develop experiences now. We had a wheelchair lady have one of our experiences in our canoe last year in September. And we were prepared for her, but the way Frank and I tackled it, it was-- You know what? We're going to get you, and it doesn't matter how we're going to do it. We're just going to get you in here. There is no other option. You're taking this tour with us. It's not-- Oh, geez. I don't know if you can come. It's, no. So, we just said, "No. You're coming with us. We're going to make this work. What do you need to make it work?" And she kind of looked, and she said, "Well, I have this special seat in my truck." You know? Like, yeah. Go grab it. Let's go. We put it down. We put it into the canoe. We strapped it down. I ended up getting some herc straps [i.e., ratchet straps], and we put down the seat. We picked her up. We put her into the seat that she had. And she was waist down, I don't know what that is, waist down, paraplegic? Quadri-- I don't know. It's the waist down. So, she still is able to use her arms for paddling, but-- So, we just put her into this canoe, and we treated her-- There was no special treatment for her. It was just-- Hey. Let's get into the canoe, and you're just one of these other 16 people in the canoe. There's no special attention or people staring at you or checking in with you every five seconds: "Are you okay? Do you need anything?" And she said that was the best part of it, Greg. She goes, "You just made it work." And I go to other places, wineries-- I go to other tourism-- And

they're like, "Oh. Are you okay? Do you-- And they really, they treat me with kid gloves." And she said, "The beauty thing is you guys didn't do that. You put me in the canoe, and then you just let me be." And she said, "I love that because I just-- It felt for those 2 hours-- It felt like I wasn't even paralyzed. It just felt like I was just one of the 16 paddlers and enjoying the songs and seeing the eagles and seeing the salmon." And she goes, "I'll never forget that experience." And actually, she goes around and talks-- She's an advocate of accessible tourism. And she goes around and tells that story all the time about her experience with Moccasin Trails and how we just tackled that issue. So, a follow up from that was it made us look as a business of saying, "What are we doing? We handled that, but what are we doing? Maybe we should look at getting some funding to maybe retrofit one of our canoes. Let's take one row. Like, it's just a simple row. Let's take one row, and let's make sure that that row of our canoe is accessible-friendly. Maybe it's-- We have to bring it to a manufacturer to get them to customize this one row or retrofit this one row to make sure that it's accessible-friendly." So, right now, it's made us look at our business. And it's changed our approach, but again, we need to work with the nonprofit organizations of accessibility, which there are a lot out there, to be able to say, "Okay. How do we make this work now?" Obviously, that's going to cost money. It's going to cost a few thousand dollars to get someone to retrofit and weld and whatever, a carpenter, a welder, to come in and fix this. We-- It's important for us, but we're just still a baby. We can't put money towards that, but is there a partnership here where you can get some money, and we will do it for you. So, we need to work with those nonprofit organizations for that as well, but it's changed our way of thinking. And it was really-- It was an awesome experience, and-- To this day, I've seen the presentation she's made, and our picture's there, and she talks about how Moccasin Trails-- Just was so over the moon about just being that accessible-friendly. And just making it work.

Q: What about people that maybe could not participate? Because it is-- You're still doing active things, like, all this paddling, hiking the trails. Not everybody can do that. Do you have other products, or, like you just said,

you just make it work with anybody? Maybe even for senior people that can't even paddle?

A: Yeah.

Q: Have you had that situation?

A: We've had that situation last year. And again, as we're building new experiences, we're learning as we're going, right? So, when we did a pilot run in West Kelowna to work with the Westbank First Nations to build the Kelowna package, we wanted to take people up Mount Boucherie, which is a pretty steep hill, but it's a beautiful hike. For those who have done it, it's beautiful. It's one of the most beautiful hikes in the whole Okanagan Valley, but it is kind of challenging. And so, we had said, "Well, let's take them for a hike up there." Well, there was some accessible people, maybe just obese, obesity or whatever, that it wasn't for them. And they kind of looked at this, and they just said, "Okay. Well, Greg, I don't even want to try this. I just-- I don't-- I can't do it." And so, we convinced them maybe try it. We had another individual, a staff member, go with them. So, we had our cultural leader at the front who has the knowledge of traditional plants and medicines, but then we had a staff person at the back making sure that we kind of motivate-- Turns out that we got about a quarter of the way up, and then there was three of them just looked and said, "I can't. I can't go up." So, the staff person then took them back down. The leader took the rest of the group, cultural leader, and then we took them to the museum for, you know, kind of an archeological, historical lesson, a guided tour of the museum that the other group didn't get to see. So, it's something that we really need to keep in mind when building packages, to make sure that-- There's a fine line of, you know, making sure that people do have that full experience, like-- And then also, making sure that people are able to do the experience, like a hike. That's the hiking part. The canoeing part is easy because it's not much paddling. We're not going through rapids. In Kamloops, it's really easy 'cause we go with the current, so there's a lot of times where our paddlers will just have their paddle just on their lap and just so immersed in the elders' and the cultural leaders' stories and songs, and they're not even paddling. And then we're going

with the current, so I'm just in the back steering the canoe. On Lake Okanagan, it's a little different. You do have to paddle. There is no current, but it's a really light paddle. It's not hardcore, anything like that. So, there's elders that kind of, just like this. And that's fine. You know? So, our canoe adventures, our canoe experiences are very, very-- Very light activity, I guess, if that's the word, but we really have to look at our hiking. We're working right now-- Is we can't have it too steep because at the end of the day that's not our main clientele. Our main clientele for hikes is not adventure seekers. It's cultural explorers. You know, if you're an adventure seeker, then there's great hikes around the Okanagan Valley that are steep. You know? There's one in Salmon Arm there. What's that big bluff? Or-- The Enderby Cliffs. There's huge hikes, but those are for those adventure seekers. That's not really our market. Our market is those cultural explorers that can go on a nice leisurely hike with some running shoes and really immerse themselves in the educational component of that hike. And the traditional plant use and medicines and listening to our elders' stories and ceremonies and songs.

Please note that this transcript has been slightly modified; it is not a verbatim copy of the original audio clip.