

Best Kept Secret in North America?

Please don't keep the secret.....

By Cathy Dawson

What is that most tourists do not know that could be forcing them to compromise on the quality of the getaway experiences that they enjoy? -There is more to life than franchise businesses. While franchises effectively offer predictability and some form of quality assurance with respect to restaurants and accommodation facilities, there is rarely any point in incurring the expense of leaving your home town to experience sameness in a new place.

Many food connoisseurs have a network of associates who refer each other to unique dining experiences that are not available from franchises and many people are willing to drive to get to these referred locations. They learn of these things by joining clubs, attending meetings or even on line. Yet, it seems that there are few opportunities for those seeking to partner these unique dining experiences with an accommodation provider, for options to make themselves known. It seems that there may be some exceptional accommodation, non-franchise options that are kept quiet. If only these two unique type experiences could be aligned easily in an attempt to create a truly memorable getaway.

All the while, most truly charming communities do house a selection of B & B's that typically are run by people who love to provide hospitality service to their town's visitors. They are local people who know about the best shops, points of interest and often have informal type partnerships with local service providers that have been created specifically to provide maximum added value to their guests. Knowing about these kinds of accommodation options could provide exponential benefit to the non-franchise restaurant visitor, often for not a great deal more expenditure. Nonetheless, these alternate accommodation providers are often so cloaked due to advertising budget constraints (the ones that many small businesses face), that no one knows they are there. These accommodation providers, many of top quality, are the best-kept secret in North America!

People who travel worldwide recognize that Bed and Breakfast patronage in North America is considerably less than it is in Europe. This does not mean that a guest would necessarily be compromising their standards by choosing this form of overnight stay on our continent. It just means that franchise hotels usually have the highest profile. Many of our highway intersections have been built within the last few decades. Hotels with their big budgets, have eagerly bought up those high visibility locations. When hotels are full, their front desk staff often says "There is nothing available in the area" as a way to suggest their sister property in a neighbouring community as the next best choice. This is an excellent business strategy-for the hotel-but not necessarily what is best for the weary traveler. Many times in this circumstance a nearby B & B does in fact have a room available.

For those of you who love to meet people, enjoy the true personality of a community and feel the rejuvenation of an escape type getaway, you owe it to

yourself to consider a Bed and Breakfast retreat. Unfortunately, you will probably have to do a little bit of internet surfing to put your getaway pieces together. Regional government mandates mean that many truly inviting and interesting small towns are wrapped together in generic advertising campaigns for the regions they happen to be located in. This advertising structure seems to be more aimed at being politically appropriate versus informative to the end user, therefore requiring even more surfing and linking to uncover the value that these small town communities offer.

Many good B & B listing websites exist and are a good start, but there is not yet a good network of sharing the excitement of non-franchise getaway experiences. Become a tourist who gets value for your money, lives an experience that stands out from the rest and become an advocate for Bed and Breakfast accommodation on our continent. Everyone will benefit if together we burst the bubble of secrecy and 'B & B blab' away! Plan to eradicate this secret, once and, in fact, for the benefit of all!