

Instruments of peace



By Nate Smelle

LIVING IN NORTH Hastings for almost 18 years now I have come to appreciate the value of tourism on many levels. Whether noticing the return of cottagers and tourists on the May long weekend, waiting in line to get a seat on one of the local patios during a sunny summer day, or hearing the hum of snowmobiles during the winter, any local business owner will attest to the fundamental role tourism has in feeding our local economy. Because the warm temperatures and frequent sunshine during the summer always tend to be enough of a draw for visitors, there is no better time of year to observe the influence of tourism on our lives and livelihoods than during the winter. While there are many reasons why people come to the Bancroft area between May and October, from late December until early March there is really only one ? snowmobiling. Sure there is ice fishing, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, pond hockey, and many other things to do when the temperatures begin to drop and the snow piles up; however, when the weather does not produce the right conditions for our local trails network everyone in town feels it in one way or another. Reading about the theme of this year's World Tourism Day ? Tourism and Peace ? on the United Nations website, I was reminded of an equally, if not more important service the tourism sector provides society as a whole; that being, it's ability to function as an instrument of peace. Following the links through the UN's maze of information, I found myself looking at a chart that lists the theme of each World Tourism Day since its inception 44 years ago. Some of the past themes on the list include: Tourism and Green Investments; Rethinking Tourism; Tourism for inclusive growth; Tourism and rural development; Sustainable tourism ? a tool for development; Tourism for all ? promoting universal accessibility; Tourism and water: protecting our common future; Tourism and Biodiversity; Tourism: responding to the challenge of climate change; Tourism: a driving force for poverty alleviation, job creation and social harmony; and, Tourism ? a tool for peace and dialogue among civilizations. Every one of the World Tourism Day themes on the UN's list were conducive to building a more peaceful global society and healthier future for those of us alive today and future generations. Reflecting on each of the themes and how they are interconnected with our ability to nurture a peaceful quality of life for all through responsible tourism, I recalled a statement from the Canadian Peace Museum's founder and president Chris Houston regarding why North Hastings, Canada, and the world for that matter, needs such a tourist destination. ?I appreciate the relative peacefulness of Canada, but I do not take it for granted,? writes Houston. ?We are opening the Canadian Peace Museum to promote peace and to showcase the links between peace, conflict, equity, cohesive communities, art, activism and climate change. The rise of polarization, misinformation, disinformation, and hatred risks violence, and the urgency to provoke important conversations about our individual and collective responsibilities to be peaceful and promote peace is high. ?Certainly anyone who has ever spent a significant amount of time in another part of the world, immersed in a culture and surrounded by language other than their own understands why it is much better to find common ground than it is to draw lines in the sand. As someone who has travelled to more than a dozen countries, and encountered many different cultures firsthand, when I saw the UN's list of themes I was reminded of how my travel experiences have encouraged me to engage with those I meet on the road in a respectful way. By making respect for

the local people and culture a key priority when travelling, I have always found more open doors than closed ones. In order to take on this responsibility sincerely, a substantial amount of pre-trip research must be conducted. With every adventure that comes to pass, it becomes clearer that the deeper I dig into this research, the more open doors I find waiting upon my arrival. Before every journey there are a few subjects which must be researched if one intends to show respect for the local people and cultures wherever they may roam. First, a basic understanding of the common language ? especially certain words and phrases ? is absolutely essential. When I began travelling outside of my comfort zone almost 25 years ago, this required a trip to the local library or bookstore to pick up a book to translate whichever language I was about to encounter to English. Now, all one needs to do to acquire the basics of a new language, is search one of the many language translation apps on their phone or computer. Although some might argue that researching the basics of language before exploring a new place is no longer necessary thanks to such software, from my experience abroad, the local taxi drivers, guides, servers, and shopkeepers I meet tend to appreciate an honest ? although often poorly pronounced ? first attempt to speak their language. Next, it is wise to investigate the most popular traditional foods you will find on the local menu. Taking a few moments to study the many unique comfort foods people enjoy around the world, not only expands your own palate, it also sends a message to those you meet that you are open to experiencing, appreciating, and learning about their culture. Lastly, and most importantly, it is wise to learn as much about the religions and local traditions you will encounter on your journey before you insert yourself in a different community and culture. Acknowledging the varying significance of the role that religion and spirituality play in different parts of the world, one cannot explore and experience new cultures in a respectful and responsible way, unless one understands what the local people they meet consider sacred. As previously mentioned, the more pre-trip research one does, the richer their travel experience will be. When we invest our time in understanding how other people around the world live and what they value, we inevitably discover that there is more common ground to stand upon than there are reasons to fight one another. Through this realization, we also learn how as responsible and respectful tourists, we all have the power to become effective instruments of peace.