

Welcome

Travellers from around the world are telling us they want to explore and live a life less ordinary. We know Canada is a place where they can fulfill this dream. YOU—the tourism operators—are key to delivering on that promise.

To identify and showcase the best brand-aligned travel experiences, ones that fulfill Destination Canada's (DC) mandate for marketing internationally, DC created the Canadian Signature Experiences (CSE) program.

The great thing about this program is that it is FREE! No money is required to apply, or to be in the collection. You do need to commit time to ensure your activities demonstrate your company's investment in Destination Canada's and PMO's core international markets.

This guide contains the important information about the program, eligibility criteria and the application process. It also contains tips on completing certain sections of the application form, and Destination Canada's expectations of members in the collection.

It is highly recommended that you review the various Destination Canada resources to familiarize yourself with the Canada tourism brand, Explorer Quotient® (EQ®) research, and current members in the collection (<http://en.destinationcanada.com/resources-industry>). These documents are referred to in certain questions found on the application form.

If you have not already done so, take the [CSE pre-qualifying quiz](#) to see if you meet the basic program criteria. When you feel certain your company has an excellent visitor experience that is a great fit within the Canadian Signature Experiences collection, contact your Provincial Marketing Organization ([PMO](#)) to get started and to request a formal application form.

Thank you for your interest in the program.

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Program information

What is the Canadian Signature Experiences (CSE) collection?

The CSE is a collection of visitor experiences that are best aligned to deliver internationally on Destination Canada's *Canada. Keep Exploring* brand promise. It is a brand-alignment and market development program designed to:

- Help change international travellers' perceptions of Canada, and generate demand for export-ready experiences that meet travellers' interests as defined by Destination Canada's Explorer Quotient® research
- Raise the bar by stimulating innovative product development and packaging, and increase the number of SMEs (small and medium businesses) selling in international markets and through the travel trade
- Drive international sales to Canadian tourism businesses and raise the profile of the depth and breadth of quality visitor experiences in our country
- Align Canadian tourism operators with Destination Canada's corporate strategy

Launched in 2011, there are currently 186 members in the CSE collection selling direct to the fully independent traveller (FIT), and/or through the travel trade for packaged independent travel (PIT) and group travel market. Authentically Canadian, the collection contains large and small companies, as well as rural, urban and remote experiences that are offered to mass and niche markets.

The program is not an accreditation program, nor is it a marketing campaign. However, Canadian Signature Experiences are integrated into Destination Canada's annual international marketing effort. The program does not promote a single company's full range of products, tour operator packages or self-discovery activities (e.g., circle routes, trails), nor is it designed to promote provincial or regional travel destinations. It promotes Canada.

What is a Canadian Signature Experience?

Canadian Signature Experiences (CSEs) are saleable visitor experiences that respond to travellers' desires to venture beyond the beaten tourist paths. CSEs dive deeper into Canada's natural environment and/or authentic, local culture and connect travellers with places and people that enrich their lives. They engage visitors in a series of memorable travel activities, revealed over time, that are inherently personal, engage the senses and make connections on an emotional, physical, spiritual, intellectual or social level.

These experiences embody experiential travel. They are designed, programmed and delivered for inquisitive and curious people who want to do more than see the sites. They want to fill their suitcases with authentic experiences that touch their hearts and minds, carving memories that last a lifetime.

Experiences like this are the new 'currency' that is differentiating tourism businesses and destinations around the world, and expanding the ways travellers engage with people, places and cultures.

For tourism businesses, embracing experiential travel requires a true commitment to “thinking like a traveller.” Experiences are not about packaging and discounts; they’re about layering on value that people are willing to pay for.

Who should apply?

We are looking for a range of visitor experiences, offered by Canadian companies, that will entice international travellers to choose Canada. The experience must exemplify Canada’s tourism brand and engage travellers with the culture, people or geography in ways that are authentic and memorable.

General eligibility criteria

- Deliver a travel experience that meets the definition of a Canadian Signature Experience
- Have been in operation a minimum of two years, delivering travel experiences
- Have a website with a clear call to action for sales
- Be doing business internationally or be actively invested in targeted international marketing activities in one of Destination Canada’s target markets¹
- Be working with the travel trade and meet the nationally accepted export-ready criteria²
- Be the owner, provider and deliverer of the experience, and the point of sales for customers³
- Have rights-free, high-resolution images of the proposed experience

Benefits of being in the collection

Although the program benefits differ between CSE members, the key benefits members can expect include:

- Increased sales and global recognition of being in the collection
- Increased international exposure and marketing by Destination Canada through CSE integration initiatives developed and delivered globally by Destination Canada and its PMO partners
- Increased packaging or cross-promotional opportunities with other CSE members
- Strengthened business relationships with the travel trade, and invitations to participate in networking events
- Increased media exposure specific when hosting media FAM trips
- Access to new digital assets through participation in photo and video shoots
- Prestige and marketplace credibility, plus peer recognition

¹ A company must be actively investing dollars in advertising and promotional activities that purposefully target international visitors. Actively making marketing investments (financial or in-kind) in partnership with a PMO’s international marketing efforts is also acceptable. Destination Canada’s target markets include the UK, France, Germany, Australia, Japan, China, South Korea, Mexico, Brazil, India and the USA.

² A company must be compliant with the nationally accepted [Export-Ready Criteria](#). A major emphasis of the CSE program is working with the travel trade to assist in developing both awareness of Canada as a destination and ensuring there is a critical mass of purchasable travel experiences in our primary international markets.

³ Companies that package and/or resell travel experiences afforded by other companies are ineligible for membership. An application submitted jointly, by no more than two partnering businesses, may be considered. In such instances, partnering companies must certify that they co-own, co-manage and/or co-deliver the designated Signature Experience described in the application. At least one of the two partners must be export-ready.

The application process

How do I apply to the program?

Before starting an application

Before applying, you must take the [CSE pre-qualifying quiz](#) and be able to answer, without hesitation, ‘YES’ to all the questions asked. Also make sure you have reviewed the recommended Destination Canada resources and program documents. *This will best ensure your company is eligible for the CSE program.*

DESTINATION CANADA resources

- Consult [Destination Canada’s website, Brand Toolkit and Experiences Toolkit](#) and understand what the Canada Keep Exploring Brand is all about

CSE program documents

- Consult the [CSE backgrounder](#) and understand how the CSE program is a part of the Canada Brand
- Consult the list of [current CSE members](#) and are familiar with the current membership and the experiences they are selling
- Consult the [CSE Program Eligibility Criteria](#) and are satisfied that your company has a unique Canadian Signature Experience
- Consult [Destination Canada’s Export-Ready Criteria](#) and are satisfied that you are export-ready

While the above steps may appear to be cumbersome, they are the best way to prepare yourself before you spend the time and effort in completing an application form.

How to apply

Your [PMO](#) is your first point of contact to express your interest in joining the Canadian Signature Experiences program. You must provide them with a signed copy of your pre-qualifying quiz. Once your PMO has determined you meet the program’s mandatory criteria, they will provide you with a copy of the application form, and can answer any questions you may have. They will also make an initial assessment of your potential in the program and can provide guidance on completing your application. If you are not quite ready for the CSE program, they may be in a position to provide coaching/mentoring support for you to meet the program criteria.

Tips on completing the application form

The application form is divided into three sections: (1) general company information, (2) sales and marketing information, and (3) details about the proposed Canadian Signature Experience.

Some questions on the application form require specific and carefully drafted answers. These questions will be accompanied by footnotes to provide you with additional context surrounding the question and tips on how best to answer the questions. Remember that *the answers you give help us to determine how well you meet the program’s criteria for membership*. Coaching on the questions may be available from your PMO.

Who evaluates the applications?

The application will initially be reviewed and evaluated by your [PMO](#). At this stage, unsuccessful applicants will be notified, told why their application was declined, and be provided with constructive feedback.

Subject to a favourable review, the PMO will recommend your application for approval to Destination Canada. The PMO and Destination Canada will then complete a final review and render a final decision.

Successful applicants will be notified by Destination Canada that they have been conditionally approved.

What is the conditional acceptance period and what is required to be officially accepted into the program?

The purpose of this phase of the program is to ensure that all necessary steps are taken before Destination Canada announces the inclusion of a new member. This phase also ensures that members are ready to accept inquiries and transact sales from the very first day they are announced to industry.

To be officially accepted in the program, applicants must:

- Work with a Destination Canada-appointed travel writer to create editorial copy and a visitor experience statement that will describe the designated Canadian Signature Experience.
- Submit a minimum of three rights-free, high-definition images of the Canadian Signature Experience, for use in marketing materials.
- If possible, submit one rights-free, high-definition video of the Canadian Signature Experience.
- Provide the URL of the designated experience landing page of their company's website. This will go live the day the designated experience is announced, and must include prominent placement of the Canadian Signature Experience member badge.
- Ensure their website has a clear call to action for product sales for independent travellers, and ideally for media and the travel trade.

Companies that meet the requirements of conditional acceptance will have their place in the collection confirmed. This must remain confidential until Destination Canada officially announces new members to the industry.

How are new members announced?

Destination Canada, in conjunction with the PMO, will announce new members of the Canadian Signature Experiences collection. In preparation for official CSE announcements, Destination Canada will use the materials available to them to:

- Create a webpage for each new Canadian Signature Experience, to be posted on Destination Canada's *Canada. Keep Exploring* website.
- Prepare the announcements for the new collection and coordinate communication timings with the new CSE member and their PMO.
- Ensure all materials have both English and French versions.

Expectations of members in the collection

What are the CSE members' responsibilities?

The program has the greatest chance of succeeding through the collaborative efforts of the members, Destination Canada and the PMO.

To retain membership in the collection, members are required to:

- Continue to sell and deliver their designated Canadian Signature Experience, as submitted and approved.
- Discuss and seek approval for any changes to the Canadian Signature Experience that impact the marketing activities of Destination Canada and the travel trade channels. Destination Canada acknowledges there are times this needs to occur, but anticipates this to be the exception not the norm.
- Actively invest in international marketing in one or more of Destination Canada core and emerging markets.
- Promote their company's participation in the Canadian Signature Experiences collection, and ensure their staff are knowledgeable about the program so they may appropriately respond to sales/booking inquiries.
- Maintain a webpage for the approved Canadian Signature Experience year-round, even if the experience is seasonal. This is to ensure that travel trade, media and consumers can obtain information about the experience year-round.
- Post the CSE member badge on the Canadian Signature Experience landing page of their website.
- Provide support to the creation of targeted marketing materials that promote their CSE (these are produced by Destination Canada or PMO).
- Continue to comply with [export-ready market criteria](#) established by Destination Canada.
- Respond to Destination Canada/PMO inquiries regarding the Canadian Signature Experience within 72 hours.
- Communicate changes in key program contacts to Destination Canada/PMO in a timely manner.
- Complete an annual member survey that provides feedback and core performance metrics on the program and sales of the company's Canadian Signature Experience.
- On an annual basis, share with Destination Canada/PMO qualitative and/or quantitative business performance results that are attributable, in part, to their association with the CSE program. (Note: results that are shared will be kept in confidence and used only for reporting aggregated performance measurement data.)

Members are also encouraged to:

- Participate in media or travel trade FAM trips if requested by Destination Canada or PMO.
- Support Destination Canada or PMO-led photo/video shoots of their Signature Experience.
- Provide new rights-free, high-definition photos or videos of their Canadian Signature Experience as they become available.
- Use the CSE member badge in their marketing materials when promoting their Canadian Signature Experience.
- Participate in partner marketing programs for CSE members.
- Participate in periodic Destination Canada-led member WebEx's, information updates and education events.
- Contribute to fellow member and industry education sessions through participation in case studies, interviews or special requests from Destination Canada or PMO.

Please note that Destination Canada and PMO will annually review the current membership to ensure continued integrity of the collection.

Can I leave the CSE program or be asked to leave?

Yes. To be market responsive and competitive, companies need to be able to move in directions that support their growth and success; this applies equally to members, Destination Canada and your PMO.

Members choosing to leave the program

A company may wish to leave the program for a variety of reasons. They may no longer offer the approved Canadian Signature Experience, may sell their business, lose their operating license, or feel they are not receiving enough benefits from the program.

Due to the level of investment and the integrated reach of the online and traditional marketing activities, **members are asked to provide Destination Canada and their PMO with three months' written notice if they would like to leave the collection.** This will allow Destination Canada and the PMO time to:

- Notify the distribution channels
- Remove the member's designated experience from Destination Canada and/or PMO consumer website
- Halt any promotional activities in-progress
- Cancel any future promotional plans for the Canadian Signature Experience
- Inform travel trade partners (if appropriate)

Members may be asked to leave the collection

Destination Canada may need to ask a member to leave the program. Reasons for this can include:

- Non-compliance with the program requirements
- Evidence that the quality of the designated Signature Experience or the integrity of the CSE member no longer aligns with the other members of the collection
- Complaints from industry or consumers about problems with the company that could impact the integrity of the program, other members and/or Destination Canada's/PMO's reputation
- Not in good standing with Destination Canada or the PMO. As examples: non-payment of registration fees associated with Destination Canada or PMO marketing initiatives you choose to participate in or non-provision of in-kind contributions associated with a member's participation in Destination Canada and/or PMO-led marketing initiatives

If any of these circumstances occur, Destination Canada and/or the PMO will contact the company owner/CEO to discuss concerns. If plans can be made to resolve the problems in a set period of time, Destination Canada may opt to let the member stay in the collection.

If there is no resolution, after a set period of time (communicated to the member in advance), the member will be informed in writing that they are no longer in the CSE program. All marketing activities will immediately cease, and the member will be expected to stop using any CSE member badge or marketing resources that identify their company as part of the collection.