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1. What is the Canadian Signature Experiences collection?

Canadian Signature Experiences (CSE) is a collection of visitor experiences chosen and managed by the Destination Canada. They deliver internationally on Destination Canada's *Canada. Keep Exploring* brand promise. The collection represents 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. It is not designed to promote a single company's full range of products, individual packages of tour operators or self-discovery activities (e.g., circle routes, trails). Nor is it designed to promote provincial or regional travel destinations. This program promotes Canada.

It is also not a marketing campaign. However, Canadian Signature Experiences are integrated into Destination Canada's annual international marketing efforts.

2. What is a Canadian Signature Experience?

A Canadian Signature Experience is a purchasable visitor experience that responds to travellers' desires to venture beyond the beaten tourist paths. It dives deeper into Canada's natural environment and/or authentic, local culture that connects with people and enriches their lives. It engages 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.

Experiences are the new 'currency' that differentiates tourism businesses and destinations around the world. They are expanding the ways travellers can engage with people, places and cultures. For tourism businesses, embracing experiential travel requires a true commitment to "thinking like a traveller." Most important, these experiences are about layering on value that people are willing to pay for; they're not about packages and discounts.

3. Why did Destination Canada create the Canadian Signature Experiences program?

The CSE program is a brand-alignment and market development program designed to:

- Help change perceptions in the international marketplace of travelling within Canada and to broaden the view of what Canada has to offer as a destination
- Encourage tourism operators to align with Destination Canada's corporate strategy and Canada's tourism brand to offer the experiences travellers are seeking and to generate awareness of the destinations' unique/differentiated visitor experiences
- Create demand for Canada by highlighting export-ready travel experiences that meet target travellers' interests as identified by Destination Canada's Explorer Quotient® (EQ) research
- Drive travellers down all paths-to-purchase from fully independent travel (FIT) to packaged independent travel (PIT), and/or group travel by showcasing compelling Canadian experiences in CTC's marketing, media and sales activities

- Raise the bar and stimulate new product development and packaging with industry to create travel experiences that respond to Canada's target travellers' motivations
- Increase the number of small- and medium-size businesses (SMEs) in international markets

4. Where are Canadian Signature Experiences profiled?

Destination Canada promotes Canadian Signature Experiences in our five core markets—the UK, France, Germany, Australia and the USA—as well as our six emerging markets of China, South Korea, Mexico, Japan, Brazil and India. Destination Canada works actively with the travel trade and travel media in-market to ensure integration of the collection in trade development, media/PR, social media and consumer-direct marketing initiatives.

PMOs and Destination Canada often undertake cooperative marketing initiatives together in CTC primary markets, which CSE members can potentially benefit from. PMOs also make marketing investments in Destination Canada's prescribed markets and other international countries, which may accrue other potential benefits for CSE members.

5. What are the benefits of being in the Canadian Signature Experiences collection?

Although the program benefits vary between CSE members, key benefits include:

- Increased sales
- Worldwide recognition
- Increased international exposure and marketing through CSE initiatives developed and delivered globally by CTC and/or PMOs
- Increased packaging or cross-promotional opportunities with other CSE members
- Strengthened business relationships with the travel trade, including invitations to participate in networking events
- Increased media exposure, specifically when hosting media FAM trips
- Access to new digital assets through participation in photo and video shoots organized by Destination Canada or PMO
- Prestige and marketplace credibility, plus peer recognition

6. How much does it cost to belong to the program?

There is no cost to apply to or be a member of the CSE program. However, Destination Canada and/or PMOs may present marketing partnership buy-in opportunities. CSE members will receive advance notice and details. However, there is no obligation to participate in, or buy into, these opportunities. Neither Destination Canada nor the PMOs are obligated to offer specific opportunities to individual members.

7. 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. Please refer to the [CSE program eligibility criteria](#).

8. When can I apply?

As it is not deadline driven, the opportunity to apply is year-round.

9. What are the main changes to the program?

In 2014, Destination Canada and 13 Provincial and Territorial Marketing Organizations (PMOs) agreed to evolve the CSE program on several levels.

- The CSE program is an initiative that is co-managed by Destination Canada and PMOs across Canada. It is currently a CTC-supported program embraced by all PMOs and connected to tourism businesses offering export-ready travel experiences.
- In 2015, the PMOs will assume more responsibility for managing the membership application process. In addition, Destination Canada and PMOs will co-manage the member renewal process to ensure that existing members continue to be in good standing.
- The CSE program will have a greater emphasis on trade development initiatives. Through past experience with CSE integration efforts across our global markets, we have concluded that export-ready CSE members that have established business relationships with the travel trade are critical to the goals, objectives and benefits associated with the CSE program. Going forward, [export-market readiness is a mandatory criteria](#). All new and current members will be required to be export ready.
- Destination Canada will also continue to use the CSE collection to influence media story ideas and published media articles, to engage in social-media conversations about Canada and to support broadcast media where it is advantageous to do so.

10. What are the significant changes to the eligibility criteria for the program?

To be eligible for the Canadian Signature Experiences program, a company must:

- Deliver a travel experience that meets the definition of a Canadian Signature Experience
- Have been in operation for a minimum of two years, delivering travel experiences
- Have a website with a clear call to action for sales
- Do business internationally or be actively invested in marketing activities in one of Destination Canada's target markets
- Be working with the travel trade
- Meet the nationally accepted export-ready criteria

- Be the owner, provider and deliverer of the travel experience, as well as the point of sales for customers
- Have rights-free, high-resolution images of the proposed signature experience

Please refer to the [Program Criteria and Pre-Qualifying Quiz](#) for more information.

11. What is a trade-friendly company?

Trade-friendly tourism businesses are market-ready and willing to sell their Canadian Signature Experience through an international or domestic RTO or directly with a tour operator in-market. Destination Canada and PMOs know that for international markets, the travel-trade distribution channel is essential to strengthening both the long-haul packaged independent travel and group travel business. For more information on doing business with the travel trade, visit Destination Canada's corporate website, <http://en.destinationcanada.com/resources-industry> Resources section, where a video series is available on doing business with travel trade and doing business in overseas markets. Also refer to the [export ready criteria](#) associated with this program.

Companies that are trade friendly:

- Provide NET FIT/group rate contracts
- May offer travel agent commissions
- Have a current website with a call to action for the trade
- Provide high-resolution, rights-free images and videos that depict their experience
- Create concise, trade-relevant descriptions of their experience
- Are willing to host trade FAM tours
- Demonstrate a commitment to enter and stay in at least one of Destination Canada's core international markets for a minimum of three years
- Are willing to provide net rates, and guarantee space and departures at least 12-18 months in advance (depending on trade partner business cycle).

Companies that are international consumer ready:

- Have a current website with a clear call to action for the customer
- Use engaging, experiential imagery and video to promote the proposed signature experience
- Have online booking capabilities (minimum of email, but ideally with transactional capability) and respond to inquiries within 24 hours
- Demonstrate a willingness to host international media
- Have the ability to adapt to the needs of overseas clients
- Have a positive TripAdvisor score
- Engage in ongoing advocacy activities to drive repeat visitation to the destination, rebooking with your company and referrals

- Execute an internationally focused marketing plan and/or are actively engaged with local, regional and/or provincial marketing agencies that do international marketing.

12. What changes have been made to the application process?

All prospective applicants must follow a new application process. The PMO is the first point of contact for prospective applicants to express interest in joining the CSE program. PMOs have set up a protocol to internally administer the application process.

Here's how it works:

- 1) Contact your PMO and let them know you are interested in applying to the CSE program.
- 2) Your PMO will ask you to provide them with a completed copy of the brief pre-qualifying quiz.
- 3) Subject to review and consultation, your PMO will provide you with an application form.
 - Your PMO can answer any questions and make an initial assessment of your potential fit in the program.
 - Your PMO can provide guidance on completing the application.
 - If your business is not quite ready for the CSE program, your PMO may be in a position to provide coaching/mentoring support to help you meet the program criteria.
- 4) Complete and submit the application form to your PMO for evaluation.
- 5) If your application is unsuccessful at this stage, you will be notified and told your application was declined. You will also be provided with constructive feedback in case you wish to re-apply.
- 6) Favourable applications will be recommended to Destination Canada by the PMO. Both parties will complete a final review and render a final decision.
- 7) If you are a successful applicant, you will be notified by Destination Canada that you have been conditionally approved. Destination Canada will work with you to develop the required marketing assets (editorial copy and digital assets).
- 8) When conditional approval conditions are met, a formal media announcement will be prepared by Destination Canada and you will be officially accepted into the program.

13. What if I am already a member and want to make sure I still qualify? What steps can I proactively take to ensure I remain in the Collection?

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

- Continue to offer and advertise the designated Canadian Signature Experience on a regular basis
- Remain active in marketing in one or more of Destination Canada's and/or PMO's core and/or emerging markets through direct investment or partnership
- Complete an annual member survey that provides feedback and core performance metrics on the program and sale of the company's Canadian Signature Experience
- Maintain compliance with the program's mandatory [export-ready criteria](#).

- Respond to CTC and/or PMO inquiries regarding the Canadian Signature Experience within 72 hours
- Communicate changes in key program contacts to Destination Canada and PMO in a timely manner

14. Is my provincial or local tourism organization involved?

The CSE program is co-managed between Destination Canada and Canada's thirteen [PMOs](#). Each partner has specific responsibilities. PMOs are the first point of contact for tourism businesses applying to the program. They each have an established protocol for seeking, identifying and evaluating prospective new members. PMOs may be in a position to provide advice during the application process.

15. How long does it take to fill out the application?

That depends. We highly recommend that prospective applicants take the time to do some background research ([see CSE Application Guide](#)) before spending time and effort in completing an application form.

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

A number of the questions on the application form require specific information. These questions are accompanied by footnotes to provide applicants with additional context surrounding the question and a tip on how best to answer the question. Remember that answers help evaluators to determine how well applicants meet the program's criteria for membership. Coaching on the questions may be available from the PMO.

16. What happens if I apply and I'm not accepted? Can I re-apply?

Yes, you can re-apply if your application is unsuccessful. Destination Canada and PMOs want to support businesses that aspire to be in the collection. If you are not selected, you will be provided with constructive feedback.

17. What are the top three reasons tourism businesses are not be accepted into the program?

- 1) **The applicant does not sell an experience.** We set a very targeted definition for a Canadian Signature Experience. Many applicants do not pay attention to this when describing their proposed experience, often only writing about the physical infrastructure or the recreational activity, such as skiing, canoeing or horseback riding. They fail to capture the guest's engagement in the experience. Many applicants also struggle when asked to describe what makes their experience uniquely Canadian and different from similar types of businesses (e.g., whale watching, wildlife viewing, culinary programs, attractions). We strongly encourage you to do the recommended homework to see if your business is a good fit with the program ([see CSE Application Guide](#)).

- 2) **The applicant's experience is not in high enough demand internationally.** Our Explorer Quotient® research details the experience appeal based on EQ types. Applications are immediately declined if the primary experience does not appeal sufficiently to at least one of Destination Canada's primary global explorer types, which are Free Spirits, Authentic Experiencers and Cultural Explorers. It is important that applicants think about which travellers their Canadian Signature Experience appeals to, as this will be asked on the application form. Check out the [free resources on EQ research](#).
- 3) **The applicant demonstrates limited international marketing knowledge or effort.** To be effective internationally and for Destination Canada to include your Canadian Signature Experience in our marketing efforts, you must align with the program's [criteria on export readiness](#). Member companies must have a clear call to action to sell their products, and must have an established business relationship with either a receptive tour operator (RTO) or an in-market tour operator. Applicants must also provide rights-free, high-resolution images (and ideally video) of the experience, all of which should align with the [Canada tourism brand standards for digital assets](#).

Having a functional website does not qualify as an international marketing capacity. There has to be a concerted effort to drive international business to the company from at least one of Destination Canada's or PMOs' core markets, whether directly, and/or in partnership with a PMO or a regional destination marketing organization. A concerted effort includes active and integrated use of trade, media/PR, social media and/or consumer-direct marketing channels.

18. What is the conditional acceptance period?

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.

Destination Canada will contact successful applicants to advise them of what is required to be officially accepted into the CSE collection. This includes:

- Working with a Destination Canada-appointed travel writer to create editorial copy and a visitor experience statement, which will describe the designated Canadian Signature Experience.
- Providing Destination Canada and PMO with permission to use the accepted member's submitted digital assets for marketing purposes (members must sign a photo/video-licensing agreement).
- Providing the URL of the designated experience landing webpage on the company's website. This will go live the day the new member is officially announced, with the Canadian Signature Experience badge prominently placed on the landing webpage.
- Ensuring the website has a clear call to action for product sales for independent travellers (and ideally for media and the travel trade).
- Once they have met the requirements of the conditional acceptance period, companies will have their place in the collection confirmed. This will remain confidential until Destination Canada officially announces new CSE members to the industry.

19. Is this a quality assurance or accreditation program?

No. Destination Canada makes no concerted effort to certify or accredit CSE members. Members are provided with exclusive use of a CSE badge to signify that a Canadian Signature Experience is offered by the member.

Destination Canada and PMOs will review the current membership on an annual basis to ensure that CSE members remain in good standing.

20. How is the Canadian Signature Experiences' member badge associated with my company?

All CSE members enjoy the privilege of using the CSE member badge on their website and marketing information to identify that Destination Canada and their PMO has recognized their designated Canadian Signature Experience. The emphasis of the designation is on the experience offering, not on the company as the experience provider. Members are reminded that badge should only be associated with the designated signature experience and not their full inventory of travel experiences. Use of the badge should not imply or be seen to suggest that the company and its full range of experiences are recognized as Canadian Signature Experiences.

Key stakeholders and partners of Destination Canada and PMOs, such as qualified RTOs, international tours and media organizations, also follow the same member badge application guidelines. For example, if an international tour operator features a designated Canadian Signature Experience in its marketing materials, they may apply and associate the CSE member badge to that listing, but not to non-CSE experiences from the same company.

All official members and authorized industry partners receive electronic copies of the various available CSE member badges and guidelines associated with their proper use.

21. How many businesses are in the collection?

The Collection currently has [186 members](#).

22. Do you have examples of companies already in the collection?

Destination Canada maintains a section on our [Canada Keep Exploring consumer website](#) devoted to featuring all current CSE members.

We have invested in two [case study series](#), which are helpful resources for companies wishing to be CSE members. The first case study consists of interviews with current members, who express their perspectives on the program. The second is a series of case studies with current members about experiential travel and their Canadian Signature Experience. Members share what experiential travel means to their business, and what makes a memorable travel experience. They also talk about their ideal guests, partners, sales channels and operational challenges, reflect on how the Canadian Signature Experience collection contributes to Canada's competitive landscape, and provide tips for others to consider.

23. How will the collection be managed going forward?

Destination Canada and the PMO will review the current membership on an annual basis to ensure continued integrity of the collection. To retain membership in the CSE collection, members are required to:

- Remain in good standing with Destination Canada or PMO. As examples, non-payment of registration fees associated with CTC or PMO marketing initiatives you choose to participate in or non-provision of in-kind contributions associated with a member's participation in CTC and/or PMO-led marketing initiatives will result in a member being dropped from the collection.
- Continue to offer and advertise the designated Canadian Signature Experience on a regular basis.
- Remain active in marketing in one or more of Destination Canada's core and/or emerging markets through direct investment or partnership with a PMO or DMO.
- Continue to comply with the [export-ready market criteria](#) established for the CSE program.
- Complete an annual member survey that provides feedback and core performance metrics on the program and sale 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 the company's association with the CSE program. Results that are shared will be kept in confidence and used only for reporting aggregated performance measurement data.
- Maintain Canadian legal operating status, including the appropriate insurance and licenses for the business.
- Within 72 hours, respond to Destination Canada/PMO inquiries regarding the member's Canadian Signature Experience.
- Communicate changes in key program contacts to Destination Canada/PMO in a timely manner.

24. What if I have a great experience but only sell in Canada?

If you only sell within Canada, this program isn't for you. Destination Canada's strategy is to market Canada internationally in France, Germany, the UK, Australia, Japan, South Korea, Mexico, Brazil, India, China and the USA. Some of the PMOs extend their marketing efforts to other specified international markets.

A number of Canadian jurisdictions are currently administering or exploring provincial or regional versions of the Canadian Signature Experiences collection, so check with your PMO to see if there is an opportunity. If you are interested in entering new international markets or working with the travel trade, please visit our corporate website's <http://en.destinationcanada.com/resources-industry> Resources section for video vignettes that discuss the characteristics of international markets, plus how and why to do business internationally and with travel trade. Your PMO may have similar resources available to you.

25. Does Destination Canada use the CSE program to promote destinations or specific locations?

Indirectly. The program's primary purpose is to promote saleable, Canada brand-aligned experiences. The program compliments our efforts to bring a deeper awareness of what there is to see and do in Canada through experiential travel. By extension, these experiences also can support efforts to strengthen traveller awareness of Canada's amazing provincial destinations.

26. What is Destination Canada? Does it help smaller businesses?

Destination Canada is Canada's national tourism marketing organization. Together with our partners, we've been extremely successful in developing a strong tourism brand for Canada. It's a big part of why Canada was ranked the #1 country brand in the world by FutureBrand's Country Brand Index in 2010 and 2011. Our international marketing campaigns and programs increase the market potential of every tourism business in Canada, large and small. We also provide free research and tools on our corporate website to help people develop their tourism business. [Sign up for CTC News](#) for frequent updates about what we're doing.