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NORTHWEST NEWSWEEK - TOP STORY

Tourism workshop says the experience is the trip

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A two-day workshop offering a whole new spin on tourism, where the experience is not strictly bound by season, facilities or whether there's a pool, was held at Lake Helen last week.

Community leaders from Thunder Bay to Pukaskwa looked at integrating local language, culture and cuisine into a memorable and marketable experience for tourists along Superior's north shore. Participants were asked to embrace what is already here to enjoy in the region and create a unique and dynamic learning experience for visitors. The workshop was a first of its kind for the region promoting an experience-based trip.

Giving people a memorable time they haven't had before is a selling point for a huge segment of potential visitors and it can be done on a year round basis. Celes Davar of Earth Rhythms has applied this type of tourism in Manitoba for roughly ten years and he says the North Shore is filled with what he calls Canadian icons, including the boreal forest, the big lake and big rocks. Participants were also encouraged to share their unique culture with visitors.

Another key message at the workshop was getting communities to link their strategies and create regional tourism packages. Davar says he was inspired by the north shore and the fact that people are thinking ahead and willing to embrace a new form of tourism, one where our culture and heritage plays the lead role.

Workshop participants visited the Nipigon Museum, Marina and a sweat lodge on the outskirts of Lake Helen. But the key was that these were not just visits to destinations but learning experiences. At each stop the focus was more on language, tradition and culture, rather than the facilities.

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