

Questions and Answers

What is the Canadian Tourism Commission (CTC)? Does it help smaller businesses?

The CTC 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. 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. Also, sign up for [CTC News](#) for daily updates about what we're doing.

What is the *Signature Experiences Collection*® (SEC)?

The CTC is building a collection of travel experiences that will show the world what Canada's tourism brand is all about. Tourism businesses are being invited to apply at www.canada.travel/SEC to become part of this collection that will grow over time. Our winter 2011 application intake begins November 15th and goes until December 15th. We're looking for "experiences" that can deliver what our research tells us our priority consumers are seeking when they select a vacation destination. Our marketing teams will draw on this collection of Signature Experiences to capture the attention and imagination of consumers around the world, and entice them to visit Canada now.

So far, interest in the program has been high. We received 153 applications during our summer 2011 intake. A total of 67 tourism businesses were welcomed into the program bringing our collection total to 115 experiences.

What is a *Signature Experience*?

A *Signature Experience* is an exceptional travel experience offered for sale by a Canadian-based tourism operator. Businesses like Sonora Resort in British Columbia, Sucrierie de la Montagne in Quebec, Tranquility Cove Adventures on Prince Edward Island, the Inniskillin winery in Ontario and Uncommon Journeys in the Yukon offer the types of immersive, hands-on and unique *Signature Experiences* that today's travellers are looking for. For more information on what makes an extraordinary tourism "experience", consult our [Experiences Toolkit](#).

Why is the CTC doing this? Why is it important for me to support the SEC program?

Travellers around the world are telling us that they want to explore and live a life that's less ordinary. We've promised these travellers that our country is the place where they can fulfill this dream. Canada's tourism operators are key to delivering on that promise.

The SEC is good for all tourism businesses because these *Signature Experiences* will help CTC campaigns draw more attention from target consumers, which will increase the number of international visitors likely to book a trip anywhere in Canada.

What does my business or organization gain from being part of the SEC? Why should I participate?

Interest in the program is high. We received 153 applications during our summer 2011 intake. A total of 67 tourism businesses were welcomed into the program bringing our collection total to 115 experiences. These extraordinary experiences know they are helping Canada as a whole win more international travel business, which is the biggest benefit of the SEC program. Of course, there are also marketing benefits waiting for members. The CTC will look to the SEC as a primary inventory of experiences to use in our global marketing, media and sales activities.

Businesses in the program understand that their experience will be used to support Canada's tourism brand, and that the CTC will not be promoting individual businesses and their brands or logos. There are no promises about how often or where a particular SEC member will be specifically featured.

When and where can I apply to join the SEC?

Our winter 2011 application intake goes from November 15, 2011, to December 15, 2011. Applicants can apply at www.canada.travel/SEC, and notification of all future application and selection periods will also be posted on this site.

In what countries will the SEC be featured?

The CTC will initially focus efforts on identifying and marketing *Signature Experiences* in our key core markets: the **UK, France, Germany** and **Australia**, as well as the US as part of our media efforts there. Over time, the *Collection* will be integrated into our emerging markets, which include **China, South Korea, Mexico, Japan, Brazil** and **India**.

How much does it cost to belong to the program?

There is no cost to apply to, or be a member of, the SEC. We may, however, offer partnership marketing buy-in or in-kind opportunities through CTC core marketing initiatives. SEC members will receive advance notice and details of such opportunities, but there is no obligation to buy into, or participate in, these opportunities.

How can a business become a part of the SEC? Which ones are eligible for consideration?

We're looking for businesses that deliver, according to our research, the types of tourism experiences that our key consumers are looking for when they select a vacation destination. Businesses that want to become part of the collection need to apply. An expert panel of tourism marketers will then review the application to see if it meets the criteria for membership. Not all applicants will be accepted.

Selection criteria, the application process and the online application form are available at www.canada.travel/SEC. If you can't find the answer you're looking for, please e-mail us at experiences@canada.travel.

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

The CTC wants to support tourism businesses that aspire to be in the Collection. If your business is not selected for inclusion, you will be provided with feedback indicating which criteria were not sufficiently met. Where possible, you will be pointed to resources that may help you like our **Brand Toolkit**, our **Experiences Toolkit** and **Explorer Quotient® (EQ) Toolkit** for small businesses. We always welcome unsuccessful applicants to submit a new application in the future.

What are the most common reasons tourism businesses are not accepted into the program?

The top three (3) reasons applications are rejected are as follows (in order of their importance):

1. **The applicant does not sell an experience.** The CTC has set a very strict definition for what counts as an experience. Many applicants do not pay attention to the definition when crafting their essays describing their experiences, while others merely list their accommodations, activities and amenities.
2. **The applicant's experience is not in high enough demand internationally.** Innovations in Explorer Quotient® research now provide detailed data on experience appeal. Applications are immediately declined if their primary experience does not appeal sufficiently to at least one of the CTC's global explorer types (i.e. Free Spirits, Authentic Experiencers, and Cultural Explorers).
3. **The applicant demonstrates low marketing knowledge.** Although less weight is put on questions seeking to measure their skill as marketers, many applicants show a poor understanding of the positioning and marketing effort required to compete in the international marketplace.

What can I do to increase my likelihood of being accepted into the SEC program?

Applicants that take the time to complete a quality application improve their chances of being selected. Before you start your application, carefully read our selection criteria that are posted online at www.canada.travel/SEC. Be sure to also take advantage of the free marketing tools available like our [Brand Toolkit](#), our [Experiences Toolkit](#) and [Explorer Quotient® \(EQ\) Toolkit](#).

How is each SEC application judged? Is the process fair?

The CTC has gone to great lengths to develop an application review and scoring process that is fair and objective. A total of 13 CTC marketing experts and 3 outside marketing professionals use a state-of-the-art online system to manage, judge and score each application. The maximum score for an application is 100 points. Selling an experience that is in-demand internationally is worth the most points. Generally, applicants need at least 60 points to be considered for entry into the *Collection*.

Where can I get more information?

Information on the Collection, criteria and the online application form is available at www.canada.travel/SEC.

Is this a quality assurance or accreditation program?

The SEC isn't meant to be a list of top experiences, an accreditation program or a quality assurance program. It is a collection of experiences that the CTC will use to deliver consistent and relevant messages to potential travellers about Canada.

Is my provincial or local tourism organization involved?

The CTC has collaborated with provincial and territorial tourism organizations in the design and delivery of the SEC program. These provincial partners have made valuable contributions to criteria development and will help us communicate the program to tourism businesses within their respective jurisdictions. The CTC will also encourage local destination marketing organizations to do the same. Where appropriate, the CTC will attend industry events to speak about the SEC.

As part of the application evaluation process, the CTC may consult with our network of provincial tourism marketing agencies or local/regional destination marketing organizations for assistance related to certain criteria.

How many operators will form the SEC?

We want every tourism experience that qualifies to be in the SEC. There is no limit on the number of tourism businesses that can be selected for the initiative. The CTC will place emphasis on the quality of alignment with the published criteria versus the quantity of experiences included in the *Collection*.

Is there a limit to the number of operators accepted per province?

There is no limit to the number of tourism operators accepted per province. The SEC is intended to represent tourism experiences found across Canada, and each province/territory will have varying numbers of operators based on how many apply and how many of those applications meet the program criteria.

Will CTC use the SEC program to promote destinations or locations generally?

No. Contrary to some reporting, this initiative is not about promoting amazing destinations or locations in a general way. That's why places like the Rideau Canal, Whistler, or Peggy's Cove are not part of the *Collection*; other initiatives and partnerships cover this kind of marketing. The SEC program is focused on selecting businesses and operators that sell specific tourism opportunities to travellers and meet the criteria set out on our SEC web page: www.canada.travel/SEC.