For the Love of Camping
2019 National Outdoor Recreation Conference
Jennifer Dubois, Visitor Experience Infrastructure Advisor, Parks Canada
Jennifer.Dubois@canada.ca
Storyline

1. A Little Bit of History
2. Parks Canada at a Glance
3. Early Camping in PC
4. Decline in Camping
5. Parks Canada’s Response
   • Local Solutions
   • oTENTik
   • Pilot Projects
   • Ôasis
6. Multiple Pathways to Innovation
7. The Next Chapter
8. Discussion and Questions
A little bit of history…

• 1885: First National Park established (Banff)
• 1911: Birth of “Parks Canada” – World’s first national park service
PARKS CANADA at a Glance

Our largest park is bigger than Switzerland.

The world's largest beaver dam (it can be seen from space!)
PARKS CANADA at a GLANCE

25 million person-visits per year
12,000 campsites
$25 billion of assets

850,000 occupied nights per year

5,000 dedicated employees

$1.65 billion budget

an unlimited number of experiential opportunities...
How we are Organised

CEO

Protected Areas Establishment and Conservation
Indigenous Affairs and Cultural Heritage
External Relations and Visitor Experience
Operations
Strategic Policy and Investment
Chief Financial Officer
Human Resources

Visitor Experience Infrastructure Team
- VE Planning
- National Policies, Standards, Guidelines and Tools
- National Procurement Instruments
- Project Delivery Support

33 Field Units across Canada
...national parks, national historic sites and national marine conservation areas managed by a Field Unit Superintendent
Our Mandate

On behalf of the people of Canada, we protect and present nationally significant examples of Canada's natural and cultural heritage, and foster public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment in ways that ensure their ecological and commemorative integrity for present and future generations.
From the Beginning

- Long tradition of camping in National Parks
- 1\textsuperscript{st} wave of facility development in 1930’s
  - Relief workers following the great depression
- 2\textsuperscript{nd} wave of development in 1950’s
  - Support the post WWII camping boom
  - Standard summer holiday middle-class families
- Overnight stay in a National park is an important element of a memorable experience and contributes to create a sense of place or connection
Spectrum of Accommodations

- A range of camping and accommodation offered in Canada’s NPs
  - Front-country campgrounds remain quintessential NP experience
    - More than 110 campgrounds = 12,000+ campsites
    - 5.7 million adult campers in Canada
A Decline in Camping

- Early 2000’s camping in Canada’s NPs became stagnant, even declining in some locations
- Changing demographics & Social trends were influencing visitor’s needs & expectations
Our Response

• Parks Canada began exploring camping-like accommodation
• Conducted market research
• Field Units undertook a number of pilot projects
  • In 2007, the first yurt was tested (RMNP)
  • Other accommodations followed in subsequent years
Local Solutions

• Field Units began implementing a variety of accommodations

• Yurts:
  • Fundy NP, Kejimkujik NP, Bruce Peninsula NP, Riding Mountain NP
  • Comfortable, convenient with strong market familiarity
Tipis

- Grasslands NP, Rocky Mountain House NHS
- Tipis respecting local indigenous heritage
Trapper’s Tents

• Rocky Mountain House NHS
Cabins

• Multiple designs across multiple parks and one national historic site
  • Partnerships with Technical Colleges – Fundy NP, Kejimkujik NP
  • Designed as Autism-Friendly - Gros Morne NP
Wake-Up in the Past – Period Stays

- Period tents set up on the grounds of National Historic Sites
- Bed and Breakfast in Chief Factor’s House (FSJ NHS)
- Lockmasters’ Houses (Historic Canals)
- Period Style House (Fortress of Louisburg)
National Solutions

• New national tools – *Parks Canada’s Diversified Accommodation Guidelines 2010* and *Parks Canada’s Accommodation Fee Matrix*

• 2012 introduced oTENTik – Parks Canada’s first national accommodation product
oTENTik

- Tent-cabin hybrid - sleeps six
- Initial roll-out met with strong demand & positive media coverage
- To date over 400 oTENTiks system wide
- Signature product - improving financial sustainability of camping operations, increasing awareness of Parks Canada’s heritage places and promoting visitation
Economic Impact

- To date Parks Canada has invested $15 M in the oTENTik program

- In 2016, oTENTik generated $2.8 M in revenue with 237 oTENTik on the reservation service

- In 2017, $3.5 M revenue generated

- In 2018, 393 oTENTik on reservation service in 27 locations (20 NP, 6 NHS, and 1 NUP), $3.8 M in revenue generated
Promoting Visitation

Seasonal (April 1 – October 10) Occupancy

Free Entry

2017

oTENTiks introduced

Attendance (Person-Visits)

oTENTiks introduced
Visitor Experience Infrastructure projects are assessed through a suite of Standards, Guidelines, Product-Specific Planning Tools and other Policy Instruments.

- Parks / Sites identify interest in accommodation
- VE Infrastructure team assesses the project
- Detailed ROI exercise is completed
- Project funded through National Accommodation Fund
- Accommodation purchased and installed
Building on Success

• 2015 - ambitious Research and Development phase for new accommodation products

  • Focused on:
    • Two (2) mainstream products responding to main trends, large markets and common needs
      • Accommodation for 2/couples
      • Tiny Homes experiences for 4 people
    • Three (3) niche products responding to specific markets and needs, presenting innovative and inspirational Visitor Experience
      • Canopy Accommodation
      • Floating Accommodation
R & D, the approach

- Selected a combination of off-the-shelf products and in-house designs
- Field Units volunteered to test each product
- Contracts were established to purchase/rent each product
- Each product tested over the 2016 camping season
- Feedback was collected from users and staff
The ‘Test’ Products

• Accommodation for 2/couples
  • Micro-Cube & Double-Tent

• Tiny Homes on Wheels
  • 2 different concepts

• Canopy Accommodation
  • The Cocoon Tree Bed
  • The Goutte d’Ô
Social Media: > 1M People Reached

- Parks Canada posted on Twitter and Facebook 17 messages, with a potential overall reach of 1,088,493 users.
Pilot Evaluation

1) There was considerable demand from visitors for some form of canopy/novelty product

2) There was park support for broader implementation of a canopy product

3) There was sufficient interest/support for the MicrOcube to be developed as the national two person accommodation product

4) Areas for improvement and refinement to all of the products were identified
Introducing the Ôasis

• National accommodation #2
• Ôasis can be mounted on stilts or suspended to give visitors an ‘elevated’ experience
Multiple Pathways for Innovation

• Parks and National Historic Sites continue to innovate

• Parks Canada has developed two new programs related to camping:
  • Parks Canada’s Learn to Camp Program
  • Parks Canada’s Equipped Campsites
The Next Chapter

• VE Infrastructure team will continue to explore opportunities and designs for the following products:
  • Accommodation for 2-people (MicrOcube or other)
  • National Cabin design
  • Shelters (backcountry)
  • Floating accommodation
Bringing it Home

• Diversified accommodations support our mandate – to engage and immerse visitors in the stories of our places

• One of many tools to create memories, transformational experiences, and life-long connections to our places

• Management plans are in place for each park and site – to define, protect and present the uniqueness of place, and set the boundaries and goals we work within

• The integrity of our parks and sites remains the foremost consideration in all matters (ecological and commemorative integrity)