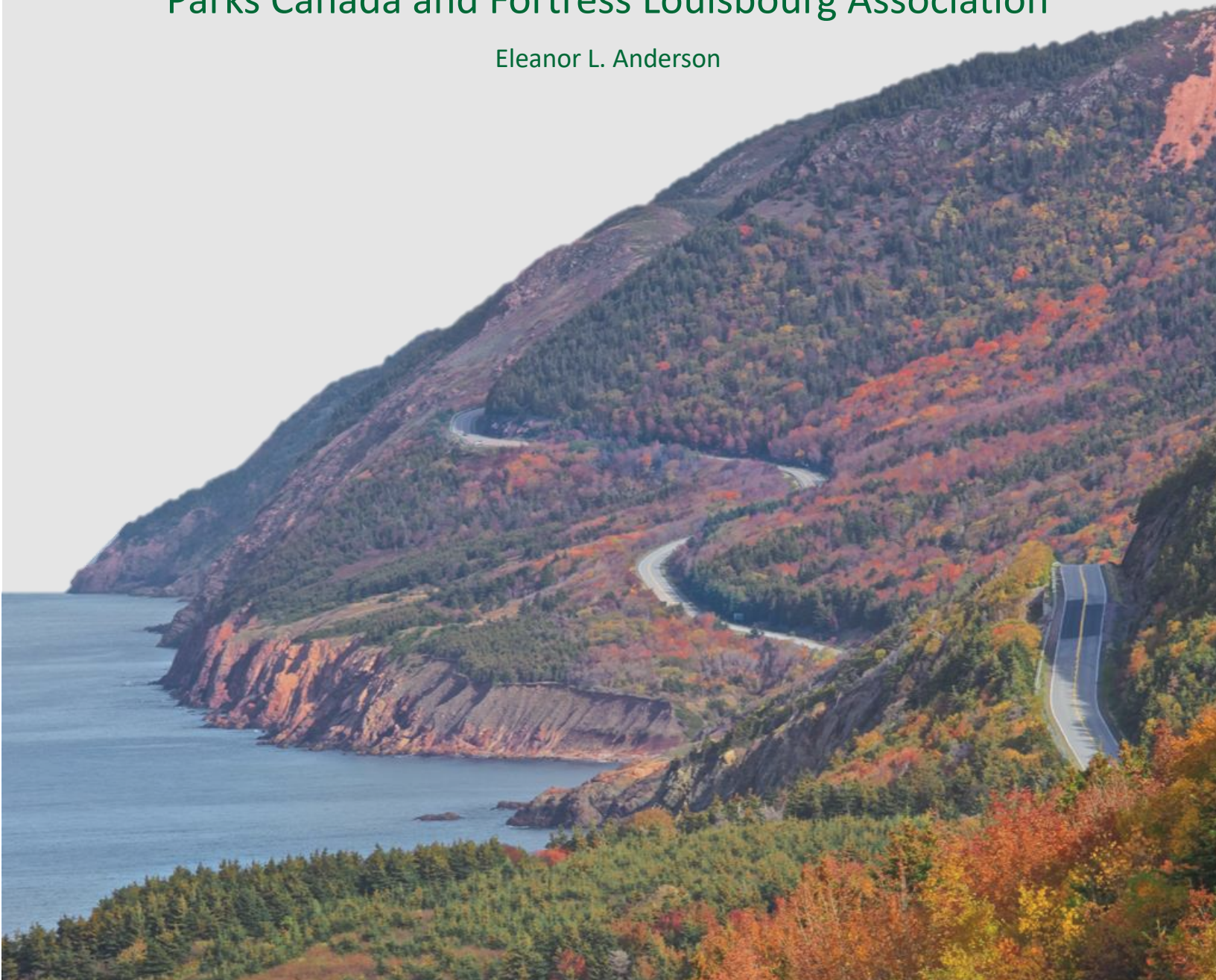




## **Unama'ki - Cape Breton Island Tourism Case Studies**

**Delivering an Immersive Visitor Experience -  
Parks Canada and Fortress Louisbourg Association**

Eleanor L. Anderson



Cape Breton Island has long been lauded as one of the most beautiful Islands in the world. Cape Breton University has delivered well-established tourism and hospitality training for decades and is a leader in the field of such undergraduate training in Canada. The World Tourism Institute (WTI) at CBU is perfectly positioned and timed to leverage, support, and enhance, a growing tourism industry at home and globally.

**The World Tourism Institute (WTI)** was founded at Cape Breton University (CBU) in 2018 with a strong foundation rooted in the depth and diversity of the Cape Breton Island Tourism Sector, the long history of Tourism and Hospitality programming at CBU and the established industry and community relationships.

In 2022, the WTI secured \$2.24 million, 3 year project running February 2022 to 2025, for training and research funding from the Canadian government to stimulate post-pandemic recovery, build capacity and grow opportunities for Cape Breton Island's Tourism Sector. This project is called the **Cape Breton Island Tourism Training Network (CBITTN)**.

#### **CBITTN Objectives:**

- Ensure inclusivity in all development activities.
- Work with Mi'kmaw partners to explore, design and implement community-based credit programs in Indigenous tourism.
- Develop a foundation of accessible, timely and credible research which will support decision-making by the industry and act as a catalyst in innovation and entrepreneurialism in tourism.
- Identify training gaps and needs associated with labour shortages.
- Promote education and professional certifications for the tourism industry, including the development of micro-credentials and customized training programs.

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Please note that the accuracy of these case studies is subject to change since the publication date. The individuals interviewed may no longer be affiliated with the respective tourism operations or businesses. Changes in business practices, ownership, and other relevant details may have occurred since the time of writing.



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## HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

Located on Cape Breton Island-Unama'ki in the province of Nova Scotia in Canada, the Fortress of Louisburg National Historic Site is the largest historical reconstruction in North America. The fortress is an iconic tourism heritage site spanning 16,000 acres, sixty of which are located within the fortress's stone walls. In 1961 the Canadian federal government began reconstructing the 18<sup>th</sup> century Fortress of Louisburg. The work began with archaeological excavations and extensive research of more than 750,000 pages of documents and 500 maps from France, Canada, England, Scotland, and the United States. Since that time, one quarter of the original French colonial town has been recreated. The fortress depicts life in what was once a bustling 18<sup>th</sup> century coastal center for defense and commerce. With a focus on interpretation and delivering an immersive visitor experience, the fortress offers a wide range of activities including daily educational programming, camping, guided tours, walking trails, and culinary and musical experiences.

The ownership and operation of this National Historic Site has a unique partnership structure. The site is owned and operated by Parks Canada as one of 171 protected sites throughout the country, each with the goal of protecting, understanding, and appreciating Canadian history. To deliver a quality, authentic and immersive visitor experience, Parks Canada partners with a community non-profit organization called the Fortress Louisburg Association (FLA). The FLA works with Parks Canada to operate food service and retail outlets, overnight stays, special events, as well as educational and interpretative programming. These two organizations have been partnering for decades with the goal of delivering a quality authentic immersive visitor experience.

Today they continue to collaborate to develop new product offerings, offsetting each partner's weaknesses and leveraging their strengths to meet or exceed visitor expectations. Together, Parks Canada and the FLA work to bring the 18<sup>th</sup> century French colonial town to life.

Nadine Neima-Drover is the Parks Canada Visitor Experience Product Development Officer for the Fortress of Louisburg National Historic Site. Her overall mandate is to make connections between the Site and the visitor, ensuring a quality, memorable, and authentic experience. Her mandate for connection extends beyond the visitor experience to building collaborations with tourism industry partners as well.

Thomas Drover is the Executive Director of the Fortress Louisburg Association, the membership driven community non-profit group that plays a critical role in delivering the visitor experience. The FLA employs approximately sixty to seventy seasonal and student staff to present youth, education, and interpretative programs, manage food and beverage and retail operations, and coordinate events on site.



## STRENGTHS THROUGH COLLABORATION

Parks Canada has much to offer as an experienced cross-country network of educators, conservationists, archivists, and interpreters of nature, history, and culture. Parks Canada has access to a wide range of target market data and share that information with the FLA which helps them shape their programs and their promotions. FLA is a smaller and nimbler organization than Parks Canada so it can act and react to changes in the market more quickly. The same applies to hiring practices since Parks Canada has more restrictive hiring requirements than the FLA. Both organizations are committed to a diverse, equitable and inclusive workforce.

## THE OPPORTUNITY

Cape Breton Island has been consistently ranked by Travel + Leisure Magazine as the #1 *Best Island* in Canada and was rated the #1 Island in North America in Condé Nast Traveler's Readers' Choice Awards (DCB, 2023). Pre Covid-19, Cape Breton Island was home to a vibrant tourism industry. According to the destination marketing organization, Destination Cape Breton, in 2019 the sector generated approximately \$450 million annually to the local economy and accounted for 10% of the jobs on the Island. Heavily dependant on seasonal employment, the tourism sector is comprised of small and medium sized enterprises predominantly located in rural areas. According to World Tourism Organization data, 100% of global destinations were impacted by restrictions on travel beginning in March 2020. As with all destinations worldwide, Cape Breton also suffered the impacts of Covid-19 as borders closed.

Living history sites such as the Fortress of Louisburg take great care to curate unique immersive experiences. While the pandemic shuttered the site, it also presented an opportunity (through necessity) to re-evaluate the visitor experience. Strengthening and deepening the partnership between the FLA and Parks Canada to meet visitors' expectations was determined key for post-pandemic recovery and critical to meeting market demand and maximizing revenue moving forward. New products and services at Fortress of Louisburg National Historic site are often the result of collaboration and so the two parties charged with operating the site – Parks Canada and the FLA – teamed up to overcome limitations of the individual organizations and leverage each other's strengths.

## PARTNERSHIP STRATEGY

Since the FLA are long term partners of the Fortress of Louisbourg, collaboration between the two organizations is well-established.

The relationship between the two is mutually beneficial and actively nurtured. This partnership supports the FLA's business strategy. Thomas Drover describes the business strategy of the FLA as a "3C" strategy:

1. Create a buzz of excitement.
2. Capitalize on the uniqueness of the site.
3. Collaborate with local partners and organizations to create experiences.

The first two strategic directives of creating excitement and capitalizing on the uniqueness of the Fortress of Louisbourg are heavily influenced by the third directive of collaborating with local partners to create experiences. Nadine and Thomas believe that the Fortress can be strengthened by developing, diversifying, and expanding additional partnerships within the local community. Nadine Neima-Drover believes that attracting and selecting community partner organizations is determined by the key messages and mandates of Parks Canada National Historic Sites. These partnerships benefit both the Fortress of Louisbourg as well as the partnering organization. Sometimes the partnerships involve working toward attracting visitors to Louisbourg, working on destination marketing and promotion strategies, or working jointly on economic development projects. The products of these partnerships include research, goods, services, labour, knowledge, promotion, financial resources, and community support.

According to Nadine, current partners in research and in promotion include Destination Canada and Tourism Nova Scotia. In training and in transportation, Cape Breton University has demonstrated increasingly important potential partnership opportunities through the World Tourism Institute and CBU shuttle program respectively. Thomas identifies off-site breweries such as Breton Brewery, Authentic Seacoast Distillery and Brewery, Big Spruce Brewing, Route 19 Brewing, and Island Folk Cider House who the Fortress has worked with to gain expertise and to develop products for sale on site. Additional recent creative efforts include building relationships with marketing and event producing agencies such as 902 Advertising and 9K Events and Productions. Both Nadine and Thomas note the importance of working with local community groups such as the Louisbourg Fire Department, the LAPPS Group, and the SNL Railway Association.

Nadine and Thomas acknowledge that partnerships must benefit both parties, with both parties providing and receiving value. One example of a mutually beneficial partnership that the Fortress is involved in is with the Coast Guard College in Westmount. The Fortress of Louisbourg provides and transports the canon used for a celebratory firing post convocation at the College and in return, the Coast Guard incoming cadets visit the Fortress each year for a tour and overnight experience. Another example is that each year the Fortress hosts underprivileged

youth from the Family Place Resource Center for a camp experience. These experiences help develop a sense of trust and goodwill in the community.

## **CONCLUSION**

To summarize the relationship between Parks Canada and the Fortress Louisbourg Association, Nadine says: “This is an amazing marriage of two organizations that can work together to help ensure we offer a diverse set of visitor offerings because neither one of us could do it all.” And Thomas reiterates that position by confirming that the established partnership between Parks Canada and the FLA are critical to their success. To continue to grow and become more resilient, Parks Canada and the FLA strategically create partnerships with local organizations that benefit everyone involved. These partnerships are cornerstones toward not only the long-term success of the Fortress of Louisbourg, but also to the growth and development of the Cape Breton Island tourism community.

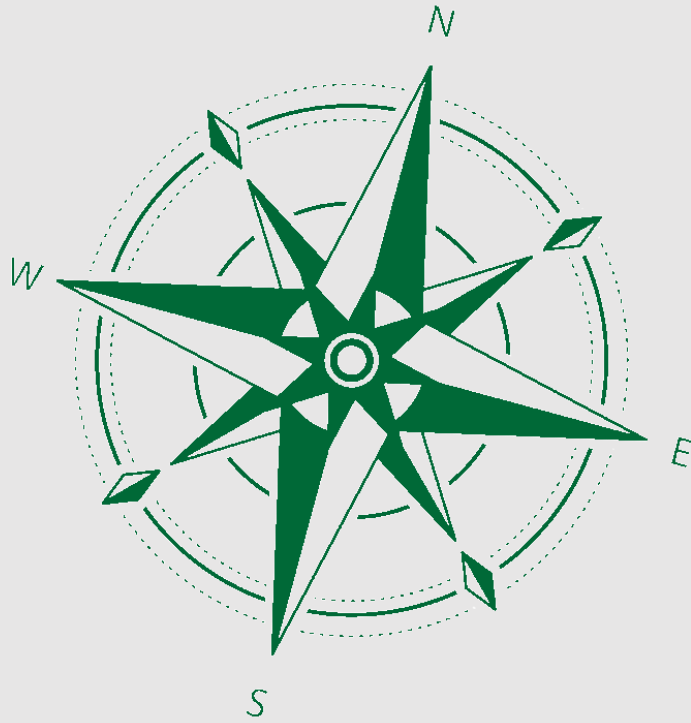
## **ALTERNATIVE DECISIONS**

1. The partnership strategy of Parks Canada and the FLA is to cultivate many diverse community and corporate partners. Rather than divide their strategic focus and resources between a large number of smaller partners, Parks Canada and the FLA could commit their resources to developing a few high-profile relationships that are more lucrative.
2. Further expanding their partnership base beyond local tourism related businesses could lead to the Fortress diversifying their offerings and expanding their customer base.
3. To maximize partnership potential, Parks Canada and the FLA could develop a comprehensive partnership strategy complete with clear goals, cash targets, action plan, and timeline along with a system to monitor performance and revise the strategy accordingly.
4. The Fortress of Louisbourg (via Parks Canada and FLA) could identify and formalize their partnership value proposition. They would each need to look internally and see what they realistically have to offer to potential partners and then agree on a collective value proposition that can be articulated.

## **INSTRUCTOR GUIDE: STUDY CASE QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS**

1. Parks Canada has identified numerous product development opportunities including developing programming for youth to tie into their mobile devices. What partners could they work with to deliver such a product?

2. What do you see as the biggest challenge for Parks Canada and the FLA as they move forward with the aim of developing new products/services for the visitors to Fortress of Louisbourg?
3. Can you identify some external partners for Parks Canada and the FLA to help them meet the strategic goals of creating a buzz and capitalizing on the uniqueness of the site? What potential partnerships from outside of the tourism industry might be beneficial?



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