

A 2006 Eco-Efficiency Success Story



Petit Passage Whale Watch East Ferry, Digby County, NS

Working towards Environmentally Responsible Tourism

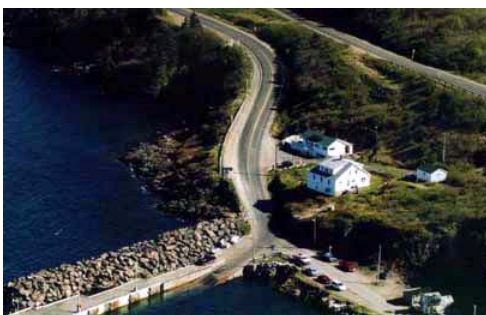
Petit Passage Whale Watch is owned and operated by the Theriault family. Located in East Ferry, on the southern-most tip of Digby Neck, they have been offering whale watching tours in the Bay of Fundy - some of Canada's richest marine habitat - since 1994. Between June to October, Petit Passage engages and entertains 2700 visitors, offering two to three daily cruises. The company also operates a small café. A staff of seven work seasonally in the kitchen and on the tour boats.

The family has a long history of promoting and engaging in ecologically sustainable activities, both independently and collectively with other tourism operators. The company has been active in various tourism organizations helping to develop nature-based and eco-tourism programs in Nova Scotia. Petit Passage is a member of the Bay of Fundy Tourism Partnership which develops and promotes the Bay of Fundy as a unique nature-based tourism destination. This group determined there was a need to identify and implement environmentally responsible tourism guidelines and practices, and over the past several years have developed a mission statement and a set of four principles to move this group of operators towards a leadership position on environmental sustainability. The Eco-Efficiency Centre is collaborating with the Partnership in offering the Eco-Business Program to all 60 members.

Petit Passage is committed to implementing sustainable practices such as minimizing waste, reducing energy costs, protecting natural beauty, and are conscientious in all aspects of the day-to-day operation of their café and vessel. They have a full recycling and on-site composting program in place, which includes the segregation of paper, glass, and plastic. As they prepare for the 2006 tourism season, the business is designing new waste collection stations for placement near the café, with better signage and collection bins for their customers, but also for the many other tourists and residents that wait near the café for the ferry to Long Island. Petit Passage sees the value of providing garbage/recycling opportunities for tourists, so that wastes and recycling materials don't turn into litter. The business seems to find second life for many waste items from the café, like ice-cream containers. The company is also preparing to undertake a lighting retrofit -from incandescents to new compact fluorescents. They use environmentally-friendly cleaners where possible, and are looking to move to alternatives, for even their most difficult cleaning jobs.

The cruises are undertaken in the "Passage Provider 04" - a 45 foot fibreglass Cape Island style boat. Launched in 2004, it has an on-board holding tank for sewage that's pumped to a land septic system for treatment. Garbage and recycling containers are provided for tourists, so no litter ends up overboard. As well, the company adheres to a strict code of ethics for whale watching tour operators.

As tourism operators in rural parts of Nova Scotia struggle to stay in business, the messages of increasing efficiencies for operators in their day-to-day business, and the connection between a healthy environment and a healthy tourism industry is hitting home. Petit Passage Whale Watching already "gets it", and are proving to be a good role model to others in the industry as they work towards a sustainable future.



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