

Community Building: Landsea Tours and Adventures

In 1985, Scott Mason recognized a gap in the Vancouver sightseeing market: the need for personalized, small-group excursions that intimately connected people with the city. He borrowed money from his parents to purchase a small bus, and Landsea Tours & Adventures was born.

More than two decades later, Landsea was still going strong. As the 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games drew nearer, Vancouver was seized by excitement; but Scott and his new business partner, Kevin Pearce, feared jam-packed streets and pop-up venues citywide would lead to a drop in business. Over the course of several weeks, they called tour operators in cities around the world that had hosted the Olympics. The tour operators confirmed the partners' fears: most had experienced a drastic dip in business during the Games.

Landsea, however, saw this as an opportunity rather than a threat, and readily accepted requests to charter their vehicles throughout the Games. When hotels called on Landsea guides – renowned for possessing a wealth of city information and effortlessly charming guests – to lead tours for visiting celebrities and VIPs, the company agreed. The opportunities for private and charter services brought in much-needed cash flow, and also sparked expansion. In 2012, Landsea Charters & Services opened for business.

Today, Landsea Tours & Adventures operates more than 50 sightseeing vehicles, hosting upwards of 50,000 visitors each year. The charter arm is thriving with 85 percent of winter business dedicated to private bookings. In May 2019, Landsea launched a new Hop-on, Hop-off tour, which takes guests to notable landmarks, neighbourhoods and attractions in double-decker buses boasting glass roofing.

Business is booming for Scott and Kevin – as well as their new co-owner, John Wilson – and growth has been entirely organic. The secret to Landsea's success? Hiring for personality, and training for skills. A key component of the interview process involves a group of potential hires taking a spin around the city in a Landsea bus; each interviewee is given the mic for five minutes, and asked to share their passions. One woman spoke at length about flossing her teeth; she was hilarious, informative and interesting – in other words, the ideal tour guide – and she was immediately hired.

Once hired, drivers and guides undergo five weeks of rigorous training before meeting their first customer. Actors are hired to support trainees with story delivery, helping them become comfortable with adapting dialogue to varying traffic conditions, difficult guests and countless other variables. Guides are

never scheduled for the same tour more than once a week, promoting ongoing engagement and passion, and by extension ensuring satisfied guests.

In addition to executing a highly collaborative tourism service – for example, the Sea to Sky Tour highlights the Sea to Sky Gondola and Britannia Mine Museum, and offers the option to take a zodiac wildlife tour with Sewell's Marina – Landsea is heavily involved in the community. Each year, the company hosts nearly 800 members of Vancouver's tourism businesses to a warm-weather bash called the Summer Sizzler. They also partner with Capilano University to run

Stuff the Bus, a multiday charity drive that calls upon locals to fill buses with warm clothing, toiletries and other essentials for donation to community service societies. Landsea has also “adopted” a shoreline in Stanley Park, which the team keeps clean for the annual Vancouver Shoreline Cleanup.

Scott and Kevin have not only created a thriving company; they have also built a community that prioritizes customer service, encourages employees to live their passions, and forges collaborative relationships between tourism businesses – one of many ways that **#BCTourismMatters**.

