

CHEW ON THIS TASTY TOURS

Case Study

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Thank you to Lise Hines for your input and background knowledge.

INTRODUCTION



Chew On This Tasty Tours is a British Columbia based tour operator who operates tours on the traditional and unceded shared territories of the ǫʷɑ:ɾɿ̓łəŋ (Kwantlen), Máthxwi (Matsqui), se'mya'me (Semiahmoo), and ǫíçəy̓ (**Katzie**) First Nations. The company also works in the place where hən̓q̓əmin̓əm and Skwxwú7mesh speaking *peoples*, the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh *Nations*, have occupied the lands since time immemorial.

Chew On This Tasty Tours offers immersive culinary experiences that showcase how incorporating diverse flavors and rich cultural heritage can help regenerate British Columbia's neighborhoods. The company's vision is to "cultivate vibrant communities through immersive culinary experiences that celebrate local flavours and foster meaningful connections."¹

This business serves as a praiseworthy case study of how small enterprises can collaborate to celebrate local cuisine, cultural diversity and community spirit. By weaving together culinary delights with cultural insights, Chew On This Tasty Tours creates a unique, all-inclusive experience that benefits both visitors and local businesses.

Founded by Lise Hines, a former interior design entrepreneur, the company was born in 2020 out of the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. After her own battle with cancer and witnessing local businesses struggle, Hines developed the concept as an antidote to the 'Amazon phenomenon.' Her goal was to help preserve the social fabric of communities by supporting small, locally owned and original businesses.

Hines' personal values and priorities are reflected in the company's approach, which prioritizes authentic local experiences and meaningful connections. This ethos not only supports individual businesses but also contributes to a more regenerative and community-oriented tourism industry.

By curating tours that link together small businesses and local artisans, Chew On This Tasty Tours offers a unique platform for visitors to explore and connect with communities, while simultaneously supporting local economies and preserving cultural heritage. This innovative approach demonstrates how tourism can be a force for positive change, fostering healthier, more resilient communities.

¹ Chew On This Tasty Tours Mission <https://chewonthistastytours.com/> last accessed October 2024



Why Food

Lise feels that food is a connector and it creates a multi-sensory experience that brings people together.

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Food isn't just about filling our bellies; it's a way to connect with each other. Every bite tells a story, and when we share a meal, we're really sharing moments, laughter, and love. There were so many amazing small, culinary-focused businesses in Fort Langley that I saw the possibilities.”

In her journey to establish Chew On This Tasty Tours, Lise Hines actively sought insights and guidance from a variety of sources. She reached out to numerous industry professionals, including Destination BC and Tourism Langley staff and fellow business owners. Lise also immersed herself in knowledge by listening to relevant podcasts and hiring a business coach, all aimed at refining her vision and strategy for success.

These connections provided her with invaluable advice and inspiration, helping to shape the direction of her culinary tours. By engaging with a diverse network of individuals, Lise gathered insights that informed her approach and fostered a collaborative spirit within the local business community. This proactive outreach enriched her understanding of the industry and laid the groundwork for Chew On This Tasty Tours to thrive amidst the challenges posed by the pandemic.

The Present

Now starting its fifth year, Chew On This has shown that this local tourism development model can succeed. The company's original tour, Fort Langley: Local Flavour has been her most successful and due to this success, Lise has developed tours in other destinations. Tours are for both visitors as well as the local community and the all-inclusive, no stress formula allows friends to get together without having to make plans. Chew On This Tasty Tours has established a strong, collaborative partnership with municipal, business and community partners which keeps the area independent and creates a unique destination and experience.

Successes and Challenges

Successes:

1. **Industry Recognition:** Lise was invited to speak as an entrepreneur at the 2024 TIABC conference, showcasing the company's growth and impact.
2. **Economic Impact:** This type of tour has allowed for more money to stay in the community and less leakage. Each tour generates approximately \$100 profit per participating local business, with over 400 guests enjoying the Fort Langley tour in the 3.5 years that it has been offered.
3. **Collaborative Partnerships:** Successful collaborations with local chefs, food producers, and business owners have created unique experiences and enhanced business prospects while helping to sustain local businesses and the community in which they operate.
4. **Customer Satisfaction:** Attention to detail and a unique experience has led to high customer retention rate. Almost 30% of guests are repeat consumers, with positive feedback driving business growth and improvements.
5. **Expansion:** The success of the Fort Langley tour has led to requests from other destinations to create similar experiences.
6. **Strategic Partnerships:** Collaborations with Tourism Langley, small food providers, attractions like Fort Langley National Historic Site, and indigenous businesses like Tradish's-Ancestor's Cafe have enhanced the tour offerings and marketing reach as well as showcasing local and indigenous offerings.

Challenges:

7. **Funding:** Limited monetary support, with more in-kind assistance received. Initial marketing support came from Discovery Langley City in 2021, followed by micro-funding from the Tourism Innovation Lab in 2022 and 2024, and a Destination British Columbia Micro grant in 2024.
8. **Self-Reliance:** Despite receiving some funding, the majority of work and financial investment has come from the owner, Lise, herself. As a solo-preneur, Lise often found it challenging to not have anyone to discuss or improve ideas with. In order to achieve success, it is important to have a good support system.

9. **Ensuring Fair Compensation:** Hines' business was established within the Pandemic in order to support small businesses who were struggling to stay afloat amidst the uncertainty. Although there were numerous expenses associated with establishing the business, it was a challenge not to ask for compensation from the vendors for the marketing value. Shifting to a for-profit model has been a challenge as many of the long-term partners had come to expect the free marketing service she had established. Ensure you set your parameters up front and if offering services for free—have a fixed time period.

Flexibility: Due to the changing market environment during covid, the tours were in constant flux with unexpected closures due to health reasons. Although the tour model was initially established as six guests and a guide, Lise had to adapt when the Pandemic dictated that only groups of two could visit. That's when the itinerary-led, two person two evolved. The ability to shift ended up turning into a success.

Pandemic-Born Business

Chew On This Tasty Tours emerged during the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, a time when the tourism and restaurant industries faced severe disruptions. Launching a food-focused business in this volatile environment required exceptional adaptability and resilience.

Lise Hines likened her approach to that of a Roomba—the popular robotic vacuum cleaner. “I had to be like a Roomba,” she explained.



When faced with an obstacle, I'd simply change direction and keep moving forward. This adaptable strategy was crucial for maintaining my sanity and ensuring the success of the business.”

This analogy aptly captures the agility and perseverance required to navigate the constantly shifting landscape of pandemic-era entrepreneurship. By embracing flexibility and maintaining forward momentum, Chew On This Tasty Tours managed to thrive despite the challenging circumstances of its inception.

Standing Out in the Market, a Regenerative Approach

As a newcomer in the competitive food tourism sector, Chew On This Tasty Tours differentiated itself through several key regenerative strategies:

→ Value-Driven Approach

Lise Hines developed the business as an extension of her personal values, emphasizing support for small businesses and community discovery through a local and culinary lens.

→ Relationship-Focused

The tours focus on nurturing meaningful connections between guests and business owners, creating a more intimate and authentic experience

→ Community Engagement

By partnering with local chefs and businesses in the communities which tours operate, the company creates meaningful connections between visitors and the local community allowing visitors to engage with the people who live in the destination which helps to strengthen the social fabric of the destinations they visit. By offering cultural insights about a neighbourhood, the tours also help preserve and promote local culture.

→ Diverse Tour Options

The company offers a range of experiences, including walking tours, deep-dive tours, self-directed tours, and the unique 'With The Chef' program, catering to various preferences and group sizes.

→ Seasonal and Local Focus

By celebrating what is unique and local in the Fort Langley area and operating year-round, tours help local businesses in the shoulder season.

→ All-Inclusive Model

Tours are designed to be fully inclusive, covering food, drinks, and even gratuities, simplifying the experience for guests.

→ Local Economic Support

Unlike some tour operators, Chew On This Tasty Tours fully compensates participating businesses for tastings, creating a no-risk opportunity for local establishments to gain exposure. By focusing on including and showcasing local cuisine and artisanal shops, this form of tourism directly supports local businesses and the community economy.

→ Customization and Flexibility

The business offers private tours and can accommodate various culinary needs, ensuring inclusivity and personalization. By accommodating all dietary preferences where possible helps ensure accessibility for all guests. Tours make a special effort to provide Indigenous facts and welcome all genders and nationalities. Chew On This Tasty Tours also offers tailored experiences for corporate clients and special occasions, the business has expanded beyond traditional tourism.

→ Sustainable Practices

By offering intimate, curated experiences, tours help minimize the negative impacts often associated with large groups or mass tourism. Hines put Fort Langley on hold for the Summer of 2021 as she observed the signs of overtourism and restarted it in the shoulder season. Many tours are conducted on foot, thereby reducing CO2 emissions, and the company uses reusable canvas totes for its "tasty totes" program, aligning with environmentally conscious consumers. Lise also works with local partners, such as Grounds and Greens, which is an entirely plant based café and Reusables, which minimizes disposable take away containers, tours help to minimize waste. Hines also audits each tour regularly to ensure the appropriate amount of food is served in order to minimize excess food waste.

→ Storytelling

Lise is working on embedding more stories into her tours and seeking to improve her storytelling skills through a masterclass through an application to a program through Destination BC. This focus on narrative suggests a move towards more engaging and memorable tour experiences.

Through these distinctive features, Chew On This Tasty Tours has carved out a unique niche in the food tourism market, balancing local economic support with memorable guest experiences. The company's growth from a pandemic-born idea to a thriving small business showcases its adaptability and the effectiveness of its market positioning and has grown from one to five communities in two years, demonstrating its ability to replicate its successful model across different locations.

The Future

Chew On This Tasty Tours is poised for significant growth and expansion, building on the success of its Fort Langley tour. The company is actively diversifying its offerings and geographical reach.

The future direction of Chew On This Tasty Tours is to evolve from a purely culinary-focused experience to

a more holistic, community-oriented, and sustainable tourism model. The company appears to be positioning itself at the forefront of regenerative tourism, blending food experiences with cultural insights, community connections, and environmental awareness.

