

Sustainable Tourism: A Case Study on Salt Spring Island

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Abstract-- Over the past few decades, tourism has become one of the mainstay industries for many communities. Salt Spring Island, an island the south of Vancouver Island, is no exception to the benefits of tourism. Sustainable tourism is a necessary and useful pattern to Salt Spring Island. Under this perspective, there are some challenges that exist on Salt Spring Island regarding the tourism industry. Seasonality and inconvenient transportation are the major challenges, for seasonality will cause unstable revenue and under- or unemployment issues, which will affect residents' quality of life; the inconvenient transportation will not only influence the locals' daily life, but also reduce tourists' interest in travelling. The paper contains three sections: the challenges that exist on Salt Spring Island tourism industries, the measures are using on Salt Spring Island, and innovative approaches from outside the region to help Salt Spring Island to improve its tourism development and sustainability. Despite the local people's efforts to come up with solutions to the issues, these solutions cannot solve the problems because these solutions do not address the root of the problems. Therefore, the authors suggest three innovations to solve these two problems, including building greenways and automatic rental bicycle system, creating a theme for events, and developing wellness tourism.

Keywords: *sustainable tourism, greenway, and wellness tourism*

1. Introduction

Salt Spring Island is the largest island among the southern gulf islands, with an official measurement of 182.7 square kilometers (Statistics Canada, 2001). It is also the most populated island, with a population of about 10,500 as of 2008 (Zimmerman, 2008). Salt Spring Island is very well known for its artistic community because of the creative arts and crafts produced by the locals (Villani, 1996). The island is also famous for its organic food especially lamb. Salt Spring industries have

transitioned from mostly agricultural to sustainable tourism; more and more locals on the island are starting to work in the tourism industry (Halpern, 2009).

Tourism has become a key industry in Salt Spring Island. As Vaugeois says, "Despite often being deemed a 'non extractive' industry, tourism is still a resource dependent industry. It relies on natural surroundings, communities and the steady supply of products to create experiences for visitors" (Vaugeois & Thuot, 2009). Sustainable tourism is a fundamental pattern for the tourism industry. The main tourism challenge on Salt Spring Island is how to promote its tourism industry and come up with methods so that it remains viable over the long term. One of the widely-used definitions of sustainable tourism development focuses on "leading to management of all resources in such a way that we can fulfill economic, social, and aesthetic needs while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems" (Tourism Canada, cited in Murphy, 1994, P.279). Integrating three elements, economy, socio-culture, and environment, is the best way to achieve sustainable tourism. This paper contains three sections: the challenges that exist for Salt Spring Island tourism industries, the measures used on Salt Spring Island, and innovative approaches from outside the region to help Salt Spring Island to improve its tourism development and sustainability.

2. The challenges that exist on Salt Spring Island tourism industries.

There are two main challenges that exist on Salt Spring Island; one is tourism seasonality; the other is inconvenient transportation. The two challenges are the main problems that block tourism development on Salt Spring Island from being more sustainable.

2.1 The effects of seasonality

Seasonality has long been the biggest issue for many tourism destinations. Many tourism policymakers and marketers' strategy plans are to solve the issues of seasonality, mainly because of its negative impact on the economy, as well as on socio-cultural and ecological environmental aspects (Baum and Hagen, 1999). For example, seasonal tourism creates unstable revenue and under-or unemployment. This will affect the quality of life of the local residents. Tourist arrivals on Salt Spring Island exhibit strong seasonality (see Table 1). For example, in 2009, from July to September, the total number of tourists was 24,066, but between January and March, the total number of tourists was only 3,119, and between October and December, the total number of visitors was 3,660. To reduce seasonality on this island is an ambitious goal. In order to promote sustainable tourism, there is a need to tackle seasonality.

Total Values	January	February	March	Q1 Total	April	May	June	Q2 Total	July	August	September	Q3 Total	October	November	December	Q4 Total	TOTAL
2012	710	807	1,127	2,644	2,387	3,043	3,457	9,484	6,663	7,739	4,665	19,067	1,921	1,111	344	3,376	30,862
% change 2012-2011	1.6%	45.1%	-8.6%	8.4%	3.0%	20.7%	5.5%	5.3%	-11.8%	20.8%	20.9%	8.5%	-89.8%	-100.0%	-8.5%	-82.7%	-1.4%
2011	707	825	1,207	2,539	2,310	2,772	3,655	9,141	6,405	6,421	4,110	16,936	1,866	821	303	3,067	29,286
% change 2011-2010	-8.5%	-26.4%	7.5%	-6.0%	-6.0%	-16.5%	-1.9%	-8.6%	-25.8%	-14.6%	-15.3%	-14.1%	3.4%	-12.6%	-40.1%	-1.2%	-11.1%
2010	769	848	1,123	2,740	2,474	3,321	3,789	9,954	8,615	7,537	5,664	19,716	1,935	729	424	3,108	26,176
% change 2010-2009	16.0%	-20.4%	-20.1%	-12.3%	-8.2%	-8.8%	-2.1%	-14.6%	-5.6%	-27.4%	-21.9%	-21.9%	-10.4%	-12.4%	-5.6%	-11.4%	-16.2%
2009	667	1,065	1,406	3,139	2,724	3,644	4,029	10,196	9,125	10,378	4,564	24,066	2,224	832	599	3,660	42,028
% change 2009-2008	-37.5%	9.2%	-31.2%	-20.7%	20.0%	12.2%	21.2%	18.0%	8.2%	-4.3%	2.0%	3.2%	14.5%	-14.0%	6.0%	5.4%	4.6%
2008	862	870	2,043	3,911	2,250	3,247	3,367	9,400	8,421	10,405	4,472	23,307	1,945	867	591	3,404	40,160
% change 2008-2007	-48.0%	24.2%	36.9%	36.2%	-17.0%	-4.5%	1.3%	-4.6%	7.2%	17.1%	-3.2%	9.0%	6.0%	-17.6%	-5.6%	6.0%	7.2%
2007	585	705	1,461	2,872	2,721	3,395	3,937	9,959	7,665	8,885	4,823	21,373	1,826	822	594	3,242	37,447
% change 2007-2006	-22.9%	-25.2%	-32.1%	-20.1%	-12.8%	-4.9%	-10.2%	-21.4%	-18.4%	-10.4%	-10.4%	-10.4%	-6.0%	-28.4%	-45.7%	8.2%	-12.7%
2006	772	1,048	1,915	3,735	3,167	3,784	4,435	10,000	10,010	9,724	5,600	25,354	1,955	620	455	3,065	43,391
% change 2006-2005	-45.0%	-17.1%	-10.2%	-4.9%	35.2%	17.1%	8.2%	10.0%	15.5%	3.8%	-13.8%	-10.2%	-17.4%	-37.3%	-42.4%	-20.0%	5.5%
2005	529	1,265	2,151	3,929	3,142	3,222	4,826	10,000	8,665	9,381	6,131	23,100	2,371	873	691	3,942	41,140

Source: Visitor Center Network Statistic Program, 2012

Table 1. Seasonal Indices for Tourists Arrivals on Salt Spring Island 2005-2012.

2.1.1 Under-or unemployment issues

Over twenty-two percent of the jobs on Salt Spring Island are related to tourism industries (Ecoplan International Inc, 2008). Problems occur during off-seasons because many people lose their jobs. For example, hotels need more employees from May to September, and the owners of hotels have to lay off many employees during the rest of the year because visitor numbers decline. Also, restaurants, pubs, and retail stores have the same problems. During busy seasons, the firms need to hire more employees, but many of these new employees need to be trained before duty; therefore, the

firms spend money and time to train the new recruits. In addition, when people are under or unemployed, they may go to other cities to work and live because they have difficulty finding jobs to support their families. Although Salt Spring Island is a beautiful place to live, it is gradually becoming a retirement community. Many young families are leaving, and the aging population is becoming a serious issue on this island. As more and more of the population retires, and a younger work force leaves the island, Salt Spring Island may become less and less productive.

2.1.2 Revenue may decline during off-seasons

Salt Spring Island's main industry is tourism because it offers visitors an environment away from the city. People can enjoy bike rides along the coast or check out sculptures and art created by local artists (Salt Spring Island, BC); however, from October to May, the weather on the island is not as good as the summer because of the rainy season. Therefore, tourists do not want to visit the island as much as during the summer time. Without enough tourists, many firms lose income. For instance, hotels will have many vacant rooms. Restaurant owners not only have to pay the salary of chefs and other staff, they also have to pay fixed costs like rent. Similarly, the retailers' income for these months will decline; many hotels, restaurants, and retail stores may close. Many locals will lose their jobs, and that will eventually affect the quality of life of local residents.

2.2 The inconvenience of transportation

Tourism is about traveling; therefore, transportation is vital in tourism development, and accessibility can make or break the success of a tourist destination (Sorupla, 2005). The transportation system of a tourist destination has an impact on the tourism experience, which explains how people travel and why they choose differently according to the form of holiday, destination and transport (Lumsdon, as cited in Sorupla, 2005). Although Salt Spring Island is the largest island among the Southern Gulf Islands, its transportation is not exceedingly convenient for two reasons; one is the lack of frequency with which B.C Ferries connect Salt Spring Island to other islands; second is the lack of frequency of public transportation on the island.

2.2.1 B.C Ferries

There are three harbors on Salt Spring Island; the Vesuvius bay has ferries to Crofton;

from Fulford Harbor one can take ferries to Victoria (Swartz Bay), and Long Harbor has ferries to Pender Islands (Otter Bay). However, there are no direct ferries from Salt Spring Island to Vancouver. The B.C Ferries website shows if people take the ferry at Tsawwassen to Salt Spring Island, there are three stops on the route, and it will likely take travelers three hours to travel from Vancouver to Salt Spring Island.

Tourism on Salt Spring Island is highly seasonal, and the schedule of B.C Ferries also fluctuates according to seasons. During low seasons, the ferry only stops at Salt Spring Island two times daily. Once at 10:10am in the morning and once at 7:20pm at night during weekdays (see table 2).

Tsawwassen to Salt Spring Island (Long Harbour)
IN EFFECT: September 4, 2012 to March 31, 2013

Leave	Days	Stops/Transfers	Arrive
10:10 AM	Mon, Tue, Wed, Thu, Fri	3 stops Galiano, Mayne, Pender	1:10 PM
11:10 AM	Sun	3 stops Galiano, Mayne, Pender	2:10 PM
12:15 PM	Sat	non-stop	1:40 PM
7:20 PM	Mon*, Tue, Wed, Thu**	3 stops Galiano, Mayne, Pender	10:20 PM
8:25 PM ▲	Fri	1 stop Galiano	10:15 PM
8:45 PM	Sat	2 stops Galiano, Mayne	11:00 PM
9:35 PM	Sun & Holiday Mon	non-stop	11:00 PM
10:25 PM ■	Fri	non-stop	11:50 PM

▲Sep 7, 14, 21, 28, Oct 5, 2012, Mar 28 & 29, 2013 only

■Not available: Sep 7, 14, 21, 28, Oct 5, 2012, Mar 28 & 29, 2013

*On October 8, 2012 & February 11, 2013, the Monday schedule is in effect until 2:00 pm, the Holiday Monday Schedule is in effect after 2:00 pm.

**Thursdays Excluding March 28, 2013

Table 2. B.C Ferries Schedule from September 4, 2012 to March 31, 2013

During high seasons, the number of ferry pickups increases. As one can see in the Table 3, although sometimes there are two vessels from Vancouver to Salt Spring Island, the pick up times are still quite far apart every day. For example, if people go to Salt Spring Island on Friday, the earliest ferry is at 10:20 and the next ferry is four hours later.

Tsawwassen to Salt Spring Island (Long Harbour)
IN EFFECT: June 26 to September 2, 2013

Leave	Days	Stops/Transfers	Arrive
10:20 AM	Mon*, Tue, Wed, Thu, Fri	3 stops Galiano, Mayne, Pender	1:35 PM
12:35 PM	Sat	non-stop	2:00 PM
2:00 PM	Fri	non-stop	3:30 PM
2:05 PM	Sun & Holiday Mon	non-stop	3:30 PM
2:30 PM	Mon*, Thu	non-stop	4:00 PM
6:20 PM	Mon*, Thu	non-stop	7:50 PM
6:25 PM	Fri	1 stop Galiano	8:20 PM
6:50 PM	Sun & Holiday Mon	non-stop	8:20 PM
7:40 PM	Mon*, Tue, Wed, Thu	3 stops Galiano, Mayne, Pender	10:45 PM
8:25 PM	Fri	2 stops Mayne, Pender	10:55 PM
9:30 PM	Sat	non-stop	10:55 PM
10:45 PM	Sun & Holiday Mon	non-stop	12:10 AM

▲ During the summer there are two vessels on the Vancouver - Gulf Islands route. This symbol indicates the smaller vessel which has a limited snack bar and no elevator. Washroom facilities are available on the vehicle deck.
*No sailing on Holiday Mondays: July 1, Aug 5 & Sep 2, 2013.

Table 3. B.C Ferries Schedule from June 26 to September 2, 2012

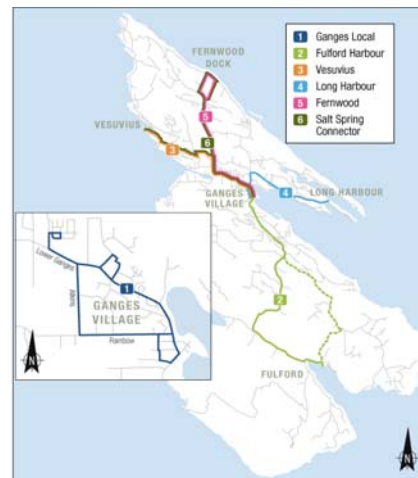


Table 4. Salt Spring Island bus route

2.2.2 Bus route

Public bus transportation is also a challenge on Salt Spring Island due to the lack of frequency. As one can see on the regional map for Salt Spring Island (BC Transit), there are six bus routes. Three of them connect to the harbors, and one is the main connector. Lack of many routes determines that the available buses usually cannot satisfy the needs of travelers to visit many of the places on the island, especially sight seeing spots and national parks. The schedules of bus routes on Salt Spring Island are exceedingly limited; for example, route 4 and route 5 only have two runs from Monday to Friday. Route 1 is a loop that goes around the island, and it only has four runs every day. The time gap between each run is two hours, which cannot satisfy the needs of the travelers who do not have cars to visit around Salt Spring Island easily.

3. The responses of Salt Spring Island to the challenges

Although there are many challenges on Salt Spring Island, the local people have come up with measures to develop tourism and attract more tourists while protecting the environment. There are many organizations being set up on Salt Spring Island to focus on servicing tourism development.

3.1 Transition

Transition Salt Spring, a local organization that addresses urgent and critical issues of global climate change and declining fossil fuel supplies, supports working together to rebuild a resilient community in a time of transition. This organization has initiated many projects to protect the environment and at the same time help develop tourism.

3.1.1 Pathway

Cycling is an ideal way to discover the beauty of Salt Spring Island. There is a company that rents bicycles to visitors on the island. Salt Spring Island Transition Organization set up a project about pathways to promote a safety and healthy environment for non-motorized traffic, and to make Salt Spring Island bicycle and pedestrian friendly. The local group, Island Pathways, has helped to develop the island to become more bike-friendly with installation of bike racks and development of a map with bike routes. This project is to allow anyone within walking distance of Ganges to be able to walk to or cycle safely into town without driving cars. Therefore, island pathways not only offer a safe and healthy living environment for local residents, but also for tourists who wish to ride bicycles on the island.

The transition organization has also published a heritage map, which is a self-guided tour of heritage sites. It also shows roads, trailheads, beach accesses, parks on the island and bike routes.

3.1.2 Car stops

Learning from the experience on Pender Island, the transition organization has also installed car stops on Salt Spring Island on Fort Street via Robinson Road route. The main purpose of car stops is to help the environment by moving beyond one car and one passenger, and making it easier for people with cars to carpool and give rides to others.

The car stops serve areas where bus routes do not reach, and they offer tourists without cars opportunities to get around Salt Spring more easily and a chance to meet and interact with locals. It is also an opportunity for people to make a contribution to the environment and forge a stronger community.

4. Innovation in developing sustainable tourism on Salt Spring Island

Although Salt Spring Island has taken some measures to develop its tourism, it still has not solved the seasonality problem or created a theme to enhance the image of this island. Learning from the experience of other countries or regions can help Salt Spring Island find a way to improve its tourism development.

4.1 Build greenways and automatic rental and return bicycle system

The Overall Planning of Greenways in Guangdong Province, China, has ten provincial greenways that connect more than seven hundred major parks, nature reserves, scenic areas and historical and cultural sites. Greenways generate new ideas for the tourism industry. The greenways not only offer safe paths for cyclists, but also outdoor recreation centers near attractions. They also offer tourists and cyclists a way to get tourism information and have a place to rest or buy souvenirs. Moreover, they have become established many rest stations along the greenways. These rest stations are set up for tourists and cyclists to rest and to mode of transportation. They are near attractions and public transportation, such as metro and bus stations. The most important thing is the existence of bicycle rental and return stations at bus stations and the metro, which encourage automatic rental and return system.

Guangdong Province is promoting the development of the greenways for the tourism industry. It connects the attractions, villages, agricultural bases and the countryside. They integrate attractions, parks and lead residents who live near the greenways to develop village inn, agritourism and leisure farms. In this way, the greenways can improve sustainable tourism and increase farmers' income. Moreover, the greenways can also have remote effects on real estate, the entertainment industry, and create more job opportunities.

The Guangdong government proposed a plan to establish six greenways in the Pearl River Delta in 2010. The greenway is 1060 kilometers

in total and connects Guangzhou from north to south, runs through the downtown area of the city and the Central Business District to the old city quarter. It also covers 1800 square kilometers and serves seven million people.

From the website of Guangzhou Newspaper (2012, Oct. 5), people can learn more about culture in Guangzhou by walking along the greenways, for the greenways connect to 234 city view sights, 98 streets, 99 stations and 42 Asian Games venues. The greenways are closely connected with the metro and city pedestrian networks. In Shangxia Jiu, Beijing road, the greenways are close to commercial area, which increase the commercial opportunities. In the countryside or rural area, greenways also produce an opportunity for economic development and increase people's income. Guangzhou carried out an economic evaluation of the greenways. It was reported by the Zhongshan University in 2009; the average income and the number of tourists for three small towns like Xiaoluo, Paitan and Zhongguo have rapidly increased. According to the website of Renming Wang (2010, 2.2), Zengcheng city received more than 11.89 million RMB, and tourism income was up to 2.5 billion RMB (425 million USD), which was an increase of 128.6% and 151.48% respectively. Also, the farmers' individual income went up to 9281 RMB (1546 USD), an increase of 17.18%.

Although Salt Spring Island has its pathways, these pathways do not connect to the main attractions and shops and do not have a bike share system. Therefore, the main goal of Salt Spring Island is to connect the attractions and set up some bike rental and return stations near attractions and parks. A Public bike share program is the fastest growing form of urban transportation. Since the first system was launched in 2005, more than 270 cities globally have adopted "PBS" system (Sandvault, 2011). Golden and Sandvault launched first bike share program in BC. They aim to promote active transportation and a healthy life style, reduce green house gas emissions from the use of cars, and reduce bike theft (Golden Bike Share Program).

Through this bike share system, visitors and residents can ride bicycles to attractions instead of driving a car, which is beneficial for the environment because riding bicycles can reduce the greenhouse gas. Moreover, some rental and return bicycle stations can be installed near car stops; therefore, people can return bicycles if they are tired, or can rent a bicycle to

continue their journey. The bike share program should not solely serve residents but also provide convenient mobility to visitors who wish to travel around Salt Spring Island.

4.2 Create a theme for an event

Another innovative approach that may be useful for the region to consider would be one that was introduced in Australia (Fredline, 2006). It addresses the impacts of events to the community by comparing three different events that vary by location and theme in Australia, and after many years people have found that positive effects of events outweighed than the negative effects. These effects are not only in social, but also economic and environmental, for they can improve residents' quality of life and attract more visitors to destinations during low seasons. Seasonal events and festivals are used by cities extremely in order to attract more tourists come to the destination. For example, holding an event can not only create employment opportunities for local people, but can also attract tourists to come to the events to spend their money even during low seasons. The most important thing is that holding events can promote an image of tourist destination and tourism sustainability.

Another example is the Window of the World in Shenzhen, China (Window of the World). This theme park receives most visitors during the long holidays such as the National Day, Labor Day and Spring Festival. During low seasons, it still has various events depending on the season. In spring, it has an International Kite Festival. It also has the International Beer Festival in summer time. There is a French Cultural Festival from September 30th to October 7th; then from October 12th to November 4th there are Halloween haunted houses and themed parties. Through these events, Window of the World successfully gains more visitors and generates enough revenue even during off-seasons.

Salt Spring Island can analyze what makes them different from other islands and use the advantages to create events and seasonal festivals at different time of the year in hopes of attracting more tourists to visit especially during off-season. It can focus on events for retired tourists because retired tourists are becoming one of the major tourists sectors around the world but also it can use its local distinctive features to develop its tourism events. For example, it can have some events about handcraft products and organic farming. Through this way, Salt Spring

Island can develop some positive measures on tourism seasonality.

4.3 Develop the wellness tourism

The last innovative approach that may be useful for the region to consider would be one that was introduced in Switzerland—wellness tourism (Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001). Wellness tourism is the most perfect ecotourism pattern, and it can tackle seasonality because people can go for health care during the off-season, for wellness care does not depend on the weather, and people often stay inside during their wellness care, so it is expedient to promote it. According to Mueller and Kaufmann (2011), the definition of wellness tourism is that the main motivation for people to go on trips is to preserve their health. Usually, they require an entire service package, which may include physical fitness/ beauty care, healthy nutrition/ diet, relaxation/ meditation and mental activity/ education. An expanded wellness model from this article will help people to understand more about wellness tourism (see Figure 1).

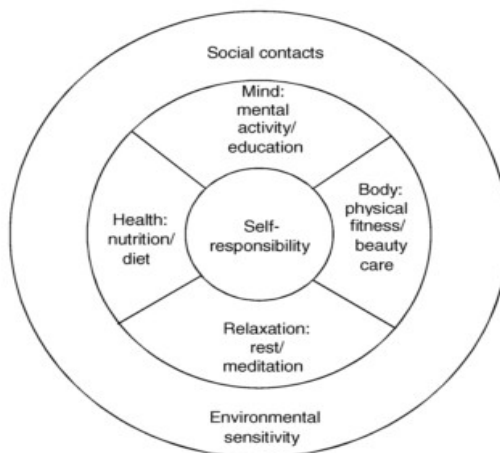


Figure 1. Expanded wellness model.
Source: Mueller & Kaufmann, 2001

The wellness tourism market in Switzerland is active. The national tourism marketing institutions, Swiss Cure Institutions Association, and the Swiss Spa Association have set up a wellness cooperative. Medical supervision, wellness infrastructure, wellness facilities, and software elements such as health topics or individual care are extremely valuable to wellness tourism. The largest group of wellness hotels in Switzerland provides not only individual care and information for guests but also comprehensive further training. The authors

did a few surveys to measure the demand for wellness tourism: over sixteen percent of Switzerland's total hotel visitors were interested in wellness tourism. Also, on average, the guests spent about eight days in hotels, and the main reason for the stay was they wanted to do something for their health such as to do a cure or convalescence. The result of these surveys shows that typical wellness guests are numerous, and wellness tourism does not need to rely on seasons because people can do their wellness care inside, so wellness tourism can tackle seasonality. Therefore, the existing wellness tourism in Switzerland has a significant market and demand. In addition, many Asia countries are aware of wellness tourism and bring it to their countries such as Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam are starting to develop and promoted.

Salt Spring Island has high quality and professional health treatments such as esthetics and therapy. Tourists can enjoy the natural environment as well as do something for their health during their trips. Many local people on Salt Spring Island prefer tourists, who are caring and willing to protect the environment. For example, according to Changou International Travel Service website, many rich Chinese people spent up to 65,000 CHF for Anti-Aging Therapy in five days during their wellness trips in Switzerland. During these trips, tourists will go sightseeing; however, they will stay at hospitals or hotels for their treatments most of the time. Thus, wellness tourism will create economic benefits and will not increase the ecological footprint on this island. Also, when wellness tourism develops, health care facilities and infrastructure will improve, so wellness tourism will benefit local people, too.

Therefore, Salt Spring Island can develop wellness tourism, which includes physical fitness/ beauty care, healthy nutrition/ diet, relaxation/ meditation and mental activity/ education. However, operator has difficulty providing entire service packages. Operators related to the health and wellness fields could collaborate. They may set up an institution association, which can help operators develop wellness tourism. The institution association should build a brand for wellness tourism on Salt Spring Island, so it can be easy to be promoted to the domestic and international tourists. Wellness tourism can integrate three elements: economic, environmental, and social/cultural. They can also tackle seasonality, so it is expedient to promote wellness tourism.

5. Conclusion

Over past few decades, tourism has become one of mainstay industries for many communities. Salt Spring Island, an island south of Vancouver Island, is no exception to the benefits of tourism. Tourism industries can create more job opportunities for local residents as well as bring in revenue. As revenue increases, facilities on the island can be upgraded; thus, locals and travelers may enjoy a better stay and accommodation. Sustainable tourism is a necessary and useful pattern for Salt Spring Island. Under this perspective, there are some challenges that exist on Salt Spring. The seasonality and inconvenient transportation are the major challenges on the island, for seasonality will cause unstable revenue and under-or unemployment issues, which will affect residents' quality of life; the inconvenient transportation will not only influence the locals' daily life, but also reduce the interests of tourists in travelling to Salt Spring Island. Despite efforts of the local people to come up with solutions to the issues, these solutions do not solve problems because the solutions cannot solve the root of the problem. There are three innovations suggested in this paper. They are building greenways and an automatic rental bicycle system, creating a theme for events, and developing wellness tourism.

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