

World Tourism Day celebrates tourism as an instrument of peace

By Nate Smelle

For the past 44 years, the United Nations World Tourism Organization has celebrated World Tourism Day on Sept. 27. As a way to raise awareness of the important role that tourism plays within the international community, World Tourism Day is also meant to demonstrate how this sector can positively influence society, culture, and the environment worldwide. Each year the UN chooses a theme that is reflective of the current state of the global tourism sector. The theme of this year's World Peace Day is 'Tourism and Peace.' Highlighting how tourism can be used as an instrument of peace, the UN's website states: 'This sector can be perceived as the epitome of intercultural dialogue; it allows meeting the 'other', learning about different cultures, hearing foreign languages, tasting exotic flavours, bonding with other human beings, and building tolerance. In essence, it is a mind-broadening educational and spiritual experience.' World Tourism Day 2024, under the theme 'Tourism and Peace', wants to highlight the vital role of this sector in fostering peace and understanding between nations and cultures and in supporting reconciliation processes. While speaking with Bancroft This Week about Hastings County's efforts to raise awareness of World Tourism Day in 2024, the county's tourism development coordinator Jen Burke, and marketing coordinator Jordon White, both expressed their excitement with the Canadian Peace Museum's decision to make the Town of Bancroft its home. They also acknowledged how the museum will be a perfect fit with the peaceful natural landscape of North Hastings. In conversation with Bancroft This Week, president of the Canadian Peace Museum Chris Houston said he was delighted to learn that Hastings County was supporting the UN's theme of 'Tourism and Peace' by profiling his team's efforts to establish the museum in Bancroft. 'We need to celebrate the widespread normality of peace, and be reminded about the need to promote peace and work for greater levels of peace, both internationally and in our own communities.' Referencing anthropologist Brian Hare's idea of the 'survival-of-the-friendliest', in juxtaposition to Sir Charles Darwin's more commonly quoted 'survival-of-the-fittest', Houston points out how Hare believes that millennia of cooperation and kindness has enabled humans to become a dominant species on earth. Explaining further how the anthropologist's idea supports the theme of this year's World Tourism Day, Houston told Bancroft This Week about how Hare also maintains that 'our love of our family and neighbours can provoke an evolutionary tendency towards [being] defensive to outsiders, that can lead to cruelty and violence.' Noting how Hare cites studies which suggest that meeting people from different cultures is good because it reduces the need to see 'the other' as an enemy or a threat, which in turn improves the potential for peace, Houston declared, 'Tourism is therefore good for peace.' According to Houston, the Canadian Peace Museum has also received a letter of support from the Ontario Highlands Tourism Organization this past summer. In the letter, dated Aug. 28, the OHTO's executive director Nicole Whiting stated how she believes museum is a 'significant and timely addition to our region, aligning perfectly with OHTO's approach to responsible tourism.' Explaining why the museum will be great for the Bancroft community and the region, Whiting said, 'The Canadian Peace Museum's focus on equity, social cohesion, and human and planetary health resonates deeply with our 'Wander Sustainably' approach, which emphasizes inclusivity, sustainability, and community alignment. We recognize that tourism and cultural institutions like the Canadian Peace Museum play a critical role in shaping the narratives and values that define our communities. By offering a space dedicated to peace education and the promotion of human rights, the museum will not only attract visitors but also contribute to the ongoing efforts to build resilient and harmonious communities within our region.' As the campaign to bring the Canadian Peace Museum to Bancroft in 2025 garners more support among the regional and local tourism sector, Houston continues to search for a facility that is suitable for such a world class tourist destination. To learn more about the Canadian Peace Museum's mission to promote peace; and, find out how to support the museum and/or get involved, visit their website at: www.canadianpeacemuseum.ca/