

Sunday, March 10, 2019

My name is Melissa Laforge and I am a recent vacation home owner.

I would like to indicate my support of the Tourist Accommodations Registration Act, as I see it as a means of addressing current trends in the accommodation industry, and legitimizing a natural progression that has occurred towards online short term rental bookings.

This 21st Century trend towards boutique travel represents a great opportunity to bring funds to remote and rural areas of the province, and to communities in need, as today's travellers are seeking unique accommodations off the beaten path. Instagram is driving people to the unique, versus city travel of the past. It's a trend to be capitalized upon, and there is no better place than Nova Scotia to build that tourism. The under developed coast alone represents a massive industry. For example, say Bay of Fundy and tourists respond with: Hopewell Rocks, St. Andrew's by the Sea, and Grand Manan. Missing from the equation is all the opportunity on the Nova Scotia side. Nobody recognizes Cape Split, Halls Harbour, nor Isle Haute. Allowing for micro-accommodations will only promote the treasures Nova Scotia has to offer.

One concern, which has plagued the small industry, is that dated accommodation regulations have a tendency to pigeon-hole a singular vision. With a system that encourages a homogenous checklist to rank accommodations, and a rating system based on amenities that may or may not be of value to the traveler, it misses the mark of modern travellers. The system has become irrelevant. I would have no incentive to *want* my property listed under those rules - facing a lower ranking for my preference for no TV, or for any intentional choice that I make to attract that boutique traveller, but which penalizes my star rating.

For this reason, I encourage the development of the Act. Of note, section 6 is a concern. I would caution the province from heavy handed fees yet to be developed, as property maintenance costs in Nova Scotia are extraordinarily high. Providing utilities during winter months, a short vacation season, and high insurance rates on vacant homes are all factors to consider when weighing the costs for hosts. Added fees from the province would actually make Nova Scotia much less competitive with other Atlantic Provinces, and international destinations. This can not become a provincial tax incentive that pushes us out of reach compared to our neighbours.

Nova Scotia is in a unique situation to buoy up and encourage the development of short term rental properties, for benefit across the province. **Tourism dollars are on the table, and we are up against international competitors.** I have witnessed tourists who tend to visit Maine, change their plans when viewing the social media of guests to my house. This is a new market, with potential for huge success if done right. Society on the whole has never been here before, with access to this kind of explosive niche tourism market. Old methods will not suit this emerging market. We have all the components necessary for a happy ending - an attractive tourism destination, a culturally vibrant province, and an online community scouring the internet for the next best destination to showcase on their Instagram.

Let's throw the doors open to Nova Scotia and let our rural communities reap the rewards. But please always keep in mind that imposing fees and regulations will directly impact the "little guy", not larger organizations with deeper cash flows. This would further serve as a deterrent for those seeking to invest.

Regards,
Melissa Laforge