



The Canadian Academy of
Travel & Tourism:

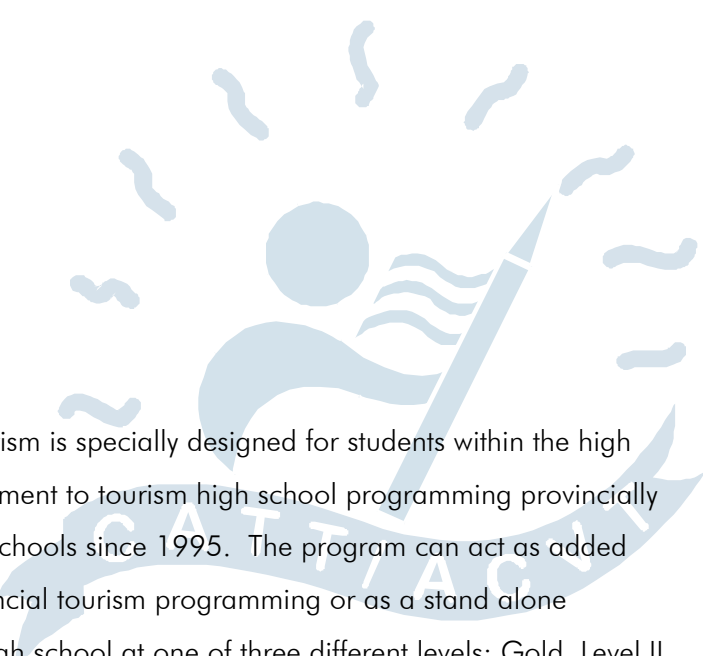
a focus on

Gimli High School

Gimli, Manitoba



CATT Background



The Canadian Academy of Travel & Tourism is specially designed for students within the high school system as an introduction and/or enrichment to tourism high school programming provincially and territorially. It has operated in Canadian schools since 1995. The program can act as added value or enrichment to existing local and provincial tourism programming or as a stand alone course/credit. CATT can be introduced in a high school at one of three different levels: Gold, Level II and Level I.

CATT aims to promote the national importance of tourism among young people, to highlight the career opportunities in tourism and to develop skills through national standardized learning outcomes associated with curriculum learning activity sets for educators to use academically and experientially in their high schools.

Its mission is to introduce and promote careers in the tourism industry while students pursue their high school studies. Students enrolled in the program follow regular high school curriculum with a “specialization” in tourism. Academy students demonstrate learning outcomes referenced to the National Occupational Standards for Transferable Skills established by the Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council, the Employability Skills 2000+ assembled by the Conference Board of Canada and Human Resource and Social Development Essential Skills.

Canadian Academy of Travel & Tourism: A Case Study

The following is an in-depth look at the Academy Gold-level program independently run within a secondary school setting. With a commitment to tourism studies and exploring careers in the industry, each Academy program is a unique operation, flavoured by the culture and the spirit of the surrounding community.

The School and the Community

Situated near the picturesque shores of Lake Winnipeg, Gimli High School is surrounded by the popular Interlake tourism region, which boasts breathtaking natural beauty and a rich heritage. The area offers a wealth of festivals and events, resorts and cottages, museums and shopping. With such a wide range of opportunities for students to learn about the diverse career options in tourism, it is a prime location for the Canadian Academy of Travel and Tourism (CATT).

The CATT program allows students to pursue their high school diploma while learning a multitude of academic, technological, and job skills. These provide a head start in post-secondary education and enable graduates to take advantage of the tourism employment and business possibilities at their doorstep or around the globe. It also forges links between the education system and local business, building stronger, more connected communities and creating a new generation of skilled and experienced employees.

CATT is coordinated on a national level by the Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council (CTHRC), with provincial and territorial human resource organizations providing training programs, support, and advice on a regional basis. There are three levels at which a school can participate: the introductory Level I, the knowledge-building Level II, and the skill-building Gold Level. All three provide increasing degrees of classroom learning and hands-on experience.

Starting the CATT Program at Gimli

In June 2008, the Manitoba Tourism Education Council (MTEC), which coordinates CATT in the province, invited the coordinator from the Interlake Tourism Association, Gail McDonald, and the past teacher for the West Kildonan Gold CATT school, Cindy Blicq, to a meeting of school board members and principals from the Interlake School Division to talk about the CATT program.

Ms. McDonald spoke of the opportunities for students to become involved in the tourism sector in Gimli and surrounding areas, while Ms. Blicq discussed the skills students gain from the program and the opportunities they would have to transfer their skills from the program into summer positions. She added that this would encourage students to stay in these communities after graduation from high school, to look for full time positions or to create their own businesses.

MTEC representative Lori Slobodian elaborated on the support Human Resource Organizations such as MTEC provide to the program, including training programs and career workshops. She also highlighted the links to the CTHRC and the national recognition this can provide.

With its strong local tourism sector, Gimli High School decided to join CATT. Principal Dan Pona spoke to teacher Janice Skene, who together with two fellow teachers travelled to West Kildonan Collegiate to see the program in action and obtain more information from Ms. Blicq. As they began to establish the program, they gathered curriculum details, supporting materials, and experienced advice from Ms. Slobodian at MTEC, Ms. McDonald at Interlake Tourism, and Jason Gourley of the CTHRC. A second school in the area had also decided to join CATT, leading to ongoing discussions between Ms. Skene and her Riverton Collegiate Institute counterpart; the two continue to share ideas and compare notes as their programs evolve.

Setting Goals and Growing the Program

Gimli's objectives in joining CATT were to increase the students' interest in tourism, expand their knowledge of the range of tourism job opportunities, and make school contacts with various local businesses. The program began with fifteen students in Level I, which introduces students to tourism through a full-credit course, a tourism career workshop put on by MTEC, and 25 hours of volunteer work in tourism-related experiences. Students who complete these components receive a certificate – a welcome addition to a resume or post-secondary school application.

Now in its second year, the program has added Level II, which deepens interest in tourism careers and builds on the knowledge and skills of Level I. Students obtain their Level II certificates by attending a customer service course held in conjunction with MTEC, fulfilling 100 hours of relevant work experience, and completing either a Ministry of Education approved secondary provincial tourism career preparation program or a second tourism course and two employability skills such as First Aid and the It's Good Business responsible service program. These components allow students to develop transferable skills and provide them with a broad range of hands-on experiences so they can determine which aspect of tourism suits them best.

As a new Academy school, Gimli is building its program and looking for the best fit for students and administration. Classroom CATT teacher Ms. Skene has been instrumental in establishing and promoting the program, and works with division coordinator Greg Palson and school internship coordinator Tyler Moran. Ms. Skene has twice attended the national CATT conference to make important contacts and learn best practices, which she has put to good use to get the program growing.

Like any budding enterprise, coordinators are looking for ways to increase participation and awareness. CATT is listed in the school's course guide, signs and posters tout the program around the hallways, and positive word of mouth from involved students piques others' interest. Current participants are extremely enthusiastic about the course; their animated firsthand descriptions of their tourism experiences go a long way to encouraging fellow students to explore the Academy.

Developing Curriculum with CATT Students

To integrate the program into established school activities and departments, Gimli's Academy collaborates with other school areas. Aspects of the CATT curriculum overlap with the tourism component of Grade 10 geography, while others fit with the Environmental Club – students are thus able to learn about different facets of the tourism sector. Coordinators have also included Junior Achievement in the program as a way of teaching the students about running a business and fundraising practices. The Junior Achievement program complements CATT by offering students the ability to build entrepreneurial skills and leadership qualities. One upcoming project will be selling school clothing; the school has acquired an embroidery machine and students will be doing this work themselves, while also developing organizational, promotional, and sales skills.

Students have already built on their event planning and fundraising skills by working with the drama team during a school production of Peter Pan. They organized a silent auction, handling all the components: delivering letters to local businesses to obtain prizes, selling tickets, working at the auction, and coordinating the draw. During performances they worked the door, sold flowers, and assisted with costumes, then helped with the final clean-up when the play was complete.

Students are extremely involved in the program's further development. Ms. Skene offers them the latitude to shape the program to suit their needs and interests, provided these keep within the focus of the Academy. As part of the Junior Achievement link, some of the students hold executive positions within the Gimli CATT program, affording them the opportunity to build important decision-making skills. Among the group's current projects is making plans for various field trips to see the tourism sector in action and ask questions of regional tourism leaders.

Looking ahead, coordinators and students are hoping to compete in the Global Travel and Tourism Partnership case study. Students are currently researching potential topics for this yearly competition, in which students explore and write about a tourism opportunity in their region. Winning this competition amongst other Canadian CATT programs would allow students to showcase their skills on an international scale and meet like-minded students from around the world. The Gimli students also hope to attend the national student conference, where attendees share successes, challenges, and their passion for a career in tourism.

Involving Business and the Community

Local tourism businesses are becoming aware of the program and the skilled students eager to work in their sector. The Gimli Recreation Centre has approached the school with a variety of activities the students can do to obtain valuable hands-on experience and complete their volunteer hours. Some of the projects they've been involved with include working in the canteen at the arena, helping with events at Lobsterfest, updating the Gimli community directory, timekeeping during sporting events, refreshing the community notice boards, and looking for ideas to improve the town – everything from creating walking and biking paths to the placement of trash cans. The Centre has been so pleased with the results of the partnership that they call the school as events come up and positions are available.

Other employers are also happy to collaborate with the school. A Level II student is learning about the role of a curator through a placement at the Icelandic Museum. Level I students have gained experience in everything from food and beverage to sports and event planning through roles with Relay for Life, the Winnipeg Beach curling club, special events at the Fraserwood Hall, Camp Arnes, Skate Canada's Carnival for Skate

Interlake, and the drag races. One special needs student worked at the assisted living facility in Gimli, serving meals, helping in the kitchen, and assisting the recreation director. Additionally, there is a large hotel and conference centre in town which may offer placements in future years.

Working for the Future

As a new program, coordinators have naturally faced a few challenges in these initial stages. Changes to the timetable would be a benefit, as classes are only one hour in length and the course is currently scheduled during the first period of the day, before many of the businesses are open. Attracting more students to the program is a top priority, as well as finding more time to interact with local tourism businesses.

Yet its dedicated coordinators see the CATT program as a prime opportunity to introduce students to the many opportunities tourism offers beyond such typically thought of jobs as travel agent, chef, or hotel manager. They also see the benefits to the school in terms of relevance and community interaction – particularly the excellent prospect of providing students with local jobs and local businesses with skilled staff. With strong, ongoing support from administration, community employers, and tourism organizations, the Gimli CATT program looks to a promising future.