

Saranac Lake Analysis

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Saranac Lake sits in a great position to deliver great outdoor experiences, especially those related to water, climbing, winter sports, camping, and hiking. The Adirondack Park protects those opportunities into the future.

There is strong local interest in wellness and arts.

Saranac Lake currently has a greater set of experiences than it does products. Many people come to paddle or powerboat in nearby waters and others come to hike, camp, and climb in the region.

Saranac Lake has some lodging, but is currently losing a fair share of its lodging and dining patrons to Lake Placid, which has a larger diversity of more current offerings on both.

Where does one start in Saranac Lake?

We see two key areas that need work: lodging and the conversion of outdoor experiences into tourism products.

Saranac Lake needs to add lodging that is current in its set of amenities and oriented to the experiences that draw visitors to this great region. And Saranac Lake needs to upgrade much of its existing lodging.

New lodging should reinforce and facilitate the directions taken in product development. In fact, great resource oriented lodging may lead its marketing moves with the experiences one can have from that base.

New lodging should target a mid and upper-mid range clientele, building with the expectation that the patrons are expecting quality and will stay multiple nights.

Once the capacity, quality, and appeal of Saranac Lake lodging begins to change, the patronage of the lodging products will fuel the marketing process that will help solidify new experience-based products and local retail and dining and local retail and dining.

Saranac Lake needs to draw on its outdoor appeal to create its own place in the market – its own niche. Discussions have recently led to a focus on attracting urbanites (of all ages and physical abilities) and helping them learn the skills to fully enjoy the experiences that Saranac Lake is famous for.

These “Adirondack Learn to...” vacations would call on existing local skills, share this magnificent region with people who are eager to learn, spread the economy over four seasons, and develop a long term relationship between Saranac Lake and great set of patrons.

A partial list of “learn to...” experiences includes:

- Camping
- Kayaking
- Canoeing
- Hiking
- Climbing
- Backpacking
- Fishing
- Cooking Outdoors
- Mountain Biking
- Skiing (cross country and downhill)
- Snowshoeing
- Ice Fishing
- Birding
- Wildlife Spotting (including sign and tracks)
- Identifying Trees and Wildflowers
- Creating Adirondack crafts (strong emphasis on gathering and using local materials)

Those learning products each call on skills that are widely available amongst the population of Saranac Lake – opening the door for many to participate in the economy at entrepreneurial or employee levels.

Saranac Lake will need a full complement of supporting tourism products as well.

As patrons come to participate in these learning experiences, those visits and the experiences themselves will open the door for more outdoor adventure-related retail. Clustering this retail with other visitor-related retail will help build a flow of visitors into the downtown.

Saranac Lake will profit from opening more dining opportunities, some located close to tourism-related retail in the downtown, some associated with the riverwalk development, and others oriented to resources.

There is a strong interest and history in Saranac Lake related to wellness. And there is an aptitude among locals both for helping visitors attain healthy lifestyles and facilitating the experiences of those with physical limitations. Being and eating healthy is a great supporting theme for the “learn to...” niche. Further, supporting the efforts by those who are challenged to “learn to...” is both noble and a strong niche market itself.

Saranac Lake is a haven for artists and a stronghold for artisans. Some of that can be reflected in the “learn to” thrust as visitors are coached in art and craft making that is rooted in regional themes and materials. As the local economy becomes more firmly established, the demand for world class art (including performing) will grow – and the presence of a vibrant arts community will add balance to the developing sense of destination.

Saranac Lake already has strong businesses that rent canoes, kayaks, and other watercraft – and guide, drop and pick up, teach, and otherwise support watercraft related adventures. We see demand for these businesses increasing.

We also see demand for all kinds of guided experiences increasing by those who have taken “learn to...” instruction, but still want the security of having an experienced outdoorsperson along.

Next Steps

Over the next few months, the Saranac Lake working group will explore the issues related to expanding key products and infrastructure, lodging, strengthening downtown, and managing the sense of arrival. We’ll explore this “learn to...” niche and see if it’s truly a “fit” for Saranac Lake and the people who call it home. We’ll see if there are people ready to step up and bring new products to the table that can become the nucleus of an exciting new aspect to Saranac Lake’s economy. We’ll examine whether there are ways the public sector (town and park) can compliment private sector initiative and energy to change the quality and profitability of tourism for Saranac Lake.