EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
FEASIBILITY STUDY
HOMESTAY VACATIONS IN THE YUKON

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For the Association franco-yukonnaise
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1. Introduction

1.1. The Association franco-yukonnaise

Since 1982, the Association franco-yukonnaise (AFY) has been the official representative of Yukon’s francophone community and lead proponent of its development. As a non-profit organization, its mission is to create and develop services, activities and institutions together with its partners in order for the Franco-Yukon community to grow and thrive to its full potential. Its mandate is to play a role in various spheres of activity, primarily economic development, social development, employability and adult education, and arts and culture.

1.2. Background

Tour operators and travel agents who sell travel packages to the Yukon regularly ask the Association franco-yukonnaise about the availability of homestay vacations. This request is most frequently made by tour operators and travel agents in France. The Yukon government’s Department of Tourism and Culture has received similar requests when promoting the territory in France.

The product that most closely resembles homestay vacations at present is bed and breakfast lodging, but it is not exactly what visitors want. More and more seek an unique experience and the opportunity to meet the people who live in the regions they are visiting and to take part in local life.

This type of product would be offered to tour operators, travel wholesalers and travel agencies looking for a niche product to sell to small groups visiting the Yukon.

In February 2013, the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency (CanNor), through the Strategic Investments in Northern Economic Development (SINED) program, granted AFY funding to carry out a feasibility study for the creation of homestay vacations.

1.3. Terminology

Travel agency

A retailer that sells travel packages directly to clients, provides related tourism services, such as independent or group vacations with or without a tour package, delivers travel vouchers, and books lodgings or arranges for hospitality for people travelling for pleasure, business or events.

The profession of travel agent is regulated and falls into one of two groups: tour operators, or agencies that deal directly with clients. The distinction is that travel agencies are vacation distributors who work for clients, while tour operators are professionals who put together different services provided by different providers.

Tour operator

A company that puts together several products from among its providers (e.g. carriers, hotels, motorcoach lines, restaurants, guides) and packages them as all-inclusive vacations for a flat price.

Destination management company (DMC)
A destination management company is a sub-contractor. Modelled after a travel agency or local business, a DMC looks after groups for the duration of their stay. Tour operators often recommend vacations that are handled entirely by DMCs upon arrival at the destination.

**Bed and breakfast (B&B)**

As the name suggests, breakfast is included with lodging. B&Bs can have a maximum of five rooms and can accommodate up to 15 people. Guests are looked after by the homeowner.

**Inn**

Short-term lodging, usually for one night, for groups of 12 to 50 people, and designed to accommodate visitors who are passing through (on foot, bicycle, horseback, etc.). Guests are looked after by the innkeeper.

**Guest house**

Structured lodging in a private home. In addition to lodging, guests are offered breakfast, and either a midday or evening meal in a family home that can accommodate up to six people. Group activities may also be offered. (Source: Tourisme Québec)

**Unescorted tour / self-catering holiday**

This formula gives travellers freedom with the added the security of an organized tour. Clients travel on their own (at least in pairs for safety reasons), without a guide, but with a program and itinerary. Logistics are looked after (overnight lodging, evening meals, transfers or car rental, activities (optional), etc.). Flights (international) are optional. This concept is very popular with French tourists.

**Escorted tour**

An all-inclusive product, organized for groups of 7 to 15 people maximum with a guide. Given the greater number of people to accommodate, lodging is most often only for one night in a guesthouse or inn, with breakfast and evening meal included.

**Host**

For the purpose of this study, host is defined as a person who provides hospitality, either out of friendship or goodwill, or one who makes a living from welcoming travellers into their home.
2. Current situation

2.1. Recent and current projects

The Association franco-yukonnaise has already carried out numerous initiatives to develop francophone tourism in Yukon.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Projects</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| Creation of promotional material to market the Yukon as a tourist destination | • Vacation guide (in French)  
• Directory of businesses offering tourism services in French  
• Partnership to launch the website [www.travelyukon.com/fr](http://www.travelyukon.com/fr)  
• Tourism handbook  
• Promotional video of Yukon in French  
• Infoletter to partners, businesses and tourism organizations in Yukon, Canada and Europe  
Distribution network:  
• Visitor information centres in Yukon  
• Centre de la francophonie in Whitehorse  
• Canadian Tourism Commission in France  
• [Aurore boréale](http://www.auroreborale.com)  
• Partners and tour operators  
• Promotional activities (Rendez-vous Canada, Destination Canada, tourism trade shows, etc.) |
| Active presence in the industry | • Familiarization tours for industry professionals and travel writers  
• Tourism trade shows for francophone markets in Canada and Europe  
• Promotion of the inter-territorial francophone tourism consortium  
• Participation in the Société d’histoire franco-yukonnaise committee  
• Organization of networking activities for the industry (cocktail receptions, launches, etc.) |
| Partnership with Yukon’s Department of Tourism | For several years, Travel Yukon has considered France to be an emerging travel market. AFY and Travel Yukon are working together to promote the territory in French:  
• Joint participation in the IFTM Top Resa tourism trade show in Paris  
• Joint participation in familiarization tours and press trips  
• French translation of the [www.travelyukon.com](http://www.travelyukon.com) website and French services at the Visitor Information Centre in Whitehorse  
• Production, translation and distribution of the vacation guide  
• Signing of a memorandum of understanding between AFY and the Department of Tourism |
| Project to build ties, engage in consultations, and increase the offering of bilingual services | Funded by Canadian Heritage, this key project for Yukon society will enable AFY to work with eight non-profit organizations to promote the offering of bilingual services in Yukon. The project will span two years and will bring together partners from different areas, namely, tourism, museums, arts and culture, and community services.  
Partnership agreements have already been signed with the Yukon Transportation Museum and the Miles Canyon Historic Railway Society to develop bilingual activities and exhibitions, including a Franco-Yukon component. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Projects</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Study on the feasibility of developing Franco-Yukon cultural tourism products</td>
<td>In 2010-2011, AFY hired a team of consultants to study the feasibility of creating Franco-Yukon cultural tourism products. The document presents the concept of cultural tourism in the context of Yukon’s francophone community. It includes an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats related to the current offering of francophone tourism products. It suggests strategies to offset the weaknesses and threats associated with these products. The second part of the study presents a description of potential products and the marketing strategy. Promoting Yukon attractions and services offered by the francophone community and business people will make it possible to innovate and meet the demands of the markets targeted by the Department of Tourism and the tourism development organizations in the territory.</td>
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### 2.2. Profile of francophone visitors

More and more francophones are entering the hospitality industry in a professional capacity: 20 have been identified, including B&Bs, inns and a youth hostel. Seven have been operating in Yukon for the past five years, with the result that there is now a diverse offering of accommodations owned by French-speaking hosts across the territory.

Because of the limited size of the market of potential clients, most of these hosts do other work in addition to operating their business. Nine offer tourism-related services, e.g. guided walking, canoe, bicycle or dogsled tours; gastronomical meals; restaurants; hot water springs. Five supplement their household incomes with jobs in non-tourism areas.

The 20 hosts operate the following types of businesses:

- Hotels/motels (3)
- Bed & breakfasts (8)
- Adventure tour operators (4), some of which are very basic (i.e. no running water or electricity)
- Guest houses operated by retirees (4)
- Youth hostel (1)

Comfort level runs the gamut from very comfortable with private bathrooms to basic with no running water or electricity, and everything in between, including yours. Nine of the entrepreneurs\(^1\) we met with for this study charge between $65 and $220/night depending on the comfort level of rooms and the location of the property (aside from the youth hostel).

Visitors can stay with francophone hosts in all regions of Yukon, from Dawson and the Dempster Highway in the north, to the lake region in the south (Carcross, Annie Lake Road, Tagish, Crag Lake)\(^2\).

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\(^1\) Listed in the appendix.

\(^2\)
and Mayo and Keno to the eat and Kluane Lake and Mendenhall to the west, and of course, Whitehorse and the surrounding area.

Of the nine hosts we met with, six have one to four rooms to let or a cabin; the other three have more rooms available.

All say that they interact with their guests, and six of the nine are thinking of professionally entering the homestay business. Their clients are diverse and include travellers from Europe, North America, Japan and even Australia. Some also provide accommodations to a very small number of local clients, particularly at exceptional sites like Kluane Lake.

Five of the nine hosts operate year-round, two close only during the shoulder season (April and November), and two are open from the end of winter/early spring to late fall/early winter. Three say that winter is their busiest season, one is as busy in winter as in summer, and five never have vacancy in summer.

All but the youth hostel operator say they have the capacity to take in more guests, particularly in summer for five of them; during the shoulder seasons, particularly spring, for one; one would like more guests in winter.

All the hosts at least have their own website through which they can promote their service and use as their main channel for direct sales. Aside from the usual channels (e.g. airbnb.ca, tour operators), word-of-mouth referrals and repeat business account for a large portion of clients for four of them.

Six hosts already work with tour operators to varying extents. Sometimes, they only do business once with some who used them to meet a specific need for their clients, and only two work with DMCs to organize activities in addition to hosting.

2.3. Self-catering vacations in French in Yukon

This type of product is important for hosts who have few rooms to offer, as this type of accommodation can easily substitute for hotel rooms in tours that include lodging, hospitality and a travel log, and sometimes breakfast and dinner.

One DMC, Latitude, offers a self-catering vacation in Yukon in French which it promotes on The Yukon Adventure website, but its sales are low. A tour operator in Luxembourg distributes it and sells it from time to time, but it does not appear to be promoted by other francophone tour operators in Europe.

A number of tourism entrepreneurs in the Klondike, Kluane and Whitehorse regions joined forces a few years ago to create a circuit entirely in French, but it was never really promoted or distributed by tour operators.

3. Analysis of demand for homestay vacations

3.1. Demand

Francophone tour operators working in Yukon regularly ask the Government of Yukon and AFY’s Tourism section about homestay vacations in Yukon. This type of vacation is especially popular with tourists in France.

In order to obtain a better picture of demand, a questionnaire was prepared, and 10 tour operators in Quebec and France were contacted; eight agreed to answer our questions.

The tour operators contacted offer a broad range of vacations. Some offer customized vacations or self-catering vacations for independent travellers, while others offer guided tours for groups of 20.

Only Jonview organizes its own vacations. The others work with DMCs in Yukon, namely Ruby Range Adventures, Sky High Wilderness Ranch, All Alaska Tours, Alta Expedition, and Northern Tales. Several have recently started working with Christophe Marie of Jack & Son.

The tour operators contacted qualify several types of accommodations as homestay vacations: B&B accommodations, guest rooms for independent travellers, and “villages d’accueil,” such as those in Quebec, or hostels for groups. All would prefer to have their clients stay with francophone hosts, although it is not an absolute requirement.

Since tour operators sell few, or no, vacation packages in Yukon, it is difficult for them to assess the actual number of requests. Only Jonview estimates its sales at about 100 per year.

According to tour operators, tourists who could be interested in homestay vacations in the Yukon are francophones from France and other European countries (Luxemburg, Belgium, Switzerland), are upscale, educated, and have already travelled in Canada and want to discover a new region off the beaten path. They are seasoned travellers who do not worry about price but want to travel “smart.” They love nature and the great outdoors, and want to learn about other cultures and ways of life. Some tour operators qualify them as being interested in sports and consider them to be seasoned travellers who seek adventure tourism, while another does not necessarily consider them to be inclined toward sports.

Tour operators say that tourists choose homestay vacations as a way of meeting locals, immersing themselves in local life, learning about the history of the region, and discovering other ways of living. Price can also be an important factor, if it is less expensive than a hotel, and the services provided by hosts can also be a big plus.

Tour operators’ expectations vary in terms of rates. On the whole, most feel that the price should be equal to or less than the price of a standard hotel, but can be higher if the client is “wowed” with exceptional service, such as the quality of the service and the accommodations, comfort, and local life.
The number of rooms requested depends on whether visitors are travelling in groups or on their own. For independent travellers, one or two rooms are sufficient. Groups of 15 to 20, however, require between six and eight rooms of two to four beds each.

As a minimum requirement, homestay accommodations must be near the centre of town, located in a pleasant environment, impeccably clean rooms with access to a full bathroom, whether private or shared. Host(s) must be available and hospitable and must provide breakfast. Accommodations need not be charming, but must have at least a 3-star rating under the French classification system. Optional services could include a family supper made with locally sourced ingredients; a private bathroom would be an asset. One traveller even thought it would be a good idea to organize an evening when tourists could learn about the country and its history through a presentation and meet with local people. This type of event could be organized by the host or AFY.

All visitors to Yukon would like to deal with a DMC on arrival, preferably one that provides service in French, is very well acquainted with the region, and able to coordinate all aspects of the vacation: lodging, transportation, guides, activities, and meals. One tour operator was willing to share the 25% commission he charges to organize homestays.

Summer is the season most recommended for this destination, however, most tour operators promote, or will soon begin promoting, winter vacations. All recommend vacation stays of 10 to 15 days, and would like to be able to offer tourists a one- or two-night homestay.

### 3.2. Definition of homestay

Because demand for homestay vacations comes mainly from French tourists, we turned to tour operators in France who deal primarily with French travellers for a definition of homestay. The term “homestay” must be distinguished from “couchsurfing.” Homestays are often for a period of several days and nights (although possibly with different hosts) and can include meals and even leisure activities. Couchsurfing is more specific and refers more to the place where guests stay, or sleep.

Homestay products are however essential to the viability of the couchsurfing structure. For example, travellers could be offered an “all-in” product consisting of bed and breakfast in different households, so that they can discover different areas of a region, share evening meals with the host, benefit from transportation and luggage transfer, and enjoy sports activities and cultural excursions.

In France, for example, the products available through tour operators that most closely resemble homestay vacations are those where independent travellers can move from one place to another, either by motorcoach or self-catered travel, and stay with different hosts. Their transportation is included, as are their evening meals and sports and cultural activities. In this case, rooms in guest houses can be added to the itinerary if there are any en route, as they are actually very well suited to small groups (e.g. friends, families, couples).
3.2.1. Direct contact with hosts

1. Tour operators’ main expectation is that their clients will have direct contact with the people who live in the area their clients are visiting so that they can enjoy the most authentic experience of local life and learn about the region’s history and customs from the people who live there rather than from a guide who does not necessarily live in the country the tourists are visiting.

2. In the survey of eight tour operators in France and Quebec, two types of accommodation were identified based on client segment. For groups, tour operators’ benchmark for the type accommodations they hope to find in Yukon is the types of “villages d’accueil” found in Quebec or the kind of guest houses found in France. For independent travellers (i.e. couples, small groups of friends, families), they sought instead bed & breakfasts or the kind of guest houses found in France.

3.2.2. The advantages and challenges of homestay vacations

Advantages

Homestay vacations are the type of tourist accommodation that gives visitors the closest contact and most authentic experiences with locals.

Homestays can be a good way for families to supplement their income, especially in regions where there may not be enough economic activity for full employment.

They allow communities to come together as hosts for tourists, generate a festive atmosphere and create memorable moments shared with visitors.

Homestay vacations can also have strong economic spinoffs: a surge in visitors can be beneficial for local artists, crafts people and tour operators.

Challenges

The pool of prospective clients for homestays must be large enough for the revenue generated to cover at least the hosts’ investment and operating expenses and also make a profit.

The quality of lodging may be uneven in certain regions where this activity is less regulated. When tourists stay in private homes, it is important to define standards so that clients can enjoy a certain guarantee of quality in terms of cleanliness, services, and hospitality.

Rooms may not meet tourists’ expectations. Therefore, in order to mitigate any disappointment, it is important for hosts and tour operators who sell homestays to clearly accurately describe the kind of accommodations they have booked, particularly if the accommodations are more rustic in remote regions.

There may be a shortage of families offering this type of accommodation, and operators need consistency from hosts.
3.3. Homestays outside Yukon

3.3.1. The “village d’accueil”: a cross between cultural exchange and tourist product

A network of “villages d’accueil” has been growing since the 1970s in Quebec, billeting French travellers in the homes of locals and offering them a cultural experience (e.g. musical show, storytelling) in town.

Tourisme Québec describes “villages d’accueil” as a structured network of establishments that offer lodging, breakfast, midday or evening meals in family homes that can accommodate up to six visitors, as well as group activities. The visitors are lodged for one or two nights in family homes so that they can have closer contact with Quebeckers.

The Association des Villages d’accueil Du Québec (AVAQ), which manages the network of “villages d’accueil”, is a non-profit organization whose mission is to pool resources to create interest in and promote and develop the kind of travel packages that will help international tourists discover local culture through direct contact with people living in different regions of Quebec.

The Association has 10 member villages, representing some 650 lodging units offered by 360 families across Quebec. Most members are non-profit organizations; the Village of Desbiens in the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean region, for one, is its own association.

The lodgings have 1- to 5-star ratings assigned by the Corporation de l’industrie touristique du Québec. The CITQ gives training to participating families, and visits and inspects their homes.

Families collect $35 per person per night, which includes an apéritif, 3-course dinner and breakfast the following morning, and the Association collects $15 per person for coordinating and organizing gala evenings for the groups. The AVAQ has set pricing standards for villages and negotiation standards for tour operators.

Typically, the groups of tourists who visit Quebec have one night in a “village d’accueil” in their itinerary. They are welcomed by local families, and their stay can sometimes include an evening of entertainment with musicians or a storyteller.

International agencies like Go Tours, which distribute product like this, have exclusivity in some villages and do not accept bookings directly from non-agents. AVAQ members are in direct contact with them to take their reservations. The “villages d’accueil” do no promotion, as this is handled by the tour operators.

The Village d’accueil des Hautes-Laurentides took the initiative to round out visitors’ stays with a variety of activities such as canoe excursions, guided tours and heritage tours in addition to booking homestays. This formula makes it possible to extend the stays of visitors who will spend two or three nights in the village and one overnight on typical tours. It markets and sells its own vacations and does its own promotion and distribution, like a DMC. With this formula, it can involve tourism operators in the village, as well as artists and craftspeople.
This market is profitable for tour operators who bring hundreds of tour groups into each village during the summer season. However, some villages lack hosts and have trouble finding new ones to take over from others because the level of commitment required outweighs revenues.

This homestay formula calls for at least one coordinator to maintain the network, make reservations, organize tours, and nurture relationships with the tour operators who sell the vacations. For example, the Village d’accueil de Desbiens has a coordinator who is employed by the Desbiens vacation centre. She works full-time from May to November as an accountant and then spends some 10-15 hours per week between December and April taking reservations. The village has some 30 families and, each year, takes in more than 100 groups of up to two buses from the end of April to the start of November.

It is therefore necessary to be able to take in enough tourists in order to be profitable. In 2010, 70% of the 435,000 French visitors to Canada came by way of Québec,³ generating a large pool of prospective clients for the region’s “villages d’accueil.”

In Alberta, for example, a “village d’accueil” was established by the inhabitants of the francophone villages of Legal and Millardville. Visitors would come spend an evening in the Village d’accueil de Centralta as part of a tour of the Rockies organized by a tour operator. It was promoted by tour operators and on the tourismalberta.ca website.⁴ The company looked after the tour operator’s reservations, paired tourists with families, and organized an evening gala featuring local artists. Over about 10 years, the village has welcomed one to three groups per year, plus independent travellers. The “village d’accueil” stopped operating in 2010 further to cuts to its funding from Canadian Heritage and the Société de tourisme Centralta. The small number of visiting groups could not sustain the network’s profitability, and the coordinator’s position depended on public funding.

Aside from being a tourism product, “villages d’accueil” are also, and above all, a community project comprising villages that are willing to welcome francophone visitors from Europe and share their culture and history with them.

3.3.2. Examples of couchsurfing around the world

Inns, B&Bs, and guest houses exist in France, Cuba, Guatemala, and elsewhere in the world. Couchsurfing is varied and offers a spectrum of options for travellers who want to travel off the beaten path and have a closer experience with locals. This formula can also compensate for the lack of hotels in certain regions in the world, and makes it possible for modest-income families in countries such as Cuba, Guatemala and Russia to supplement their incomes. The operating models, moreover, are as varied as the types of lodging. Those who opt for this type of lodging can interact directly with their hosts and their stay can be enhanced with complementary activities, such as guided tours, meals, and sports activities, at which point, it becomes a homestay vacation.

France

In France, for example, two types of accommodations most resemble couchsurfing: guest houses and inns. Visitors staying in a guest house have more contact and conversations with the local population. Visitors staying at inns have less contact with their hosts (who do not necessarily live onsite, but the advantage of this formula is that it can accommodate larger groups, it is adaptable to travel itineraries, and it is often less costly.

Like the bed & breakfast concept, guest house accommodations include an overnight stay in a room in the host’s home and a breakfast. A guest house has a maximum of five rooms and can accommodate up to 15 guests. The homeowner provides hospitality.

Guest houses are rated on a scale of 1 to 5, depending on the environment and geographic location of the house, hospitality and service, overall design, ambiance, décor, the rooms and bath facilities. The Gîtes de France quality label means that the house meets specific comfort standards, and the host complies with the national charter, which defines the terms and conditions of hospitality and the quality of the lodging. The most important criteria are: authenticity, comfort, hospitable atmosphere, accessibility, surrounding scenery, generous meals, and regional products.

There are currently 10,000 guest houses in France. The network is managed by the Fédération nationale des Gîtes de France, to which owners of guest houses must belong. The Fédération has a website and a central reservation service. Anyone can reserve a room in a guest house directly with the homeowner, online, or via a central telephone number.

Some types of vacations advertised on the website are theme-based (farm vacations, health-oriented vacations), which makes it possible to classify guest houses based on clients’ interests. Rooms cost between 50 and 120 euros nightly (between CDN $70 and $165) depending on the rating and location.

The main reason travellers choose guest houses would be the inclusion of breakfast (in contrast to inns) and friendly interaction with the owners (compared with most hotels).

One optional service at guesthouses is a **prix fixe** dinner. This term is defined in the information sheet on guest houses as a single-menu meal, served family-style, and shared by the host and his family with the guest(s). This type of meal is greatly appreciated by clients who enjoy this quality time with their host(s) and the opportunity to try regional specialties when available.

Cuba

Cuba is another country where couchsurfing is well established. It is a formula that enables thousands of Cubans to make ends meet and generates additional revenue for the State. Licensed

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5. Hostels are detailed in the country guide in the appendix.
6. As defined by the guesthouse tourism code in France.
7. [http://www.gites-de-france.com/location-vacances-chambre-hotes.html](http://www.gites-de-france.com/location-vacances-chambre-hotes.html)
individuals provide lodging in their homes (either a room or the entire house), prepare breakfast and other meals for their guests, and also give advice on places to visit and things to see and do.

The country’s department of tourism sets stringent standards to be followed, and each tour operator chooses its own criteria for its own network of guest houses to suit the needs of its clientele. Those who provide lodging must note the accepted rates and tourists’ passport information (country of origin) on a government form. Each room and meal service permit are taxed monthly, regardless of the number of clients.

The network employs lodging correspondents in each city who look after reservations at the destination based on availability. In Cuba, tour operators that offer homestays have their own network of contacts.

Accommodations vary considerably. Some houses have private bathrooms, air conditioning, a terrace or balcony or garden patio, all in a typically colonial setting (high ceilings and period furniture). Other houses offer less luxury (shared bathroom, modest furnishings) in small buildings dating from the 1950 or 1960s. A room for two costs between $20 and $40, and breakfast costs $3 to $5 per person.

A vacation might combine lodging with salsa or language lessons, or might include an itinerary where the tourist can visit the entire country and stay in a different home everywhere he goes. Other formulas might be a combination of homestays and charming hotels.

Vacations are organized by travel agencies or associations that have contacts on site and organize à la carte trips. They do their own promotions for these vacations on their websites and other traditional means of promotion (brochures, social media, advertorials, etc.).

3.3.3. Couchsurfing websites

Aside from national networks, couchsurfing around the world is increasingly booked online on sites like airbnb.ca, couchsurfing.org, bedycasa.fr, and the list keeps growing.

Free lodging sites

Sites for free lodging allow for a cultural exchange between hosts and visitors. The biggest free site is without a doubt CouchSurfing.org, which seeks to provide temporary lodging, person to person. People offering hospitality or looking for lodging are matched up through an ad-free online service. This project, which began as a non-profit association in the United States back in January 2004 has been operating as a bona fide business since August 2011. With 5.5 million members as at July 2013, it is indisputably the biggest site of its kind and has spawned an international community with CouchSurfers meeting points in most major cities around the world, making it a site where new contacts can be made, even in one’s own city. Each member sets out in their personal profile whether they are currently available to take in visitors and in what conditions: the maximum

8. www.couchsurfing.org
number of people, the maximum number of nights, etc. The visitor contacts the host via a specific interface where the visitor mentions his date of arrival and departure, the number of people in his party, and makes a request. Yukon has 396 members of the site, a surprising number considering the small size of the population in the territory.\(^{10}\) It is difficult to assess the number of nights for which lodging is available in the territory based on information available on the site, as some people are registered without actually offering lodging. They do so more for the spirit of community it generates than to share a coffee with people who are passing through.

Other free accommodation sites match people based on interest; online communities like WarmShower\(^ {11}\) for people who engage in cyclotourism (sightseeing on bicycle) or Servas,\(^ {12}\) a lodging site for people who speak Esperanto.

### Fee-based lodging sites

Sites that manage fee-based services allow professional and non-professional hosts alike to advertise their rooms online. All these sites help visitors find accommodations all over the world. AirBnB,\(^ {13}\) which has a variety of lodgings in more than 33,000 cities across 192 countries,\(^ {14}\) is definitely one of the most solicited sites. Yukon has 16 hosts (professionals and non-professionals) who rent a room in their home or the entire home itself. The French site Bedycasa.fr is another popular site in this area, with 130,000 members as at July 2013.

Other sites, such as Canada Bed and Breakfasts,\(^ {15}\) list bed and breakfasts, but this particular site does not seem to be used often by Yukon tourism professionals (only two promote their services on this site) and is not easy to navigate, or homestays\(^ {16}\) (more for students looking to rent a room in the city where they are going to school).

All these sites are used to find accommodations around the world, whether they are offered by hosts whose motivation is income or simply the pleasure of connecting with travellers. However, some fee-based sites do not control the type of rooms for rent (e.g. airbnb.ca and bedycasa.fr). This has an adverse effect in that anyone can charge for rooms without necessarily being in good standing with the legislation in effect, which creates unfair competition for professional hosts. In fact, several individuals offer lodging in Whitehorse and elsewhere at rates similar to those charged by professionals on these same sites. Entrepreneurs registered on these sites are facing more and more competition.\(^ {17}\) It bears mentioning that this type of lodging is used by a certain type of tourist, one who seeks more adventure and less comfort, and while some sites make guarantees as to

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11. [www.warmshowers.org](http://www.warmshowers.org)
13. [https://www.airbnb.fr/s/Yukon-Territory--Canada](https://www.airbnb.fr/s/Yukon-Territory--Canada)
14. [https://www.airbnb.fr/story](https://www.airbnb.fr/story)
15. [http://canada.bedandbreakfasts.net/](http://canada.bedandbreakfasts.net/)
17. [https://fr.airbnb.ca/ms/Whitehorse--YT--Canada](https://fr.airbnb.ca/ms/Whitehorse--YT--Canada)
users’ security, these networks are far too large for the lodging and hosts to be evaluated. Tour operators never use this type of network to arrange accommodations for their clients.

4. The potential of the Yukon offer

4.1. Francophone tourism in Yukon – SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)

**Strengths**: Nature; open spaces; wildlife; proximity to Alaska; Gold Rush history; First Nations; the francophone community; the territory’s mythical and exotic side; “getting away from it all”; low tourist density.

**Weaknesses**: Yukon is not well known in France; accessibility; distance; flights; expense (flight, lodging, vehicle rental); no homestay network; the few DMCs in Yukon cover all countries and cannot focus only on France (a small market at the moment).

**Opportunities**: The French are looking for new destinations; there are more and more flights to Yukon; there are about 15 francophone hosts who are worth getting to know; France is a market to be developed for the Government of Yukon; cultural and experiential tourism is gaining popularity.

**Threats**: The Yukon government’s limited marketing budget for France; the difficulty of finding a francophone DMC with whom to develop the French market; a limited market for Yukon entrepreneurs (10,000 German visitors annually on average versus about 1,000 French visitors).

4.2. The community’s interest in hosting visitors

*The responses to the public consultation*

Before even contemplating the creation of a homestay network, hosts must be recruited. An advertisement for potential hosts was made in the French and English communities in newspapers, on social media (Facebook and Twitter), on cable TV (channel 9) and radio ads on CBC Whitehorse and Radio-Canada. Eleven people contacted the consultant further to the campaign; two simply wanted more information.

All the families interested in taking in French tourists were French, or families with one francophone parent. Five live within four kilometres of downtown; four live 20 to 100 kilometres from Whitehorse. Six live in a single-family home or log cabin, and four live in a duplex. All have at least a backyard or private grounds. These families can offer 15 double beds and can provide accommodations for 33 visitors, including five children. Three of the families can offer visitors a private bathroom; all the others have a shared bathroom to offer. One has an in-home sauna.

The prospective hosts can accommodate visitors for a minimum of one to three nights, up to a maximum of four to seven nights; two of them can accommodate guests for longer periods. The nightly rate ranges significantly, from $20 to $100. It can be supposed that those who charge
between $20 and $50 are simply looking to meet French or European francophones for the pleasure of chatting with them, while those who charge $80 to $100 view this as an opportunity to work their way up to becoming a true B&B.

All the potential hosts except one are willing to cook for guests and provide breakfast and supper for those staying with them, and most would not like to prepare breakfast for visitors. All except one are open to doing activities with their guests, such as visiting cultural attractions in town, doing outdoor activities, or sharing their knowledge of the history of the Yukon and its inhabitants.

All would like to be part of a structured couchsurfing network, and several are already registered on CouchSurfing.org. Five would be able to accommodate guests in summer, i.e. between spring and fall, and four could accommodate guests year round. They would be able to accommodate at least three times a year. It is difficult for them to determine how often they could take in visitors before actually trying it.

All the prospective hosts would be interested in taking training to provide the best possible stay for their guests, and all but one would be open to promoting their lodgings on the Internet. All would be prepared to accommodate visitors travelling as part of vacations organized by tour operators as well as tourists travelling on their own. Six would be prepared to charge less through tour operators than directly to clients; two would be open to negotiating rates, and one not at all. All but one would like to offer their services directly to visitors without the involvement of intermediaries.

Considering that organized tours usually involve no more than 20 people, there would be enough places for the number of travellers. However, most tour operators want to have their clients stay in or near the centre of town, which reduces the availability to six rooms. Tour operators also want to offer their clients accommodations with private bath if possible, but this is possible in most guest houses here. Lastly, it would be necessary to negotiate and standardize a rate with all prospective hosts for overnight stays and meals.

**High ratio of Yukoners on existing hosting sites**

Yukoners like meeting new visitors, sharing their knowledge of the territory, and chatting with travellers. They host guests for free, and 438 are registered on CouchSurfing.org which matches travellers with locals who billet them free of charge or simply meet them for coffee and a chat; registering on this site helps those looking to take in visitors, and also visitors looking for lodging. Of those registered on CouchSurfing.org, 65 are francophone, 23 others speak French, which is an impressive number of francophones and francophiles (20% of those registered) considering that francophones represent 3.9% of the general population. Twenty of those offering free lodging are registered with WarmShower.org (for cyclists); seven are francophone, which is also an impressive proportion of francophones and francophiles.

Yukon has less to offer on fee-based lodging sites; e.g. 16 via AirBnB.ca.

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18. The responses to the questionnaire can be seen in the appendix.
Although only nine people have shown interest in being part of a couchsurfing network, the potential for more would increase if a network were to be created.

4.3. The impact of creating a network styled after the “village d’accueil” model on professional hosts

Some francophone entrepreneurs have reservations about developing a new hosting network. They are concerned that such a product would increase competition for their businesses, especially if rates were in the same range as theirs. If there were a francophone couchsurfing network that included professional hosts, seven of the nine entrepreneurs surveyed would potentially be interested in joining. Seven entrepreneurs feel that it would be a good idea to develop a new website for homestay vacations in Yukon, but have a few suggestions to make: one felt that it would still be good to add francophones to one or more of existing sites; another pointed out that it would be good to include a detailed description of the houses with photos; another thought it would be a good idea provided that a motorcoach tour passed by his hotel; and one other felt it would be a good idea only if the site did not charge a percentage on sales.

Reaction to the question on the impact that a homestay network would have on their business was mixed. Two felt that it could boost tourism in Yukon—and potentially their client numbers—despite also boosting competition. One thought that promoting hosting would be unfair to entrepreneurs; she worried that visitors would be disappointed by the quality of lodgings and that this, in turn, would tarnish people’s image of Yukon, but conceded that good quality rooms, on the other hand, could attract new visitors. She felt that nightly rates starting at about $70 or $80 would be direct competition for B&Bs.

All the francophone professional hosts surveyed felt it necessary to develop francophone tourism in Yukon, particularly as there is a francophone community that can provide hospitality. One suggestion was to increase French-language services in Yukon tourism businesses, in the same way that AFY is trying to develop partnerships with cultural organizations.

4.4. Partners in the tourism industry are open to assisting francophone tour operators in Yukon

Seven public tourism organizations, associations and entrepreneurs were contacted and asked about their activities in order to determine whether they could work together with a new French-language homestay vacation network or whether they could work more closely with francophone hosts in Yukon.

All the tourism operators and associations were open to working with the hosts, and many made suggestions for making the businesses in their association or company more visible. Braden Bennett, owner of Latitude, a DMC, said that he would be open to adding a page on francophone lodging in Yukon in his catalogue of tourism products so that tour operators who work with French-
speaking clients can be aware of these hosts and eventually propose them in their tours. Braden could promote these types of lodgings and work with tour operators to make reservations.

Christoph Altherr, who is in charge of the non-registered network Southern Lakes Association, promotes tourism businesses in the lakes region in southern Yukon on a map he produces each year. The map shows the member businesses in his network and is distributed in all the visitor information centres from Tok, Alaska to northern Alberta. In addition, he has a website that contains links to his members and a Facebook page where he highlights everything the region has to offer. Christoph suggested that his association could add a page devoted to francophone businesses on his website to give francophone entrepreneurs in his region greater visibility, or identify francophone businesses on a map with a special icon, for instance. Many francophone tourism entrepreneurs are already members of this association.

Mo Hartigan, President of the Bed & Breakfast Association of the Yukon, suggested that her association could form a partnership with a new French-language homestay network simply by sharing links on their respective websites (once a website is created for the new francophone network). She was interested in collaborating, but needed to discuss this with her association’s board of directors to determine additional ways of fostering a partnership.

One tourism operator, Jack & Son, bills itself as a French-language DMC for adventure tourism in Yukon. The agency promotes theme-based excursions that trace the routes taken by the early explorers. The company is not currently working with any professional hosts in Yukon, but is interested in getting to know them better and could be open to creating a tour together with francophone hosts.

Sebastien Altenberger, one of the owners of the tourism operator Northern Tales, chooses lodging mainly based on clients’ wants and hosts’ ability to adapt to his needs, regardless of whether they are francophone.

Vancouver DMC À nous Canada! Works exclusively with Northern Tales for all stays it organizes in the North, and therefore has no say in the lodgings that will be chosen for its tours.

5. Recommendations

2.1. Creating and positioning a francophone tourism network in Yukon

2.1.1. Promote existing hosts rather than create a new network based on the “village d’accueil” model

A network or francophone tourism entrepreneurs in Yukon would enable its members, particularly hosts, to work together to promote tourism in Yukon in French. It would not necessarily entail creating a new incorporated association; it could instead be developed with the support of AFY’s economic development section.
The network could be made viable by taking certain steps, such as:

- Developing discussion boards along the lines of Yahoo Group or Google Group moderated by AFY’s tourism manager so that tourism entrepreneurs can exchange information about their products or develop partnerships. Creating such a list is free, and moderating the discussion would take about one hour a week.

- Creating a francophone tourism development strategy in Yukon in collaboration with interested parties: tourism associations, government, entrepreneurs. This would help participants feel that they belong to a network.

- Organizing an annual meeting of all francophone tourism entrepreneurs, including training on business management, marketing, and francophone tourism development. It could take about 60 hours for a tourism development manager to organize such a meeting, and funding for the training component could come from AFY’s employment services training budget.

Another option could be to create a network whose sole purpose would be to promote its members without organizing meetings, as the Southern Lakes Association does. According to its director Christoph Altherr, who volunteers approximately 100 hours each year to run this network (another person volunteers about the same amount of time), such a model can only work if one or two “champions” from among its members look after the tasks related to its operation, unless AFY’s economic development sections undertakes to coordinate these activities. Details and costs of promotional activities are presented in section 6.3.1, below.

It would also be possible to foster a sense of belonging in the community of francophone tourism entrepreneurs by including a francophone component in the tourism associations to which the entrepreneurs already belong, such as the TIA, Yukon Wilderness Association or the Bed & Breakfast Association of the Yukon. That way, they would not be duplicating investments in networks with the added plus that they would be recognized as being francophone. Francophone tourism entrepreneurs could have a separate meeting at the annual TIA meeting, for example, so as not to have to attend multiple events.

Whatever type of network is chosen, it would be important to make the members of the communities feel included.

2.1.2. Positioning francophone hosts vis-à-vis francophone tour operators and DMCs operating in Yukon

Aside from expecting their clients to enjoy direct contact with the people in the region they are visiting, tour operators who work with French-speaking Europeans also need a structure that would negotiate with all local hosts and look after reservations. Latitude is willing to look after this demand by adding a page in its catalogue devoted to francophone hosts. The head of this DMC, Braden Bennett, is leaving for France for several months in the fall of 2013, and could develop a promotional project in France to expand his contacts in partnership with AFY and the Government of Yukon.
AFY could also help Boréale Explorer pursue its plans to develop a DMC and increase the offering of homestays in French in Yukon. Most of its guides, moreover, speak French.

Although Yukon represents a small proportion of the clientele of the tour operators contacted for this study, most wanted to know more about the tourism operators in Yukon and to be informed of the outcome of this study. We should therefore follow up with them and give them more information about Yukon and everything the territory has to offer in the way of tourism and francophone hosting.

Adventure tourism is a niche that Yukon could explore more fully. The main adventure tour operators are Terres d’aventure and Grand Nord Grand Large, Allibert Trekking, Huwans Club Aventure. Some book B&Bs, but most book hotels. This type of program could easily be integrated into hosting programs, whether at B&Bs, guest houses or inns, depending on what is available on their route.

French-speaking lodging professionals know how to accommodate the needs of DMCs and tour operators. For example, accommodations that are outside town centres and, by extension, far from restaurants, need to help their clients find a solution for midday meals, whether they allow them to use a kitchen or help them order meals.

5.2. Finetuning AFY’s services for entrepreneurs

5.2.1. Accurately identify the services that AFY can provide to tourism businesses

Information, training, promotion, help with preparing a business plan: francophone entrepreneurs are not always aware that AFY can be of help in the area of tourism. Existing services should be presented and promoted more simply and clearly, and services that have not been properly defined should be.

As for promoting current services, the tourism section on AFY’s website does not reflect all that the association has done in this area. The Conseil de développement économique de l’Alberta, whose mandate is similar to AFY’s mandate, i.e., economic development, clearly and succinctly presents on its website all that it does for tourism:

“In concrete terms, we strive to:

- Develop tourism strategies aiming to ensure value added of the French language and to develop original tourist products;
- Work in collaboration with neighbouring provinces on joint projects;
- Collaborate with regional and provincial tourist organizations in order to create bilingual projects and raise awareness of them;
- Promote and support francophone tourism companies;
- Promote francophone tourist traffic in Alberta; and
- Introduce French-speaking Alberta to Canada and the rest of the world.”

19. www.lecdea.ca/fr/nos-secteurs-dintervention/tourisme/
AFY could introduce its tourism section in a similar manner and give an overview of its mandate and its actions, which, for the time being, are not highlighted to the fullest on the site.

It could also list existing services intended for francophone entrepreneurs:

- A monthly newsletter
- Annual cocktail reception for tourism entrepreneurs
- Information about the tourism sector

Organizations that use imprecise terms in their presentations could create expectations that they cannot live up to. For example, AFY’s page on economic development mentions that it offers economic development tools through advisory and support services. Being more specific about the type of advice and support provided would significantly improve clients’ understanding of the service that the association offers.

In terms of creating new economic development services for tourism businesses, although it may be difficult for AFY to develop business start-up assistance because of the small number of prospective clients, it would nevertheless be possible to develop a mentoring service in French, much like Dana Naye Venture, which helps anglophone business creators.

When the feasibility study on cultural tourism products was presented, one of the comments made was that everyone felt that AFY should always have print material, e.g. brochures and pamphlets, to promote businesses that serve clients in French. The directory of services available in French, produced by AFY, is a tool for Yukoners and francophone tourists alike. Other tools that would showcase the services of francophone tourism, hosts in particular should be developed. Promotional tools are discussed in greater details in section 6.3.1, below.

5.2.2. Create strategic planning for francophone tourism development in Yukon

All the francophone lodging professional surveyed felt that francophone tourism in Yukon was a market worth developing, particularly as there is a francophone community to offer visitors their hospitality.

When the feasibility study on cultural tourism products was presented to the public, one person suggested developing a marketing strategy together with partners.

As indicated in the previous section, AFY, in collaboration with the Government of Yukon’s tourism branch, could create a strategic plan to develop francophone tourism in Yukon. The plan should set out the roles of AFY and the Government of Yukon in this area and would enable all stakeholders to work together to outline the steps to take over a three- or five-year horizon to achieve this objective.

20. Summary of the feasibility study presented in English on cultural tourism products
Since France is an attractive market to tap into for tourism in Yukon, it would be appropriate to develop a strategy to increase the number of tourists from that country through action plans in Yukon and France.

Such an approach could draw inspiration from the strategy to promote francophone immigration to Yukon. The approximate cost would be $20,000, and it would be necessary to obtain funding from the Canadian Economic Development Agency, for example, or the collaboration of the Government of Yukon’s Department of Tourism.

5.2.3. Organize training on marketing and tourism for francophone hosts

Many francophone entrepreneurs who now offer lodging launched into this professional initiative without necessarily having experience in the hospitality and tourism business. Most also work at other jobs or professions in addition to offering lodging. They could benefit from training in order to be better prepared to work with tour operators and DMCs, create the best possible conditions in which to welcome visitors, and optimize their management and promotion of their business.

Since the Bed & Breakfast Association of the Yukon offers training, it might be worth working with it to develop training in French and offer all B&B owners training that can be adapted to the needs of the French market. Tour operators like Air Transat or even Allibert Trekking, for example, could be invited to present the characteristics of the French market by way of a webinar. The purpose of the training could be to allow local tourism entrepreneurs to gain a better understanding of the francophone markets and improve their marketing competencies and capacities.

Lastly, training in marketing and communication, business management and tourism geared to francophone entrepreneurs should be offered more regularly. The training could be offered as part of a program organized by the person in charge of training at AFY’s employment section, and selected in collaboration with the tourism development manager, and financed by the employment section. Yukon is home to many francophones who work in management, marketing and tourism. They could share their expertise with the community; this could be supplemented with resources from outside when financially possible. AFY could bring in trainers from outside the territory through recommendations from its training and economic development network counterparts in British Columbia and Alberta. This would limit travel expenses.

5.2.4. Inform potential hosts of the many different hosting formulas

Members of the community who showed interest in offering hospitality to visitors in this study have three options.

Those considering a career as professional hosts can be directed toward the Bed & Breakfast Association of the Yukon.

Those thinking of hosting francophones for the pleasure of meeting travellers rather than to generate income can be informed of free lodging sites.
Lastly, a list of those who could rent out a room to newcomers to Yukon would also be useful. Almost everyone who showed interest in joining a homestay vacation network was also interested in registering on a list of potential hosts for newcomers to Yukon.

The project specifications for this study mentioned that it needed to include a study of the operating costs of homestay vacations and the criteria for selecting accommodations. The study has shown that it is not necessary to develop a new homestay vacation network, so costs were not investigated, however the costs of other recommendations have been indicated.

5.3. Step up efforts to promote Yukon in francophone countries

5.3.1. Create specialized promotional tools for francophone hosts

AFY and the Government of Yukon produce French-language materials to promote tourism in Yukon, although none promote francophone tourism entrepreneurs in particular. A number of tools can be developed to meet this particular need.

A map of Yukon could be made and distributed throughout Yukon, as well as when AFY or Yukon government representatives attend tourism trade shows in French-speaking milieus. Such a tool could help promote francophone hosts and other francophone tourism entrepreneurs. Christoph Altherr of the Southern Lakes Association estimates the cost of producing and distributing 20,000 maps at $6,500.

A website could also be created. It would essentially redirect users to the websites of francophone business, hosts in particular, and would also include a map that would indicate francophone tourism businesses. Accommodations could be rated (e.g. rustic, comfortable, upscale) to help tourists with their choices. A website representing all francophone tourism businesses in Yukon would cost between $7,000 and $8,000.

The level of French services described via these tools would reflect the classification used in the directory of services available in French. The level of French service would have to be checked to make sure it is in fact the level declared by entrepreneurs, as there are already several lists of tourism businesses that indicate languages spoken, but they are only based on entrepreneurs’ claims. If the level of service does not live up to claims, tourists could end up disappointed, and the promotional tools would ultimately be discredited.

One person attending the presentation of the feasibility study on cultural tourism products suggested that AFY should make it a top priority to print tourism brochures in French. Businesses could be asked to contribute an amount to advertise their products and services, which would cover a portion of the printing costs. That is the funding model adopted by the Southern Lakes Association: the businesses that benefit from promoting the network pay $160 annually to be included on the map and the website, and costs remain low thanks to support from three sponsors: Air North, White Pass & Yukon Route, and the Suspension Bridge. The first provides return travel between Whitehorse and Vancouver to one of the businesses that paid its contribution before the
deadline date, and the other two each contribute $1,200 a year. All benefit from advertising on the website and the map. If AFY could put the tools in place, it would take about four months of full-time work and then about 200 hours of work each year to manage them. Production costs could be assumed by the entrepreneurs, sponsors and the Tourism Cooperative Marketing Fund21 (TCMF), for example.

The tools would provide travellers with some of the information they need on francophone hosts and other tourism entrepreneurs, and would also give visitors and potential visitors a better idea of the size of the francophone community in Yukon based on the number of businesses that provide service in French.

5.3.2. Continue to promote Yukon in France and Quebec

AFY and the Government of Yukon have been participating in tourism trade shows, mainly in Paris, over the past few years. They must continue to do so and even step up their efforts in order to garner greater attention for Yukon in French-speaking European countries. As Braden Bennett of Latitude has said, “it is not enough to sell tour operators on Yukon; you have to create buzz to make tourists want to come visit.”

In addition to tourism trade shows, Yukon can be promoted in other ways: through artists like photographer Nicolas Dory, who will soon be travelling to France to show his wildlife photos at the Festival de photo animalière et de nature de Montiers and speak at the conference of the Association sportive de la chasse photographique française. This type of initiative can serve as a stepping stone to raise awareness of Yukon in French-speaking European countries and Quebec.

As indicated in the report on francophone tourism in the territories (Le tourisme francophone dans les territoires22), the French eagerly seek opportunities to connect with nature and engage in unique cultural experiences, and are particularly interested in aboriginal tourism. Aboriginal cultural centres, such as the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre in Whitehorse, the Da Ku Cultural Centre in Haines Junction and others, which have sprung up across the territory in recent years, have so much to offer, and Yukon’s aboriginal cultures are very accessible to tourists who want to learn more about First Nations history and culture. We rightly promote the territory and its majestic landscapes, but we must do the same for our francophone and aboriginal heritage.

Promoting unescorted tours and adventure tours would also make it possible for travellers to opt for the services of local hosts over RVs as a way of getting closer to the community. One way to support this objective would be to ensure Yukon gets greater press coverage, and by having AFY and the Government of Yukon participate in more tourism trade shows. Lastly, helping travellers get better acquainted with Yukon is an indispensable component in positioning the territory as a choice destination (e.g. familiarization tours offered by AFY and Travel Yukon).

5.3.3. Increase the visibility of francophone tourism entrepreneurs in existing promotion networks

As mentioned in Section 5.4, certain tourism associations and businesses, such as the Bed & Breakfast Association of the Yukon and the Southern Lakes Association, are ready to help give francophones greater visibility in their promotional materials. They could, for example, have a French page on their websites, include francophone businesses on their maps, or make tourists more aware of the languages spoken through their promotional tools.

Latitude’s Braden Bennett also suggested that AFY promote its francophone entrepreneurs to Alaskan tourism associations, as they are also a good network.

Another interesting avenue to explore would be the possibility of being included in the smart phone app *L’Ouest canadien en français*,23 or developing a similar app together with the other Northern territories. Presumably, it would be better to join an existing Western network, as travellers visiting Alberta or British Columbia could feasibly add Yukon to their itinerary thanks to direct flights from Vancouver, Calgary or Edmonton, whereas it would be more complicated and costly to visit two Northern territories in a single trip.

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