



Thank you for your interest in the Alberta Country Vacations Association! Once your business is in operation, we can help you with the marketing, promotions and bookings. However, the biggest part is getting the information that you need to make an informed decision on starting up a country vacation and working through your ideas.

1. First off, you will need to get all of the information possible from your town or county business office. This is the starting point for your business licenses. If you need direction on how to contact your local municipality, click onto the website of the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties at [www.aamdc.com/Policy/default.htm](http://www.aamdc.com/Policy/default.htm) - find the Member Directory link for a listing of municipalities and counties. There is a variety of information available on this website so have a look around! If you do not find what you are looking for or have any questions, you can contact:

Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties  
2510 Sparrow Drive  
Nisku, Alberta T9E 8N5  
Ph: (780) 955-3639 Fax: (780) 955-3615  
Email: [aamdc@aamdc.com](mailto:aamdc@aamdc.com)

2. You will also need to contact your local health inspector. Contact your local Health Region regarding what you will need for a health inspection of your business. To find your local Health Region click on [http://www.health.gov.ab.ca/regions/RHA\\_map.html](http://www.health.gov.ab.ca/regions/RHA_map.html) You can also call the Health and Wellness Ministry Information line at (780) 427-7164. Dial the government toll free number first at 310-0000 for no charge dial.
3. You may also want to consult with a Community Futures Business Development Centre in your area. Each office delivers a variety of services ranging from strategic economic planning, technical and advisory services to businesses, loans to small and medium sized businesses, and self-employment assistance programs. To find a centre in your area go to [http://www.cfnsa.ca/cfna/public/find\\_cf.html](http://www.cfnsa.ca/cfna/public/find_cf.html). Have a look around the site, as there may be information that you will find useful. For more information on Community Futures, call (403) 851-9995.
4. You might also consider walking through your diversification idea with a New Venture Specialist at the Ag-Info Centre of Alberta Agriculture Food and Rural Development (AAFRD). Call them toll free at 1-866-882-7677.

5. You will want to visit the website for AAFRD at [www.agtourism.ca](http://www.agtourism.ca) for the latest information, workshops, publications, and key links. Note especially the AgVenture Publication, *Country Vacation Enterprise* (888-2) and *Country Vacation Profits* (888-1). Have a look around the entire site – the information will be vital in your planning process.
6. Alberta Economic Development – Tourism Development Branch will also be very important for you. Your contact with Alberta Economic Development – Tourism Development Branch is Bill Hodgins. His phone number is 780-427-6485 and his email is [bill.hodgins@gov.ab.ca](mailto:bill.hodgins@gov.ab.ca). Their website link is: <http://www.alberta-canada.com/aed/aboutAED/index.cfm>
7. You will also want to check with the Alberta Hotel and Lodging Association (AHLA) with regards to having an inspection done on your property. If you so choose, you can become an approved accommodation through the AHLA. They print an annual directory of approved accommodations and their online directory can be seen at [www.explorealberta.com](http://www.explorealberta.com) For more information contact:

Alberta Hotel and Lodging Association  
#401, Centre 104, 5241 Calgary Trail  
Edmonton, AB T6H 5G8  
Ph: 780-436-6112 Toll free: 1-888-436-6112 Fax 780-436-5404

8. Another important resource for all aspects of the tourism industry is the industry site for Travel Alberta at [www.industry.travelalberta.com](http://www.industry.travelalberta.com)
9. Make arrangements to stay with a member of our association! The best way to learn about a country vacation is to experience it first hand! See our website at [www.albertacountryvacation.com](http://www.albertacountryvacation.com) for a complete list of our members. Click through to their individual websites to see the diversity of the country vacation experiences and what they all have to offer.
10. As mentioned, once your business is in operation, the Alberta Country Vacations Association can help you with the marketing, promotions and bookings. The following is a list of member benefits:

The ACVA attracts tourists from all over the world to rural Alberta guest ranches, working ranches, backcountry vacations and farm & ranch country vacations through our well-developed and focused “**Experience the Real West – Your Way!**” marketing campaign. As a member of ACVA, you will be part of this professional marketing effort!

Benefits to you include:

## 1. Vastly increased promotional exposure for your property:

- Our **website** - [www.albertacountryvacation.com](http://www.albertacountryvacation.com) receives 22,000 unique visitors each year and will host a link to your website along with your membership listing. Web stats are also available to members.
- Our **brochure** - distributed nationally and internationally every year.
- Our **print advertising** - seen in selected magazines - targets key markets and often includes articles directly about the ACVA and our members.
- Participation in **Travel Alberta** collaborative marketing, which includes province wide initiatives as well as distribution of our brochures **internationally** to the United Kingdom, Germany, and the Netherlands.
- We **partner** with other tourism associations on promotional and marketing activities, which makes your promotional dollar go even further.

## 2. Increased calls from interested tourists:

- Our **toll free** information line is answered at our central office and refers tourists to ACVA members for inquiries and direct bookings.
- Referrals from other ACVA members across the province.

## 3. Increased media exposure:

- The ACVA works directly with the media department of Travel Alberta in the development and organization of media FAM tours, assisting travel writers, developing stories and referring our members to media.

## 4. Member Support: you are part of a team of successful, like-minded operators.

- Networking - our **members** have lots of tips to share. Learn from others!
- Access to **seminars** that will help you to provide an excellent experience.
- Our members work together on collaborative **package deals**.

## 5. A stronger voice:

- **Credibility** – being part of the ACVA will give you credibility in the minds of your guests and potential visitors.
- **Lobby Power** – with governmental and non-governmental agencies due to a collective voice.

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The following information is intended to help you make an informed decision about operating a Country Vacation business and your involvement in the association.

### **WHAT IS A COUNTRY VACATION?**

Members of the Alberta Country Vacations Association are privately owned and operated, situated outside of any corporate limits, and provides individual guest services, accommodations and natural experiences. There are four types of vacations that we market:

- Guest Ranches
- Working Ranches
- Backcountry vacations
- Country vacations

In the changing agricultural economy, many farmers and ranchers find there is a need to supplement their income to remain viable. One way of doing this is by opening their homes and property to paying guests. This business can be financially rewarding, when operated as a business.

### **WHY DO COUNTRY VACATIONS APPEAL TO PEOPLE?**

Many people are searching for a place to get away from the hustle and bustle of city life. They are looking for a place to rest, relax and enjoy the peace and tranquillity of the country. Many enjoy participating in regular farm and ranch activities. Visitors are delighted at the prospect of becoming personally acquainted with a rural Canadian family. The farm animals captivate children. The experience may be educational and entertaining. All types of country vacations offer a unique contribution toward Canadian unity. People come together from different walks of life, resulting in improved mutual understanding between rural and urban neighbours.

### **WHY DOES THE COUNTRY VACATION BUSINESS APPEAL TO RURAL FAMILIES?**

Hosting vacationers can be very enjoyable and rewarding, both intrinsically and financially. It provides operators with the opportunity to meet, host and entertain people from many parts of the world. Great learning and sharing may occur from both sides. It allows the host family to recognize and use their talents, skills and physical assets in a way that is beneficial and appreciated by others. Long-term friendships may transpire. Guest accommodation may be in the farm/ranch home or in separate self-contained units for housekeeping. Regardless of the location of the accommodations, it is recommended that a relationship be maintained between the host family and their guests. There is ample room for individual preferences and creativity. Some host families prefer adults only. Some prefer children (unaccompanied by adults). Some prefer families. Others may be interested in large groups or school tours.

### **SHOULD YOU BECOME COUNTRY VACATION HOSTS?**

Hosting vacationers can be demanding of one's time and privacy – depending on the type of vacation that you are offering. No matter what type of vacation you are offering, it will entail a lot of work. It is important to understand what the business is all about before becoming involved.

Some vacations offer a self contained accommodation and a self guided vacation. With others, you may choose to be more involved with your guests. Points for prospective hosts to consider:

1. Do you enjoy having guests on your farm/ranch? You will need to have time to devote to your guests and you will have to have patience with and understanding for people who are less knowledgeable about farming or ranching.
2. Is your whole family enthusiastic about hosting guests? This, more than any other enterprise, is a family undertaking. If your spouse and/or children take a dim view of the business, it may be very difficult to be successful.
3. Are you willing to invest some capital in this business? This is a business venture separate from, or in conjunction with your existing farm or ranch operation. Sufficient capital may be required initially, and it may take a few years before this capital can be recovered and a profit shown.
4. Are your accommodations clean, airy, and spacious enough for comfort? Guests will not expect the facilities of a luxury hotel, but they will expect minimum standards with a certain amount of privacy. An adequate supply of furniture, linen, dishes, etc. is necessary.
5. If you are choosing to have an all-inclusive vacation - do you enjoy cooking? Providing quality "home cooked" meals can add value to your guest's stay, while adding profit for the hosts.
6. Is your farm/ranch neat and tidy? Safety is always a concern, especially in this age of lawsuits. It may be valuable to enter your property with the eye of a visitor. We may be accustomed to our own property because we live there and see it everyday. Visitors may find it unsightly, disorganized or dangerous. First impressions are so important.
7. Can guests participate in activities on your farm / ranch? Some of the things that are routine to you may be interesting and exciting for your guests. The activities that you offer are dependent upon your location, facilities and personal preferences.

The more "YES" answers you have to the above questions, the more likely it is that you have something special to offer guests. This information is provided to allow you to make the best decision for your family. Please consider each point carefully and honestly. There are great opportunities for Country Vacation hosts in Alberta who are committed to meeting the needs and expectations of their guests.

As you can see, there is quite a bit to think about in the start up process for a country vacation. We hope that this information will help you in your decision and planning process. Once your business is set up, please contact us. As previously mentioned, the ACVA can help you with the marketing, bookings, sales and promotions of your new country vacation!