

Custom Content Feature



Setting standards in Atlantic Canada and beyond

By Tom Mason

A rating system developed right here in Atlantic Canada is having a big impact on the quality of the hospitality industry locally and in other countries around the world. After more than two decades of operation, Canada Select has established itself as the standard for quality in the Canadian travel industry, earning a solid reputation for delivering on its promises.

"The concept of a rating program started here in Atlantic Canada with the Atlantic Canada Tourism Grading Authority in the late 1980s," says Ronald van der Weegen, managing director of Quality Visitor Services, the independent non-profit organization that manages Canada Select in Nova Scotia. "That evolved into the Canada Select brand."

Canada Select was introduced in 1992, along with its five-star system that rates everything from guest rooms, bathrooms, kitchens and living rooms to restaurants, lounges and meeting rooms. "The system gives customers the confidence to book a vacation or make business travel plans even if they've never been here before and are unfamiliar with the properties," says van der Weegen.

In 2014 Canada Select implemented more flexibility to the program – a move that's been met with great enthusiasm by operators and consumers, according to van der Weegen. With ratings based on quality, cleanliness and levels of service, the availability of criteria items such as telephones, televisions and coffee makers is no longer mandatory. "No one recognizes their customers better than our operators," says van der Weegen. "Our operators provide their customers with the amenities that reflect their property's specific market appeal."

In addition, Canada Select has introduced accommodation designators, allowing fixed roofed accommodations of any type to obtain a rating, including hostels and universities.

Canada Select also operates the Camping Select Rating Program in Atlantic Canada based upon a two-tier system, reflecting separate star ratings for Facilities and Recreation.

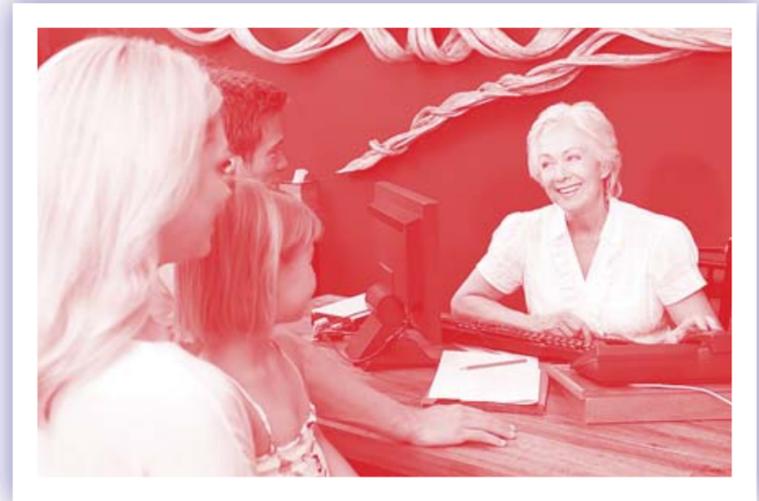
"Camping Select is a very popular program in our region with over 90 per cent of campgrounds in Atlantic Canada rated," says van der Weegen.

To make sure ratings are accurate, Canada Select operates the country's only on-site accommodation rating program. Properties are inspected by professional property assessors on an annual or biennial basis and given a star rating based on quality, cleanliness and level of service. The assessment is much more than a cursory drive-by. Inspectors are required to inspect 10 per cent – or a minimum of four – of the guest rooms during an assessment visit. If more than 25 per cent of a property's accommodation units fall short, the better units are not included in the assessment and the star rating is assigned based on the condition of the lower-quality units.

The five-star rating system gives hospitality operators the ability to market directly to their customer base while guiding consumers to the ideal accommodation choice – whether it's the comfort, cleanliness and value of a one- or two-star establishment or a more high-end hospitality experience. The system also features a unique half-star rating that is added to some properties to indicate that it stands out from a normal three-star or four-star property. The half star is awarded to properties whose physical attributes reflect an enhanced quality for the rated level.

"We are very much industry led and consumer driven," says van der Weegen. "We have revolutionized the Canada Select system into a leading edge rating program, incorporating service, hospitality and efficiency, along with food quality in the near future."

Mike Emmett owns and operates the Braeside Inn in Pictou, Nova Scotia. He says that in a world where travellers are becoming increasingly savvy and discerning, the Canada Select rating system and www.canadaselect.com are vital marketing tools for his business. "The



Internet is where tourists today are finding information about planning their vacation and where they're going to stay," he says. "They are looking for ratings, and Canada Select has the most accurate ratings system on the market."

Lyne Larade calls Canada Select her lifeline. Larade was new to the hospitality business when she became manager of Maison Fiset House in Cheticamp, a small inn located in one of the town's historic homes. "Right from the beginning I felt comfortable calling Gary Shute and asking him questions. He always has an answer and is ready to help."

Larade says her property's four-and-a-half star rating has become an invaluable piece of information for her guests to decide. "A lot of them had never even heard of Cheticamp before they decided to see the Cabot Trail." The star rating system has also raised the tourism bar in her community, as tourism operators compete to raise their own star ratings. "Before Canada Select I think the attitude was 'I'm always full so I really don't need to do anything to improve,'" she says. "Today everyone makes sure they take care of the peeling paint. They change the old drapes, to keep their standards up to everyone else's."

Now the Canada Select team is taking their expertise to an international level. Recently Quality Visitor Services' Gary Shute was selected to join a top flight team of International Accommodation Assessors from nations including the U.K., Ireland, New Zealand, Australia and Switzerland to contribute to a quality assurance and accreditation process in the accommodation industry in the Philippines. Shute is the only Canadian rating advisor on the team. Maria Wong is also a senior ratings advisor for Quality Visitor Services.

At the same time, van der Weegen was selected as the team's International Trainer Assessor Expert, developing and delivering training to the Philippines Department of Tourism, to tourism industry officials and international accommodation assessors in the island nation. The project will result in the development of a ratings system for the Philippines, a major step in the country's move to develop and market a world-leading hospitality industry, says van der Weegen.

"This project has been designed to improve and standardize the classification of hotel and resort facilities and service standards in the Philippines," he says. "It will also act as a market-based incentive to raise service standards and promote staff skills development in the regions of Bohol, Cebu, Davao and Palawan. It will help the country take its hospitality industry to the next level, very much like what we did with the Canada Select system here in this country."

For more information on Canada Select visit www.canadaselect.com. For more information on Camping Select visit www.campingselect.ca.



Canada Select & Camping Select

Canada's only on-site inspected rating programs

Other rating programs rely solely on guest reviews. Canada Select / Camping Select is a complete package.

Properties are inspected annually or biennially; ratings are focussed on quality, cleanliness, state of repair, with the addition of Welcome Programs which enables operators to focus on their specific target market while assisting the traveling and vacationing public in finding the right accommodations for them.

