

City and district

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Cornwall and Seaway Valley Tourism will be offering a free workshop next month to promote bicycle tourism in the area.

On Feb. 8, the tourism office will partner with Toronto-based Transportation Options, a not-for-profit organization promoting sustainable transportation, and the Ministry of Tourism and Culture to help area businesses tap into the growing market of bicycle tourism.

Barb Matthews, executive manager of the tourism office, said bicycle tourism is gaining speed in light of an aging population and families who are looking for alternatives to traditional vacations.

"There's a lot of people that are very, very interested in this," Matthews said. "It's a really big market and it's growing."

"(Bicycle tourism) is what is going to help us grow," she added.

Matthews said the build up of the Waterfront Trail, which spans from Niagara-on-the-Lake to the Quebec border and runs along the St. Lawrence River, has made Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry more of a destination for bicycle tourists.

She said she's had tourists tell her that this area boasts the nicest section of trail, due to the often stunning views of the St. Lawrence.

While traveling, Matthews said the tourists will make stops to eat at local restaurants, to shop and to stay overnight in accommodations.

Matthews said the workshop will give area businesses ideas on how to better attract bicycle tourists to all area businesses, in turn increasing revenue.

As an example, she said, if hotels offer a place for guests to store their bikes, give out maps of the area's bike paths and have a bike-repair kit, they are more attractive to tourists.

"It's a benefit and people certainly need to look at it that way," she said. "They are leaving money behind."

Matthews also said she'd like to see tourism expand beyond the shores of the St. Lawrence to the northern townships of the United Counties.

In order to promote the area further, Matthews also has a booth at the Salon du Vélo bicycle show in Montreal each year. This year, the event will take place from Feb. 18 to 20 at Place Bonaventure.

Scott Lecky, owner and general manager of the Ramada Inn and Conference Centre in Cornwall, said he's seen an increase in the amount of bike-related tourism in the area.

He said he plans to attend the workshop in February to get more ideas on how to attract cyclists.

"I think it's clear it's becoming a bigger market for Cornwall," Lecky said, noting he's had more people inquiring about a space to keep their bikes.

"I think at the end of the day we're becoming a little bit more of a destination for the folks that like to bike," he said. "Which is kind of nice."

The workshop will run from 2:30 p.m. until 4:30 p.m. at the St. Lawrence Power Centre on Second Street.