



TRAINING ★ TOURS ★ DISCOVERY

Guidelines for Handling Hot Topics

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Guidelines for Handling Hot Topics

We are dealing with a very political climate in our world right now. As a result, there is a wide range of “Hot Topics”, so as a reminder, we never discuss or comment on any of the following on tour, at the pier, or during interactions with guests in any way – not when addressing the group, and not individually in conversation:

- Race
- Religion
- Gender
- Sexuality
- Politics

With all that is going on in the political arena in the United States and Canada in recent years, we understand that you may be prompted by your guests with questions or asked your opinion. Again, we remind you of the following:

- Please remember that discussions or comments about politics and political leaders do not have a place on our tours.
- As an Aquila Tour Guide, you should not be discussing anything political in nature on your tour (unless specifically asked a question).
- You can safely assume that there are supporters of both sides on your tour, which means that any comment that is not neutral will offend some guests – and we want to avoid this.
- If you are directly asked a question or your opinion, we are reminding you to keep comments minimal, neutral and positive – and quickly move on.
- We respect that each of you have your own opinions on this topic, but while actively in our roles we always remain neutral in our answers to these questions.

If you are directly asked a question or your opinion on any Hot Topic, keep comments minimal, neutral and positive – and quickly move on. That means:

- Do not bring it up unless asked by a passenger.
- Keep your tone and delivery neutral.
- **Do not make jokes.**
- Do not give personal examples.
- Be ready with a simple, diplomatic message (examples below).
- If pressed with more questions from an individual, bring the focus back to the tour. If necessary, suggest answering more questions at the next stop – but again, always with neutrality and diplomacy.

Why Language and Words Matter

Language and words can perpetuate harmful stereotypes, contribute to stigma, and create situations where we judge people because of the language used to describe them. The words we use influence our own opinions and feelings as well as the opinions and feelings of others. Taking the time to consider what we say and how we say it can create bridges between community members and also create opportunities to enact real change.



Using the right language demonstrates respect for our vulnerable community members and helps to educate others. Please also be mindful of the proper use of a person’s pronouns (she/her, he/him, they/them, etc).

Instead Of:	Use:
Native or Aboriginal	Indigenous or First Nations
Hearing Impaired	Deaf or Hard of Hearing
“Hey, Guys”	“Hi Everyone, Team, Folks”
Disabled	Person with a Disability
Homeless, Bum, Hobo	Unhoused, Unsheltered
Junkie, Addict, Druggie	Person Who Uses Substances
Clean	Sober
Beggar	Person Who is Panhandling

Information on the Unhoused or Unsheltered Community in Saint John

*Occasionally questions from guests can come up during our tours about the unhoused community or temporary shelters. The information that follows has been provided directly by the **Human Development Council** and is intended to help us answer these questions factually and respectfully. While not necessarily consider a “hot topic”, we do want to remain neutral at all times, and only discuss when brought up directly by guests.*

While homelessness exists in our community, there are many organizations and people who strive to make it rare, brief, and nonrecurring. This is not a unique situation for Saint John, as all cities around the world are experiencing the same with rising costs of living.

Often, we are conditioned to believe homelessness is a personal failure caused by bad decisions on the part of the individual. But the reality is that homelessness is a complex issue rooted in systemic issues like affordable housing shortages, lack of mental health support and service, low wage employment, and lack of funding for social services. A person experiencing homelessness is trying to navigate a very difficult and painful reality and is more than a problem to be solved.

From the **Human Development Council**, we know that:

- In March 2026, there were 463 total individuals who experienced homelessness for at least 1 day that month.
- There were 257 individuals experiencing chronic homelessness at least 1 day that month.



There are many reasons why someone might experience homelessness at some point. The important thing is to always stay **neutral and non-judgmental** – whether that is in discussion with cruise guests or while engaging with an unhoused person during your tour.

Sample Messaging About the Unhoused Population Or Temporary Shelters

“Yes, like many cities around the world the pandemic and recent inflation has had a significant impact on the economy in our province. Our unhoused population has grown over the past couple of years to around 450 individuals, so you may notice some temporary shelters. There are many organizations dedicated to helping these individuals and Aquila is a big supporter of both Romero House and the United Way – two non-profits which are involved in helping those in need in our community. By joining us on tour today you are, in a way, helping us give back to our community as well.”

What To Do If a Local Is Disrupting My Tour

This can be a difficult situation for any person, let alone when managing a group of visitors. Much like incidents or emergencies, every situation will be different when dealing with people both local and those on your tour. Some tips to help you handle this situation to remain neutral and respectful would be:

- **Don’t argue or challenge:** That can escalate things quickly.
- **Don’t ignore completely if it alarms guests:** A quick acknowledgment helps people feel secure.
- **Avoid dehumanizing language:** Model respect in how you refer to the person.
- **Keep the group moving:** Movement reduces tension and exposure.
- **Avoid confronting or telling the person to “stop”:** don’t let the group crowd or stare at the person

To the local individual, keep it brief and neutral with a **“we’re just passing through – take care”** and move the guests along to a new location. To your guests you can say: **“Alright everyone, let’s keep moving together this way. Let’s just give them some space and continue on. We’ll pick up the story around the corner – follow me”**.

Once at a new location, you can reassure the guests with a further comment like **“Situations like that can happen in busy urban areas. The best thing is to stay together and give people space, which is exactly what we did.”**

If you believe someone is having a mental health crisis, this can be upsetting. If you are worried about the welfare or safety of someone because of their perceived mental state, or because you find their behaviour concerning, here are some considerations:

- If you are worried they might hurt themselves or others, **call 911** and then call Aquila (Cruise Manager or Emergency Contact for the cruise day)
- If they are in distress but it is not an emergency and you feel safe:
 - Ask someone you are with or a bystander to stay with you
 - Ask they are okay or need help
 - Get them a cup of water and a snack if you are able to
 - Ask if there is someone you can contact for them
 - Call Mobile Mental Health at 1-888-811-3664 (7 days a week, 11:00am-11:00pm) and ask someone to help. You will be transferred to a member of the care team. If they are not

available or it is outside of business hours, call Saint John Police (non-emergency line) at 506-648-3333.

- Call Aquila (Cruise Manager or Emergency Contact for the cruise day)

Something to Consider: Try having a ‘See Something, Say Something’ mentality in these situations. People often turn a blind eye when they encounter someone in crisis. If you see someone in danger or you are worried about leaving them in that situation, say something. You might save their life!

Sample Messaging on Politics To Guests

General Political Discussion On Tours:

“Well, I try to stay neutral when I’ve got people from all over on a tour. Politics can get passionate on both sides, and I’d rather focus on the beautiful coastline and the fresh seafood than on politics.”

“Yes, the current political climate is certainly receiving lots of attention and media coverage. As our closest neighbor, we are always interested in what’s happening in the United States, and we’ll continue to follow the issues with interest, as we always do.”

“You’re right, there is a lot of interest around that issue right now, but fortunately for us, you’re all on vacation and on this tour to see new sights and have new experiences, so for the next few hours, we’re going to forget about the rest of the world, and turn our attention to Saint John & the Bay of Fundy.”

Questions Regarding “51st State” Commentary

“Canada has always valued its independence, and even in the Maritimes, we have a really strong sense of our own history and identity—some of the oldest European settlements in North America are right here. We’re proud of our relationship with the U.S., but we’re also proud of being Canadian. You’d be surprised how different we are culturally despite being neighbors.”

“Well, people here in the Maritimes and in Canada have deep roots—whether Acadian, First Nations, Irish, or Loyalist - and we’ve been charting our own course for a long time. We enjoy a close friendship with our American neighbours, but we have our own traditions, stories, and way of life that we hold dear.”

Questions Specifically About The U.S President

“Well, opinions definitely vary across the country, just like they do in the U.S. That said, Canadians tend to follow American politics pretty closely—we’re neighbours, after all—but we also focus a lot on our own issues and leaders.”

“People in the Maritimes tend to be pretty community-focused. We care about how decisions—whether in Ottawa or Washington—affect things like fishing rights, cross-border trade, and the environment. When it comes to U.S. presidents, we watch with interest, but we also keep an eye on how it affects our day-to-day here.”

“Canada and the U.S. have always had a strong relationship, no matter who’s in office. Policies may shift from one administration to the next, but the people-to-people connection—like us sharing this tour together—is what’s important.”

Questions About The Us/Canada Trade War

“In places like New Brunswick, things like lobster exports and softwood lumber are major parts of the economy, so when tariffs go up, it hits close to home on both sides. That said, most people here understand that trade is complicated—it’s not about one leader, but about long-term partnerships. Canadians are always looking for ways to work things out.”

What Does “Elbows Up” Mean?

The “Elbows Up” movement has emerged in Canada as a unifying call to assert national resilience and sovereignty in response to recent U.S. policies and statements. Rooted in hockey culture, the phrase “elbows up” signifies readiness to protect oneself and push back when challenged. This metaphor resonates deeply in Canada, a nation passionate about hockey.

The movement gained significant traction following Canadian actor Mike Myers’ appearance on “Saturday Night Live” on March 1, 2025. During the show’s closing moments, Myers wore a T-shirt emblazoned with the Canadian flag and the slogan “Canada Is Not for Sale.” He pointed to the shirt and mouthed the phrase “elbows up,” signaling a call to action for Canadians to stand firm against external pressures. This rallying cry emerged amid escalating tensions between Canada and the United States, including the imposition of tariffs on Canadian goods and discussions suggesting Canada could become the U.S.’s “51st state.” Such developments have fueled a surge in Canadian nationalism, with citizens expressing their defiance through boycotts of U.S. products and participation in rallies.

The term “elbows up” draws inspiration from hockey legend Gordie Howe, renowned for using his elbows to protect himself on the ice. This connection underscores the movement’s emphasis on self-defense and resilience. In essence, the “Elbows Up” movement embodies Canada’s collective determination to uphold its sovereignty and values in the face of external challenges, symbolizing a readiness to stand firm and protect national interests.

In hockey, “elbows up” can be both a defensive and offensive strategy, depending on the context.

1. **Defensive Use** – Players sometimes raise their elbows to protect themselves from incoming hits, especially along the boards or in front of the net. It can be a way to shield oneself from aggressive opponents.
2. **Offensive Use** – Raising elbows while delivering a check can be an aggressive move to gain an advantage, but it’s often considered illegal. Elbowing is a penalty in hockey if a player extends their elbow to make contact with an opponent’s head or upper body.

In the case of the “Elbows Up” movement, the phrase draws from the defensive meaning—standing firm and protecting oneself while still being ready to push back if necessary.

Questions About Canada’s Healthcare System

“It’s publicly funded, so we don’t pay out of pocket when we visit the doctor or go to the ER. It’s not free—we fund it through taxes—but it means nobody has to choose between a hospital visit and paying the rent. It’s something most Canadians value deeply, even if the system isn’t perfect.”

“Out here in the Maritimes, we definitely appreciate the public system—it gives people peace of mind. But like in any rural region, there can be challenges with access—especially in smaller communities where it might take longer to see a family doctor. Still, if you need care, you’ll get it, and you won’t get a bill at the end.”

“Canada’s system focuses more on equity than speed—everyone gets access, regardless of income. It’s not perfect, but it reflects a different set of priorities and it works for us. And a lot of Canadians appreciate not having to think about insurance plans and deductibles.”

Cannabis Legalization: Fact Sheet

To be used if a guest asks a direct question regarding Cannabis legalization in Canada. This is considered a Political “Hot Topic” and we should remain neutral when responding to guests. This is NOT to be used in regular tour content.

Consumption

The legal age to possess, consume or cultivate cannabis is the same as the age to consume alcohol: **19 years of age**. Unlike liquor stores, those under 19 years will not be allowed to enter a cannabis retail outlet. Cannabis is not equivalent to cigarettes and cannot be smoked in public. **Cannabis must be consumed in a private dwelling or on private property with the consent of the owner and/or occupant.** It is prohibited to give cannabis to someone who appears to be intoxicated. Both recreational *and* medical cannabis are prohibited from being consumed in a smoke-free or public place. Cannabis cannot be smoked in a vehicle (motor, off-road, farm tractor, etc.) that is on a highway, on a roadway, or is parked in a public place.

Possession

It is **illegal to possess more than 30g** of dried cannabis in a public place. However, there is no provincial limit for possession of cannabis on private property. The following table outlines the maximum amount of cannabis one can possess in public based on class of cannabis. There is also a maximum of four cannabis plants allowed per private “dwelling-house”. This is not a per-person maximum, but a per-residence cap. It is illegal to possess any cannabis plants in public that are budding or flowering.

Storage

Cannabis must be stored in a **secure space** in private residences. The space must be inaccessible to anyone under the age of 19. Cannabis plants must be locked in an enclosure if it is grown outdoors. If grown indoors, plants must be stored in a separate locked space, out of access from those under 19.

Distribution

The distribution, sale and consumption of cannabis is regulated by *Cannabis NB*, a subsidiary of NB Liquor. Twenty stores are anticipated to open throughout the province, with two in Fredericton, two in Saint John, three in Greater Moncton, and the remaining thirteen in various other locations. *Cannabis NB* will organize cannabis into three product groups. Customer names and/or details will not be kept on file. All cannabis products will be behind glass. Advertisements or promotions of cannabis cannot appeal to young persons and cannot depict persons, characters or animals.

Enforcement

Cannabis laws will be enforced by “Inspectors.” They may enter and inspect any place or vehicle (other than a private dwelling, which requires a warrant) and make any examinations, inquiries or tests.

Law enforcement will also use saliva tests and other roadside testing methods to measure level of THC impairment in drivers. Starting in December, police can require random roadside non-saliva breath tests from any driver without the need for reasonable suspicion. Saliva tests will require reasonable suspicion. Currently, eighteen police officers in the province have received or are receiving training to detect cannabis impairment.

Cruise Ships

Cruise ships consider cannabis illegal, and it is not permitted to bring on board the ship similar to crossing the border.

Contact

If you have any questions or need clarification, please reach out to Aquila’s Human Resources Manager below. Thank you for contributing to a positive and professional atmosphere at Aquila.

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