

OPEN AGENDA
Tourism Sault Ste. Marie Board Meeting
October 31, 2023 at 12:00pm
LIVE STREAM: www.youtube.com/c/SaultstemarieCa

1. Roll Call

2. Approval of Minutes

Approval of minutes from August 22, 2023 Board Meeting
– Deferred to next meeting

3. Declaration of Pecuniary Interests

4. Tourism Strategic Planning Review

12:05- 14:00

5. Next Meeting

November 21, 2023

6. Adjournment



Tourism Sault Ste. Marie

Strategic Plan and Business Development Attraction Plan

October 27th, 2023

Prepared for: Tourism Sault Ste. Marie

Prepared by: Deloitte, Economic Advisory Team

Disclaimer

This report has been provided for the purpose of informing and assisting the Tourism Sault Ste. Marie with a Strategic Plan and Business Development Attraction Plan.

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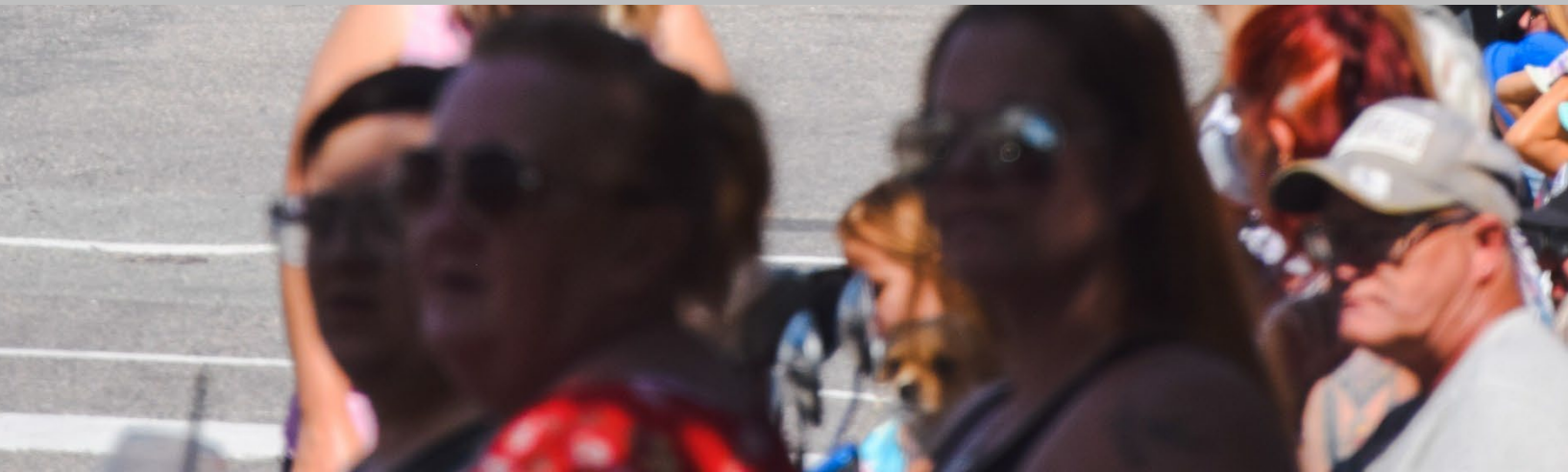
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We believe that our analyses must be considered as a whole and that selecting portions of the analyses, or the factors considered by it, without considering all factors and analyses together, could create a misleading view of the issues related to the report. Amendment of any of the assumptions identified throughout this report could have a material impact on our analysis contained herein. Should any of the major assumptions not be accurate or should any of the information provided to us not be factual or correct, our analyses, as expressed in this report, could be significantly different.



Executive Summary



Executive Summary

Tourism Sault Ste. Marie has positioned the city as a hub for urban outdoor experiences in Ontario. Tourism visitation and trends have been rapidly changing since the COVID-19 Pandemic and Tourism Sault Ste. Marie aims to capitalize on the continued desire for outdoor experiences that promote mental wellness. Aligning with Destination Northern Ontario's goal of increasing Ontario's share of provincial tourism receipts by 10% while attracting high-value, year-round visitation to Sault Ste. Marie is another priority highlighted within this strategy.

While Sault Ste. Marie fared well in comparison to other destinations during the pandemic, it was made evident that having only a few primary tourism drivers puts the sector at risk. This strategy is designed to diversify tourism products, promote the development of new tourism drivers, and continue to expand Sault Ste. Marie's winter tourism season.

The **Strategic Plan development** for Tourism Sault Ste. Marie provides alignment with their three strategic priorities:

1. Sports tourism, festivals, and events
2. Outdoor adventure
3. Downtown/waterfront improvements/activations

A gap analysis was conducted which provides context to Sault Ste. Marie's current product mix, while the SOARR assessment highlights strengths, opportunities, aspirations, risks, and results. Building on this foundation, objectives and tactics were developed to set a foundation to support strategic tourism marketing and product development. The implementation plan provides a guide at-a-glance in a matrix with timelines and prioritization.



The image highlights the strategic objectives with the underpinning of strategic priorities. These objectives aim to facilitate business development support to the tourism industry.

The connection to industry is an important theme. Engaging and supporting businesses will be a key success factor in the implementation of this strategy.

The **Business Development Attraction Plan** showcases opportunities to enhance Tourism Sault Ste. Marie's product offerings. The gap analysis and engagement findings were used as a base and threaded into market segment preferences and tied into Tourism Sault Ste. Marie's strategic priorities.

With business as the lead proponents of product development, Tourism Sault Ste. Marie's role in the development of destination drivers and trip enhancers is through business development opportunities, primarily through supporting these experiences by prioritization within the tourism development fund. Where Tourism Sault Ste. Marie can take a lead role is in the investment of municipal infrastructure that supports the tourism sector, specific to events, and the waterfront and downtown district. Continuing to prioritize funding support for Sault Ste. Marie's downtown and waterfront districts and attracting unique tourism experience operators have the potential to be major tourism drivers.

A successful destination has market-ready tourism products across tourism's five sectors: accommodations, food and beverage, recreation and entertainment, transportation, and travel services. Trip enhancers are recommended to both add to Sault Ste. Marie's tourism product mix and enhance existing products to increase visibility and increase spend and stay within the city.

Tourism Sault Ste. Marie's new Strategic Plan and Business Development Attraction Plan provides a roadmap for the path past the COVID travel restrictions. The focus is on setting the groundwork for tourism businesses to succeed, alongside the city as a whole. The outcomes and tactics will help Sault Ste. Marie align its tourism products with its desire to be Ontario's Best Adventure Town.

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Introduction



Introduction

Situated at the heart of the Great Lakes, Sault Ste. Marie is an international port of entry to the United States and continues to be an important destination for business, trade, and travel. Known as being the 'Friendliest City in Algoma' and dubbed 'Ontario's Best Adventure Town,' Sault Ste. Marie is home to the renowned Agawa Canyon Tour Train, an important tourism driver for the city.

To provide guidance for strengthening Sault Ste. Marie's tourism sector, this Strategic Plan and Business Development Attraction Plan has been developed by Tourism Sault Ste. Marie (TSSM) in partnership with Destination Northern Ontario. In 2021, the TSSM Board of Directors identified three key strategic priorities: sports tourism, festivals, and events; outdoor adventure; and downtown and waterfront improvement and activation. Along with this foundational direction, the strategic plan was built on quantitative and qualitative market research, detailed analysis, and engagement to develop a series of actions. The desired outcome is alignment of actions and tactics to grow the economy of Sault Ste. Marie through a strong tourism sector with multiple tourism drivers and enhancements to the overall experience of visiting Sault Ste. Marie.

PROJECT PROCESS

Deloitte's Economic Advisory team facilitated the process of strategic planning that included the following phases:

Phase 1: Market Research and Consultation

A situational analysis was prepared that included: a background review, a visitor profile analysis, a visitor perception assessment, visitor spending analysis, a tourism workforce analysis, transportation analysis, accommodations analysis, and a tourism business attractions trends analysis. This engagement included interviews with Tourism Sault Ste. Marie's senior staff and Board of Directors, a focus group session with tourism service delivery partners, a survey with tourism operators and a visitor/tourism panel survey. A background report, summarizing these activities, was developed prior to the development of this strategy document.

Phase 2: Strategy Development

The development of this strategy is the second phase of this work and includes a gap analysis, SOARR assessment, strategic objectives, the selection of future directions workshop with Tourism Sault Ste. Marie's Board of Directors, development of goals, tactics, implementation plan with KPIs, and the Business Development Attraction Plan.

Gap Analysis



Gap Analysis

The following section uses the primary and secondary research completed in the background report to identify current tourism offerings, product gaps, potential labour gaps, and opportunities within the tourism sector’s five key industries in Sault Ste. Marie: accommodations, food and beverage, recreation and entertainment, transportation, and travel services.

Destination Canada’s recent report: ‘Laws of Attraction for High-Value Guests’ highlights some insights to consider when examining current offers, product gaps, labour considerations and later on opportunities. High-value guests refer to travelers that have a higher-than-average income and travel frequency.¹ These considerations are highlighted in the sections below.

Opportunities, actions, and areas for improvement in these areas will be highlighted within the Business Development Attraction Plan.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Current Tourism Offerings

Sault Ste. Marie has approximately 35 accommodations properties, including 13 hotels, 12 motels, 3 Campgrounds and cottages, 3 residences, 2 lodges, 1 Bed and Breakfast and 1 resort on their Tourism website. Together, these properties total 1,614 available rooms, and 70 active short-term rentals. Sault Ste. Marie’s Operator Inventory highlights 63 accommodations operators located in Sault Ste. Marie, with many of these businesses being hotels and motels.

Product Gaps

Currently the hotels in Sault Ste. Marie offer amenities that appeal to business travel or short-stay leisure travelers driving through the city. According to Destination Canada, the presence of high-end accommodation in a destination has the potential to attract high-value guests. “For leisure travel, high-end accommodation is the top influence on destination choice”.² High-value accommodation is less about quality amenities, which are expected, and more about the measure of how you make the guest feel. While established hotel brands in Sault Ste. Marie already offer commendable

¹ Destination Canada. Laws of Attraction for High-Value Guests.

² Ibid

services and contribute significantly to the region's hospitality landscape, the addition of luxury³ accommodations can further enhance the city's appeal and attract a new market segment. As Destination Canada explains: "Perhaps the hotel or property offers a unique experience rather than world-class facilities ... Highlight that [you] are right on the edge of nature which means your guests can experience luxury accommodations then head out to explore some of the world's greatest natural attractions."⁴

The following gaps have been identified through the qualitative and quantitative analysis conducted in the background report:

- Explore opportunities to pursue development of specific accommodation types including boutique⁵ and luxury hotel classes⁶.
- Accommodations that can accommodate snowmobilers.
- Urban accommodations with packaged outdoor experiences.

Availability of accommodations during months when occupancy is high may limit future tourism event opportunities during those times.

Labour Considerations

Lightcast's staffing patterns projections for Sault Ste. Marie suggests the number of jobs in traveler accommodations will decrease by 7% between 2022 and 2028.⁷

Provincially, Tourism Human Resource Canada (TRHC) and the Conference Board of Canada are predicting employment growth of 7% to 8% in Ontario by 2025.⁸

³ Luxury hotels have "higher price tags and deliver design, quality, spaciousness and excellent services with attention to detail. Guests have full services, including 24-hour room service, amenities such as spas, a concierge or even a butler." They are likely to feature 400-thread-count sheets, Jacuzzi tubs on private patios, swim-up pools and canals to float through, private chefs and therapists on call, and more. Source: allgetaways.com

⁴ Destination Canada. Laws of Attraction for High-Value Guests.

⁵ Boutique hotels "tend to be smaller and have unique decor, sometimes historical. Each room may be decorated individually. They come in most price ranges, generally starting at mid-range and going all the way up to luxury. Some are independent, and others are affiliated with brands. Some boutique hotels make extra efforts to go green as eco-hotels." Source: allgetaways.com

⁶ STR, a division of Costar Group, Classes of hotels, <https://str.com/resourcesglossary/class>

⁷ Lightcast. Staffing Patterns in Sault Ste. Marie by Tourism Sector. 2022-2028.

⁸ Canadian Tourism HR Canada. Canadian Labour Market Snapshot. July 2023.

“For leisure travel, high-end accommodation is the top influence on destination choice [for high-value guests].”

Destination Canada

FOOD AND BEVERAGE

Current Tourism Offerings

Sault Ste. Marie’s operator inventory includes 127 food and beverage businesses, while Tourism Sault Ste. Marie’s website highlights 42 cafés and restaurants, 8 bars and pubs, and 4 breweries and wineries.

Product Gaps

Food and Beverage is a staple on a visitor’s journey, but to attract high-value guests “it’s a given that you need great food and amenities”.⁹ The following gaps have been identified through the qualitative and quantitative analysis conducted in the background report:

- Hours of operations at peak tourism times
- Indigenous culinary experiences (nearest experiences are in Sudbury and Manitoulin¹⁰)
- Dining options on the waterfront
- Farm to fork dining experiences
- High-end dining experiences

Labour Considerations

Lightcast’s staffing patterns projections for Sault Ste. Marie suggests the number of jobs in full-service restaurants and limited service eating places will see a 3% increase by 2028 and drinking places (alcoholic beverages) will increase by 4% by 2028 in Sault Ste. Marie.¹¹

⁹ Destination Canada. Laws of Attraction for High-Value Guests.

¹⁰ [Indigenous Culinary Experiences, Destination Indigenous Website](#)

¹¹ Lightcast. Staffing Patterns in Sault Ste. Marie by Tourism Sector. 2022-2028.

Provincially, the Tourism HR Council (THRC) and the Conference Board of Canada are predicting employment growth of 3% to 4% in Ontario by 2025.¹² The food and beverage industry is critical to the tourism sector, attention to labour market availability will be important to sustain the tourism asset base and availability of services.

“It’s a given that you need great food and amenities.”

Destination Canada

TRANSPORTATION

Current Tourism Offerings

Sault Ste. Marie’s operator inventory includes 42 transportation operators, while Tourism Sault Ste. Marie highlights 4 airlines, 4 biking outfitters, 8 paddling outfitters, 1 taxi service, and 4 marinas. The local airport, which served over 150,000 passengers¹³ in the last 12 months, promotes 2 airport-based car-rental companies, 2 airport shuttle services, 2 taxi services, and 1 rideshare service.¹⁴

Product Gaps

Transportation in a tourist destination is an important component of the overall experience; “convenience is an important influence on the decisions of the high-value guest.”¹⁵ The following gaps have been identified through the qualitative and quantitative analysis conducted in the background report:

- Flights to and from Sault Ste. Marie’s major target markets are limited
- Transportation options that connect Sault Ste. Marie to experiences outside the city during the week are lacking
- Expanding opportunities to get around the city that tie into the outdoor experience, such as bike rentals, and e-scooter rentals (the addition of bike rentals near the waterfront is a good addition)

¹² Canadian Tourism HR Canada. Canadian Labour Market Snapshot. July 2023.

¹³ [Sault Ste. Marie Airport Development Corporation Website](#)

¹⁴ [Ground Transportation, Sault Ste. Marie Airport Development Corporation](#)

¹⁵ Destination Canada. Laws of Attraction for High-Value Guests.

Labour Considerations

Lightcast's staffing patterns projections for Sault Ste. Marie suggests the number of jobs in rail transportation (inclusive of freight and passenger) will see a 22% increase, school and employee bus transportation will see a 15% increase, taxi and limousine services will see a 2% decrease, urban transit systems will see a 11% increase, automotive equipment rental and leasing will see a 5% increase, and scheduled air transportation will see a 5% decrease by 2028 in Sault Ste. Marie.¹⁶

Provincially, THRC and the Conference Board of Canada are predicting employment growth to reach pre-pandemic levels in 2024, with continued gradual growth into 2025.¹⁷

“Convenience is an important influence on the decisions of the high-value guest.”

Destination Canada

ENTERTAINMENT AND RECREATION

Current Tourism Offerings

Sault Ste. Marie's operator inventory includes 132 entertainment and recreation operators within the city. Tourism Sault Ste. Marie's website highlights activities and attractions that include: 4 spas, 2 farmers' markets, 2 maple syrup producers, 2 farms, 1 casino, and 1 boat tour. They also highlight 3 art galleries/experiences, 2 National Historic sites, and 2 museums related to arts and culture. Currently, 19 experiences on Tourism Sault Ste. Marie are related to sports and recreation, 10 are related to Indigenous tourism experiences, with 12 parks and beaches listed. Tourism Sault Ste. Marie also highlights events and the Agawa Canyon Tour Train.

Tourism Sault Ste. Marie's website highlights many of the community's outdoor adventure tourism assets. The experiences highlighted include 1 bike tour experience, 3 hiking guides and tours, 3

¹⁶ Lightcast. Staffing Patterns in Sault Ste. Marie by Tourism Sector. 2022-2028.

¹⁷ Tourism HR Canada. Canadian Labour Market Snapshot. July 2023.

paddling, experiences, 5 fishing experiences, 2 downhill ski experiences, and 3 snowshoe/winter hiking experiences.

Product Gaps

Recreation and entertainment tourism products are at the heart of a visitor experience. With a focus on outdoor adventure, Sault Ste. Marie is poised to capitalize on outdoor wellness trends. “The popularity of wellness tourism is predicted to continue, reflecting a shift in traveler values towards sustainability, mental wellness, and a desire to connect with nature”.¹⁸

The following gaps have been identified through the qualitative and quantitative analysis conducted in the background report.

Many of the entertainment and recreation opportunities in Sault Ste. Marie are geared at the adult population while there seems to be limited options that are suitable for families and children. More specifically, local tourism product gaps exist such as:

- Many equipment outfitters were listed on Tourism Sault Ste. Marie’s website, but few have equipment rental on-site and the ability to book online
- There is a lack of outdoor events off-season
- There is a lack of winter experiences such as snowmobile rentals/tours¹⁹
- There is a lack of enhanced shopping experience such as boutique stores and retail targeted at tourists
- There is a lack of outdoor experiences in the waterfront and downtown areas

Labour Considerations

Lightcast’s staffing patterns projections for Sault Ste. Marie suggests the number of jobs in gambling industries will decrease 3%, motion picture and video industries will increase by 3%, promoters of performing arts, sports, and similar events will increase by 2%, heritage institutions will increase by 13%, spectator sports will remain unchanged, and other amusement and recreation activities will increase by 12% by 2028.²⁰

¹⁸ [Laws of Attraction for High-Value Guests. Destination Canada.](#)

¹⁹ U.S. snowmobile market is US\$1.67 billion, 2022, with compound annual growth rate of 4.3% between 2023 and 2030, according to Grand View Research

²⁰ Lightcast. Staffing Patterns in Sault Ste. Marie by Tourism Sector. 2022-2028.

Provincially, THRC and the Conference Board of Canada are predicting employment in recreation and entertainment industries to recover from pandemic-related decreases slower than other tourism sectors and will not reach pre-pandemic levels until after 2025.²¹

“The popularity of wellness tourism is predicted to continue, reflecting a shift in traveler values towards sustainability, mental wellness and a desire to connect with nature.”

Destination Canada

TRAVEL SERVICES

Current Tourism Offerings

Sault Ste. Marie’s operator inventory includes 12 operators in the travel services sector. This list is primarily focused on outbound travel services. Tourism Sault Ste. Marie highlights 6 Tour/Guiding Operators with the potential of inbound tours.

Product Gaps

Connecting visitors with tourism experiences has evolved over the past few years and “most high-value guests favour last-minute plans and are likely to extend their stay while on the trip.”²² This means ensuring experiences and packages are easy to purchase online and should be a key priority. The following gaps have been identified through the qualitative and quantitative analysis conducted in the background report:

- Some tourism operators do not offer visitors the opportunity to make purchases or book experiences online
- In-community visitor services is an area that could be improved upon

²¹ Tourism HR Canada. Canadian Labour Market Snapshot. July 2023.

²² [Laws of Attraction for High-Value Guests. Destination Canada.](#)

Labour Considerations

Lightcast's staffing patterns projections for Sault Ste. Marie suggests the number of jobs in travel arrangements and reservation services will decrease by 3% by 2028.²³

Provincially, THRC and the Conference Board of Canada are predicting employment in the travel services sector to return to 2019 employment levels by 2025, with Ontario reaching pre-pandemic employment levels in 2024.²⁴

“Most high-value guests favour last-minute plans and are likely to extend their stay while on the trip.”

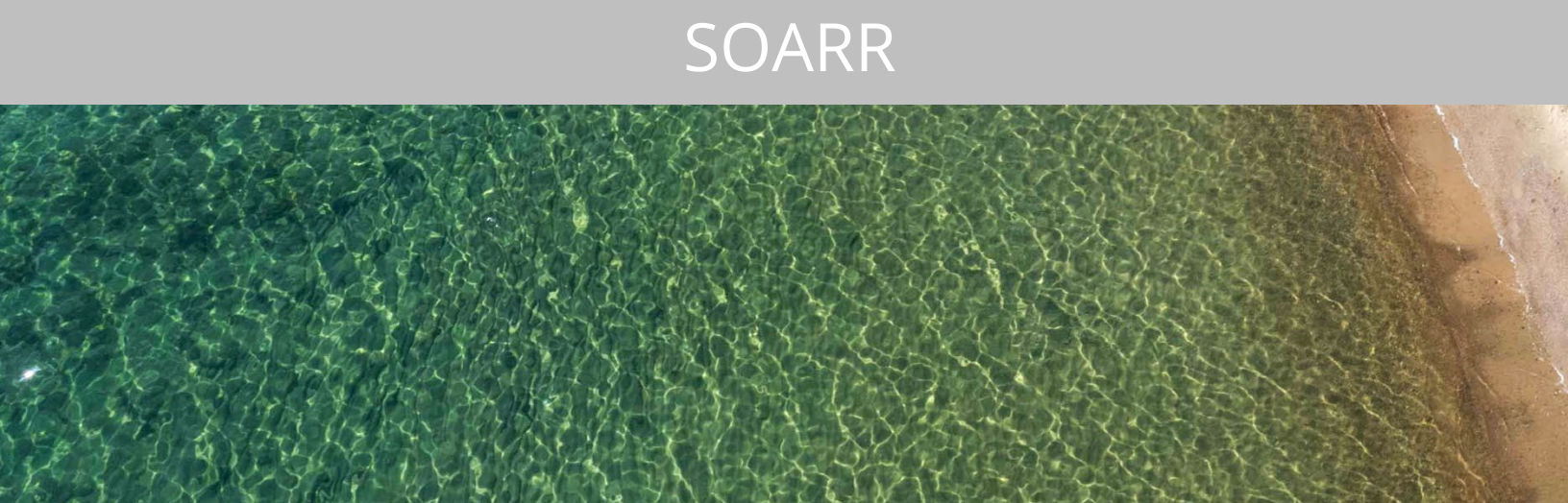
Destination Canada

²³ Lightcast. Staffing Patterns in Sault Ste. Marie by Tourism Sector. 2022-2028.

²⁴ Tourism HR Canada. Canadian Labour Market Snapshot. July 2023.



SOARR



SOARR

The assessment of strengths, opportunities, aspirations, risks, and results (SOARR) is a forward-looking evaluation framework, taking elements of what would traditionally be affiliated with a SWOT or strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats analysis.

Using insights gained through a situational analysis, statistical data, stakeholder consultations and other research, SOARR informs the community's most desired future and how to know when aspirations have been achieved. It represents a summary of the key learnings that will inform the Tourism Strategic Plan and Business and Attractions Action Plan. A detailed analysis of the strengths and aspirations can support the development of an asset-based community development model, in which identified opportunities can be leveraged, while understanding possible risks, subsequent objectives and specific action steps are designed to respond to the desired results.

S

Strengths

**What are we doing well? What key achievements are we most proud of?
What can we build on?**

- Outdoor adventure infrastructure, specifically for mountain biking trails, has seen significant investment in recent years and the trails have attracted international interest.
- Sault Ste. Marie's location by an international border crossing provides access to a large number of potential visitors.
- The Hiawatha Highlands trails boasts impressive cross-country skiing infrastructure.
- The proximity to the waterfront is seen as a tourism strength, including the Canal District.
- Sault Ste. Marie's location on the Trans-Canada Highway, its history as a key transportation centre in the Great Lakes system²⁵, a popular stop for passenger cruises and its position as a regional centre, provides steady visitation.
- Sault Ste. Marie has a strong service sector in the accommodations and restaurant industries.
- Product development support for experiences and events is well funded and supported by Tourism Sault Ste. Marie management and leadership through MAT tax funds.

²⁵ [History, Sault Ste. Marie Canal National Historic Site Website \(pc.gc.ca\)](http://History.SaultSte.MarieCanalNationalHistoricSiteWebsite(pc.gc.ca))

- The operator survey shows a high level of satisfaction with available supports and resources for tourism businesses.
- Tourism Sault Ste. Marie's three strategic priorities are well supported by its Board of Directors, showing alignment and consensus between the plan and organizational leadership.
- Most respondents to the Visitor Survey were satisfied with Sault Ste. Marie as a destination.
- Tourism wayfinding signage is new and well positioned to guide visitors around the city.
- The new Federal Tourism Growth Strategy highlights five strategic priorities that overlap with Tourism Sault Ste. Marie's priority areas. These include investing in tourism assets, embracing recreation and the great outdoors, partner to grow Indigenous tourism, attract more international events, and improve coordination.
- Some accommodations in Sault Ste. Marie have partnered with Air Canada Vacations and offer flight and hotel packages.



Opportunities

What our best possible future opportunities? What changes in demand can we expect in the future? What broader trends and policies may affect development and impact our aspirations?

- The operator survey shows high satisfaction with the tourism development fund among tourism operators familiar with the fund. However, familiarity with the fund is low, so there is an opportunity to enhance communications to industry regarding the fund's purpose.
- Respondents to the operator survey prioritized 'advice or grants for tourism businesses to improve their operators' as their top priority, while satisfaction is the lowest for this business support. There is an opportunity to enhance these business supports.
- Additional public transportation was listed as the most desired tourism business support and resource in the Operator Survey that was conducted.
- Using results from the visitor survey, educational experiences, and arts, culture and entertainment were the top priorities among visitors from all four regions (Ontario, Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin) surveyed.
- Urban outdoors, waterfront and downtown amenities are attractors for tourists who may not have much experience in the outdoors.
- Ensuring tourism businesses, such as restaurants and downtown shopping, remain open at the hours when tourists are looking to visit the community was identified as an opportunity.
- A few of the market segments identified have a large percentage of market share within the United States. Understanding their defining characteristics, and ensuring products match their interests along with targeted social media campaigns can boost American visitation.

- While hotels in Sault Ste. Marie are easily bookable online, additional packaging offerings that include accommodations and experience could help drive tourism spend.
- Capitalizing on its location on the Trans-Canada highway, Sault Ste. Marie can work to entice drive-through traffic to spend time and money in the city.
- Expanding seasonally, particularly in winter, remains a strong priority from stakeholders. Given regional competition for tourism products, Sault Ste. Marie can use winter tourism as a competitive advantage that can produce a high return on investment.

A

Aspirations

What are we deeply passionate about and want to achieve? What difference do we hope to make for all?

- Sault Ste. Marie being the hub of outdoor adventure experiences in Ontario.
- Continuing to focus on being the mountain biking capital of Ontario.
- Expanding events in Sault Ste. Marie to include a major event (500+ attendance) in every season.
- Improve the waterfront and downtown areas of Tourism Sault Ste. Marie and activate these areas for urban experiences.

R

Risks

What challenges do we need to be aware of? How will we recognize and mitigate or eliminate potential risks?

- Industrial sites are visible and present near the waterfront and some tourism areas.
- Currently Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan has a similar summer-based tourism product base, with superior amenities, which may make it difficult to attract the American market over the border during peak season.
- Air access to Sault Ste. Marie to and from some target market areas is challenging, given a lack of direct flights, as many flights are routed through Toronto.
- The highway from Sudbury to Sault Ste. Marie is in poor condition and is often slow moving and an undesirable option for Southern Ontario visitors.
- Current hours of operations are inconsistent with food and beverage services, particularly during peak visitation times.
- The Agawa Canyon Tour Train has been the primary tourism driver for Sault Ste. Marie in the past but is only a seasonal attraction. Work needs to be done to ensure year-round visitation in Sault Ste. Marie.

- Currently Tourism Sault Ste. Marie is not a data rich organization. The identification of data and research gaps can help Tourism Sault Ste. Marie make more data-driven decisions.
- Volunteer based tourism events and organizations managing tourism assets have difficulty with continuity of volunteer base and leadership.

R

Results

How do we know we are succeeding? What are the goals we would like to accomplish?

- Sault Ste. Marie experiences an increase in outdoor adventure tourism product offerings that matches visitor profile preferences.
- The downtown and waterfront areas are connected and offer vibrant outdoor urban experiences.
- There is a major tourism event in every season, attracting 500 – 1000 attendees.
- Tourism spending within Sault Ste. Marie is up each year, due to strong growth in winter months, which has historically been tourism's slowest months.
- Tourism Sault Ste. Marie is a data rich organization making data-driven decisions.
- The number of applications for the tourism development fund increases each year.
- Familiarization tours are available for targeted priority areas such as mountain biking.
- Consistent hours of operations and availability of restaurants, food and beverage services and other amenities' availability during peak tourism season, long weekends, and cruise ship arrivals.



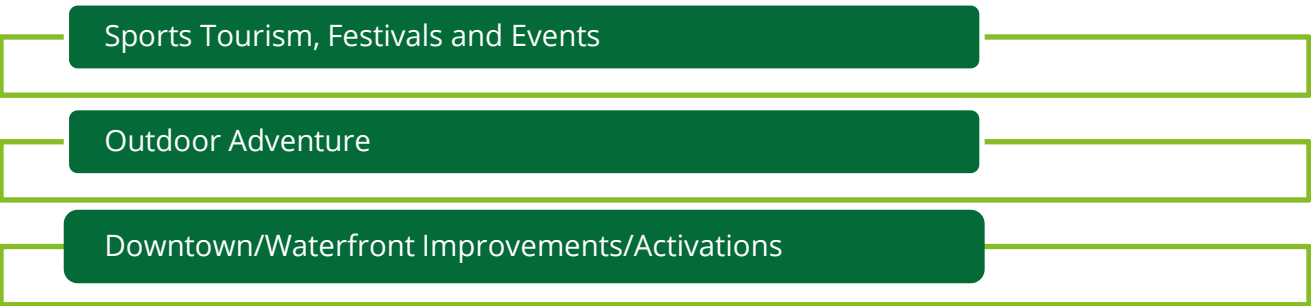
Strategic Directions



Strategic Directions

The Tourism Sault Ste. Marie Board of Directors identified three strategic priorities in 2021, which serve as the foundation for this Strategic Plan. These strategic priorities were reinforced throughout the background review, stakeholder engagement, Tourism Sault Ste. Marie Board of Directors workshop, and the SOARR assessment and will be woven through the Strategic Plan and the Business Development Attraction Plan.

The three strategic priorities are as follows:



PRIORITY AREA #1: SPORTS TOURISM, FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

Tourism Sault Ste. Marie is the lead support organization for events, providing opportunities for growth while relying on organizers for development at the local level. They are also the lead for bidding for business conferences and sporting events. Tourism Sault Ste. Marie currently has limited capacity to focus on community event coordination – an area that has been identified as an opportunity within this strategy.

PRIORITY AREA #2: OUTDOOR ADVENTURE

Tourism Sault Ste. Marie’s plays a lead role in product development in the Sault Ste. Marie tourism ecosystem. Tourism Sault Ste. Marie plays an active role in infrastructure development for outdoor adventure tourism, with a recent focus on mountain biking trail development that has the potential to accommodate other trail-based activities. Regenerative tourism experiences are also a trend for the future, where visitors help to make the local environment better for the future.

PRIORITY AREA #3: DOWNTOWN/WATERFRONT IMPROVEMENTS/ACTIVATIONS

Recent investment in signage to make wayfinding easier for visitors is a great step in activation of the downtown and waterfront areas of Sault Ste. Marie. Ensuring visitor services, tourism infrastructure and tourism products and experiences are well supported is a fundamental role for Tourism Sault Ste. Marie.

VISITOR MARKET SEGMENTS

Using these strategic directions, four market segmentations were created using a latent class analysis methodology to guide Tourism Sault Ste. Marie's marketing and product development activities.



Experiential Adventurers

- Primarily interested in outdoor activities, such as trail based activities, leisure cycling, and paddle sports
- Also interested in arts, music and entertainment events, and food and drink tasting experiences
- Uses internet searches, and word of mouth from family and friends to research potential destinations
- Typically book online or through a third party provider, with trips lasting up to 3 nights
- This segment of tourists might have high spending due to their travel activities and preferences.




Fishing and Sport Enthusiasts

- Interest in outdoor activities such as hunting and fishing, snowmobiling, paddle sports, sports tourism/events, and trail based activities
- Most likely to book travel online and least likely to book with a trip organizer
- Primarily take day trips or overnight trips of one night
- Younger demographic that is primarily men



Cultural Consumers

- Interest in food and drink tasting experiences, relaxation and wellness tourism, urban/downtown experiences, and arts, music and entertainment events
- Typically book day trips over overnight trips lasting one night
- Primarily uses online booking methods
- Slightly higher proportion of this group is women and are aged 45 - 64

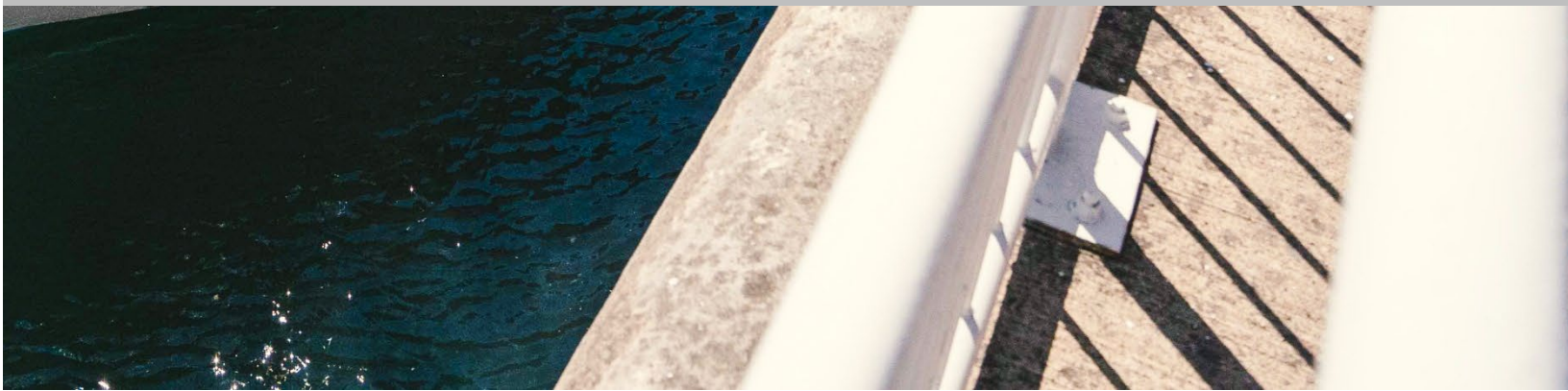


Action Seekers

- Interest in outdoor sport activities
- More likely to use social media as a source of information
- Primarily uses a trip organizer or third party provider to book travel
- Tend to take more overnight trips lasting over a week, and on average spend the most annually on tourism experiences
- Primarily made up of men, aged 25-44



Objectives and Action Plan



Objectives

Building upon the strategic priorities, the following strategic objectives create a foundation for Tourism Sault Ste. Marie to guide priorities and decision-making. Actions and tactics were identified using the research and engagement findings. The objectives work together to grow market share, increase visitation, and create a four-season destination. The strategic objectives align with Tourism Sault Ste. Marie's three priorities areas: Sports tourism, festivals and events, outdoor adventure, and downtown/waterfront improvements/activations.





OBJECTIVE 1: ENHANCE PRODUCT AND EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT

Rationale:

Sault Ste. Marie is striving to become Ontario’s best outdoor urban adventure location. This will require a high concentration of outdoor products and infrastructure along with providing a memorable overall experience. This can be achieved through supporting new and current tourism operators through an enhanced connection to the industry, industry supports for product packaging and experience development and prioritization of funding through the Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT) funds for products and infrastructure that align with target market preferences. These actions should help to provide support for further developed destination drivers and trip enhancers as listed in the Business Development Attraction Plan.

Actions and Tactics:

Actions	Tactics
1A. Categorize visitor ready, market ready, and export ready (ready for international visitation) businesses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Create tourism business readiness standards for operators and provide a self-assessment checklist.○ Create operator supports that are hyper-targeted to advance businesses towards export-readiness and high-end visitors using Tourism Sault Ste. Marie’s tourism market profiles.○ Support tourism start-ups through a program such as Ontario Tourism Innovation Lab²⁶.
1B. Target support through tourism development fund.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Adjust tourism development fund guidelines to prioritize specific gaps that align with strategic priorities.○ Allocate portions of the tourism development fund to target tourism business start-ups, tourism business expansions, and export-ready product development.

²⁶ [Tourism Innovation Lab Website](#)

Actions	Tactics
<p>1C. Support package development to encourage increased spend and stay.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Determine where packaged and/or multi-day experiences will be housed. For example: Directly on operator’s websites, on the Tourism Sault Ste. Marie website, through a third-party travel agent. ○ Encourage partnerships with e-commerce platforms to support tourism operators.
<p>1D. Support experience development to strengthen tourism products and target high-value guests.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Create an experience development program (e.g., workshops, webinars, study tours, speakers, etc.) for operators to participate in, targeting strategic priority areas. ○ Funnel successful participants to tourism development funding program.
<p>1E. Increase communications with tourism operators.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Establish an internal directory or database to track tourism operator details and interactions. ○ Provide resources and information to enhance tourism businesses and product development through the following means of communication: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Create channels of communications to operators through artificial intelligence (AI) tools, e-newsletters, etc. ○ Coordinate tourism business networking opportunities. ○ Create an industry resources section on Tourism Sault Ste. Marie’s website.
<p>1F. Support outdoor adventure infrastructure.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Continue to support and invest in the implementation of the Mountain Bike Trail Master Plan. ○ Identify and invest in opportunities to support the enhancement or development of winter tourism opportunities within the city. ○ Invest in the development of natural surface trails between the City's core and Hiawatha Highlands.

Learning and Resources from Other Destinations:

- Destination British Columbia's Market Ready Self-Assessment Checklist:
[Market Ready Standards.pdf \(destinationbc.ca\)](#)
- Grow Your Business Online Grant
[Grow Your Business Online Grant | Get up to \\$2,400 \(canada.ca\)](#)
- Travel Alberta's Product Development Fund
[Product Development Fund | Travel Alberta](#)
- RTO7 – Experience Development 101
[Experience Development 101 | RTO7](#)
- Digital Main Street – Programs for Ontario Businesses
[Programs for Ontario businesses - Digital Main Street](#)
- Top 10 Global Outdoor Adventure Activities in 2022
[2023 Adventure Travel Industry Snapshot | Adventure Travel Trade Association](#)



OBJECTIVE 2: CONNECT THE DOWNTOWN AND WATERFRONT OUTDOOR EXPERIENCE

Rationale:

Enhancing Sault Ste. Marie’s placemaking efforts will create central points for the community and visitors to gather and will connect the city’s major outdoor asset, its waterfront, to its economic core, the downtown. Strengthen Sault Ste. Marie’s small business community will require support for additional and alternative modes of transportation between these two areas and will help drive visitation to the downtown. Support for downtown and waterfront revitalization efforts will be essential to this objective and will require support for operators to package experiences that can incorporate both areas that build on Tourism Sault Ste. Marie’s urban outdoor adventure brand.

Actions and Tactics:

Actions	Tactics
<p>2A. Create a regular transportation route to trails.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Explore transportation options for tourism experiences, such as a self-guided waterfront walking tour route, expanding and promoting bicycle rentals, opening a waterfront tourism tram to visit key locations, etc. ○ Ensure all buses are bike accessible and have bike racks, and that cyclists are made aware. ○ Institute transportation options for key dates or on request, e.g., horse-drawn wagon, trackless tour train, double-decker bus for tourism events to increase visits to Canal district, or on weekends from marina to downtown in peak seasons. ○ Coordinate a shuttle partnership among hotels that takes guests to pre-identified locations across the city.
<p>2B. Package downtown experiences with outdoor adventures.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Engage and support tourism businesses interested in expanding experiences into shoulder seasons and winter through the tourism development fund. ○ Engage and support Indigenous businesses interested in expanding experiences and encourage collaboration opportunities through the tourism development fund. ○ Encourage and incentivize packaged opportunities through local tour companies.

Actions	Tactics
<p>2C. Downtown revitalization and waterfront development.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Continue to promote the adventure bus pilot program. ○ Support the Waterfront Design Plan and expand opportunities to activate the waterfront. ○ Embrace and celebrate industrial presence, educate, and make light where possible and where appropriate. For example, consider a dragon statue that lines up with the fire from the Steel Mill and use as an Instagramable photo opportunity. ○ Incorporate Indigenous cultural components of the City's history that speaks to visitors through a municipal RFP for the commissioning of an indigenous outdoor art piece that also doubles as an instagramable opportunity. ○ Ensure the planning and development of the new Downtown Plaza incorporates a tourism development perspective. ○ Partner with the City of Sault Ste. Marie to issue a solicitation of interest for tourism operators to express interest in offering experiences within the waterfront district.

Learning and Resources from Other Destinations:

- Hike Ontario's – Best Practices for Increasing Trail Usage by Hikers and Walkers
[HO-BestPractices-Web.pdf \(hikeontario.com\)](#)
- Northern Ontario: Trail Tourism Strategy
[TrailsTourismStrategy-2021.pdf \(destinationnorthernontario.ca\)](#)
- Jacobus Park Nature Trail, Wauwatosa, Wisconsin
[Jacobus Park Nature Trail, Wauwatosa, Wisconsin - American Trails](#)
- American Trails: Advancing Trail Webinar Series
[Advancing Trails Webinar Series - American Trails](#)
- Trent-Severn Trail Towns
[Home - Trent-Severn Trail Towns \(tswtrailtowns.ca\)](#)

- Parks Canada Shuttles in Banff National Park
[Visiting Lake Louise and Moraine Lake - Banff National Park \(canada.ca\)](#)
- Urban Outdoor Experiences in High Park, Toronto
[High Park - City of Toronto](#)
- Niagara Falls Experience Activation RFP
[nft-rfp-experientialactivation-2021.pdf \(niagarafallstourism.com\)](#)



OBJECTIVE 3: HAVE A MAJOR EVENT IN EACH SEASON

Rationale:

Events are an important tourism economic driver for Sault Ste. Marie that have the potential to build the city's strength as a four-season destination adding to its winter experiences. Beyond putting heads in beds, hosting and planning events throughout the year will extend Sault Ste. Marie's shoulder seasons. Focusing on expanding Sault Ste. Marie reputation for large-scale destination events will require a coordinated effort to obtain additional capacity to pursue these event bids. Expanding current community events and attracting more winter events will provide a platform to further involve tourism operators in expanding winter tourism products in Sault Ste. Marie.

Actions and Tactics:

Actions	Tactics
3A. Actively pursue bids to host provincial and national level events.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Develop a sport-specific tourism strategy to provide a more inclusive and in-depth approach to developing sports tourism in Sault Ste. Marie.○ Create a database or catalogue of current sports tourism events and organizers.○ Conduct an infrastructure review of local sports facilities to determine their current and future capacity to host events.○ Work with or establish a local Sports Network to cultivate new contacts and generate potential leads.○ Create a financial plan 3-5 years in advance to host significant blockbuster events.○ Utilize the support of the tourism development fund to entice rights-holders to choose Sault Ste. Marie as a host community.
3B. Incorporate tourism operators into events.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Work with tourism operators to incorporate on site experiences as part of major events.○ Encourage operators to create their own events where it makes sense.

Actions	Tactics
<p>3C. Continue to grow Bon Soo and focus on expanding visitor market.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Capitalize on the unique winter experience in Northern Ontario and position Bon Soo as a must-do winter event. ○ Work with operators to incorporate purchasable add-ons. ○ Work with accommodation providers to create packaged opportunities. ○ Actively pursue funding to support tourism-specific events within the Bon Soo Winter Carnival. ○ Conduct economic impact assessment to communicate the importance of the winter festival to potential funders and outside community.
<p>3D. Hire an events coordinator to focus on supporting homegrown events.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Prioritize best-bet events that offer growth opportunities. ○ Ensure community-based events are organized with tourists in mind. ○ Identify new areas for growth in off-peak season.
<p>3E. Use developing trail network to attract outdoor trail-based sports events.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Create an inventory of trail-based events over each of the four seasons. ○ Continue to build trails that are designed specifically to meet the requirements for event hosting. ○ Engage local trail user groups to increase awareness and access. ○ Build partnerships with tour operators to develop pre-post event opportunities that can extend the stay of event participants.
<p>3F. Invest in infrastructure to support winter tourism events.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Support municipal outdoor winter recreational/events development.

Learning and Resources from Other Destinations:

- Eventbrite's 2023 Event Trends Report
[The Eventbrite 2023 Event Trends Report](#)
- Destinations International Event Impact Calculator
[Event Impact Calculator \(EIC\) | Destinations International](#)
- Sports Tourism Canada Economic Impact Assessments
[Steam-PDF.pdf \(sporttourismcanada.com\)](#)
- Red Deer Major Events Strategy and Destination Development Framework
[Red Deer Major Events Strategy](#)
- Richmond Hill Festival and Events Planning Guide
[Festivals-Events-Planning-Guide.pdf \(richmondhill.ca\)](#)
- 7 Major Cycling Events in Canada in 2023
[Seven major Canadian events to look forward to in 2023 - Canadian Cycling Magazine](#)
- Cycling Canada Championship Event – Thunder Bay, ON
[Blacksheep Mountain Bike Club to host Cycling Canada championship in Thunder Bay, Ont. | CBC News](#)
- Crankworx Summer Series Canada – Canada's Largest Mountain Biking Festival – Barrie, ON
[One of Canada's biggest mountain biking festivals has arrived in Ontario for the first time | CBC News](#)
- Pine Needle Mountain Bike & Music Festival – Prince Albert, SK
[BIKE EVENT \(pineneedlebikefestival.com\)](#)
- Tourism Saskatoon Business Events Incentive Program
[Business Events Incentive Program | Tourism Saskatoon](#)



OBJECTIVE 4: USE VISITOR PROFILES TO INFORM MARKETING AND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT DECISIONS

Rationale:

Becoming a data driven organization will ensure effective use of resources and help to prioritize product and infrastructure investment. A deep understanding of visitor profiles will help define Sault Ste. Marie's competitive advantages, understand travel motivations, align investment, and drive high value visitation. Relaying insights from these visitor profiles to tourism operators will align community and individual marketing efforts and deepen Tourism Sault Ste. Marie's connection to the tourism industry. These visitor profiles will also provide a pathway to tap in the US market, a market that will be difficult to draw across the border but holds large potential due to its market size.

Actions and Tactics:

Actions	Tactics
4A. Create marketing campaigns based on geographic segmentation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Using Facebook and Instagram as the primary social media tools for campaigns, target geographic regions highlighted in segmentation and focus on products that align with their interests.
4B. Understand preferences of each segment and encourage product development in areas of interest.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Promote the tourism development fund with tourism operators offering products related to segments areas of interest to encourage new tourism products.○ Continue to support infrastructure that aligns with visitor's areas of interest.
4C. Build visual assets that align with 3 strategic priorities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Use software like CrowdRiff to compile images.○ Solicit user-generated content through a photo-contest, using 3 strategic priorities as major themes and categories.
4D. Communicate market segments with tourism operators.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Use market segments to help operators with their own marketing campaigns.

Actions	Tactics
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provide workshops to tourism operators so they understand how to develop targeted marketing campaigns.

Learning from Other Destinations:

- CrowdRiff – User generated content
[User Generated Content - CrowdRiff](#)
- Alberta Visitor Profiles
[Alberta visitor profiles | Alberta.ca](#)
- Travel Alberta’s Product Development Fund (Priority areas)
[Product Development Fund | Travel Alberta](#)
- Newfoundland and Labrador’s Tourism Marketing Strategy
[Tourism Marketing Strategy - Tourism, Culture, Arts and Recreation \(gov.nl.ca\)](#)
- Northwest Territories Tourism Training Resource
[Marketing Your Tourism Products | Industry, Tourism and Investment \(gov.nt.ca\)](#)

Implementation Plan



Implementation Plan

Each strategic direction has been identified below with priorities, actions, timing, and key performance indicators identified. The implementation timeline is based off a 5-year timeframe with S = Short-term (1-2 years), M=Medium-term (3 years), and L=Long-term (4 - 5 years). The KPIs recommended in the Implementation Plan are to be used by TSSM and its partners to report on progress.

Actions	Implementation Timeline			Key Performance Indicator (KPI)
	S	M	L	
OBJECTIVE 1: ENHANCE PRODUCT AND EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT				
1A. Categorize visitor ready, market ready, and export ready (ready for international visitation) businesses.	✓			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of the Tourism Business Readiness Standards and its checklist • Number of supports offered to operators and tourism start-ups
1B. Target support through tourism development fund.	✓	✓	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of support and funding allocated to tourism business start-ups, tourism business expansions, and export-ready product development • Number of winter experiences funded
1C. Support package development to encourage increased spend and stay.			✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of partnership and/or collaboration facilitated between the e-commerce platform and tourism operators

Actions	Implementation Timeline			Key Performance Indicator (KPI)
1D. Support experience development to strengthen tourism products and target high-value guests.		✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of participants (tourism operators) in the experience development program • Number of participants (tourism operators) in the tourism development funding program • Increase in tourism experience operators
1E. Increase communications with tourism operators.	✓			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of the internal directory or database • Number of communications to operators (i.e., number of e-newsletters sent, number of networking opportunities host) and open and click through rates, where appropriate
1F. Support outdoor adventure infrastructure.		✓	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress towards the Mountain Bike Trail Master Plan completion • Number of new winter tourism experiences developed through the tourism development fund • Dollars invested in natural surface trails between City core and Hiawatha Highlands
OBJECTIVE 2: CONNECT THE DOWNTOWN AND WATERFRONT OUTDOOR EXPERIENCE				
2A. Create a regular transportation route to trails.			✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of the assessment for tourism experience transportation options

Actions	Implementation Timeline			Key Performance Indicator (KPI)
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of programs or partnerships established to enhance transportation options for key dates or on request
2B. Packaging downtown experiences with outdoor adventures.		✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of engagement and/or support offered to tourism businesses that are interested in expanding into shoulder seasons and winter • Number of engagement and/or support offered to Indigenous businesses • Number of communications to promote the Adventure Bus pilot program
2C. Downtown revitalization and waterfront development.		✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development and implementation of the Waterfront Design Plan • Number of engagements with the Indigenous communities to promote culture and history, where requested • Issuance of RFP for the commissioning of an Indigenous outdoor art piece in prominent location and significant size. Include identification of position and parameters in Waterfront Design Plan • Issuance of RFP (in partnership with the City of Sault Ste. Marie) for tourism operators to express interest in offering experiences within the waterfront district

Actions	Implementation Timeline			Key Performance Indicator (KPI)
OBJECTIVE 3: HAVE A MAJOR EVENT IN EACH SEASON				
3A. Actively pursue bids to host provincial and national level events	✓	✓	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of bids submitted, and number of provincial and national events hosted
3B. Incorporate tourism operators into events.	✓			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number tourism operators participating in each event
3C. Continue to grow the Bon Soo event and focus on expanding the visitor market.	✓			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of operators partnering with Bon Soo • Number of packages created that includes Bon Soo • Economic impact assessment conducted on Bon Soo
3D. Hire an events coordinator to focus on supporting homegrown events		✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of communications conducted to promote winter experiences • Number of packaged opportunities created • Number of funding applications to support tourism-specific events within the Bon Soo Winter Carnival • Completion of an economic impact assessment
3E. Use developing trail network to attract outdoor trail-based sports tourism events			✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of trail-based events hosted annually • Number of trail users

Actions	Implementation Timeline			Key Performance Indicator (KPI)
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of partnerships established with tour operations to develop pre-post event opportunities that can extend the stay of event participants
3F. Invest in infrastructure to support winter tourism events.			<p style="text-align: center;">✓</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of new winter events developed. Economic Impact of Winter Events compared to Investment in Infrastructure.
OBJECTIVE 4: Use Visitor Profiles to Inform Marketing and Tourism Development Decisions				
4A. Create marketing campaigns based on geographic segmentation.	<p style="text-align: center;">✓</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">✓</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">✓</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of Campaigns completed for each segment on both Facebook and Instagram Increase in Geographic representation identified for each market segment (Ontario, Minnesota, Michigan, Wisconsin) on TSSM's Facebook and Instagram pages
4B. Understand preferences of each segment and encourage product development in areas of interest.		<p style="text-align: center;">✓</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">✓</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of tourism development funded projects aligning with TSSM's Visitor Profiles. Increase in infrastructure funding that aligns with Visitor Profile interests
4C. Build visual assets that align with 3 strategic priorities.		<p style="text-align: center;">✓</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">✓</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementation of a crowdsourced image library Increased digital assets for each Outdoor Adventure, Waterfront/Downtown, and Events

Actions	Implementation Timeline			Key Performance Indicator (KPI)
4D. Communicate visitor profiles with tourism operators.	✓	✓		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generation and distribution of content to tourism operators • Number of workshops and number of tourism operators attending workshops on visitor profiles

Business Development Attraction Plan



Business Development Attraction Plan

The opportunities in key sectors of the tourism industry were identified by first understanding the product gaps of each sector, which was determined by engagement activities with Tourism Sault Ste. Marie Board and staff. Using Destination Canada's research on high-value guests and the identified visitor profiles from the background report, these opportunity areas were then matched with Tourism Sault Ste. Marie's Priority Areas.

Tourism business development and attraction is a focused effort to provide business supports so new and existing businesses can grow and expand their revenue and the economic footprint in Sault Ste. Marie through trip enhancers and destination drivers.

ROLE OF TOURISM SAULT STE. MARIE

The *'2023 Future Study: A Strategic Road Map for the NEXT Generation of Destination Organizations* identifies the top 5 short-term priorities for Destination Organizations:

1. Destination marketing
2. Data research and intelligence
3. Brand management
4. Destination and product development
5. Community relations and partnership

This Business Development Attraction Plan tackles Tourism Sault Ste. Marie's role in destination and product development. Tourism Sault Ste. Marie can encourage and prioritize tourism product development through the tourism development fund as well as supporting infrastructure investments that benefit the community and tourism sector. Tourism Sault Ste. Marie is a stakeholder in some of the tourism assets in the community, but traditionally it is the tourism operators who create tourism products that have the potential to become destination drivers. Destination drivers usually take considerable funding support, through either public sector investment locally, provincially, and/or federally, or private sector investment. Destination Management/Marketing Organizations (DMOs) and other local organizations (chamber of commerce, Community Futures office, etc.) can facilitate growth through business visits and discussions, workshops, industry committees, other innovative approaches, etc. For example, a

DMO in southwestern Ontario coordinated two business study tours²⁷ of a similar destination for their tourism operators to learn and envision how other businesses approach obstacles and opportunities. The tours were funded by the Regional Tourism Organization with contributions from participating businesses, and the local DMO coordinated the effort.

DESTINATION DRIVERS

Destination drivers are the tourism assets that bring tourists to the destination. We know that Canadians are continuing to prioritize domestic travel with a continuing demand for open-air, nature-based, rural tourism opportunities,²⁸ leading to opportunities for Sault Ste. Marie's to build upon their goal of being Ontario's best outdoor adventure town.

The World Economic Forum's Travel and Tourism Development Index can help understanding these drivers further and uses Travel and Tourism Demand Drivers as a subindex which includes 3 pillars²⁹:

- **Natural Resources:** The availability of natural assets and the development of outdoor tourism activities can position a destination well to attract visitation.
- **Cultural Resources:** Protecting, developing, and promoting cultural assets such as archeological sites and entertainment facilities is another demand driver.
- **Non-Leisure Resources:** Factors driving business and other non-leisure travel such as business, academic, and medical related travel are also major travel drivers.

Key Trends

Key trends can influence the tourism industry and their experience offerings. Destination Canada released research in 2021 that identifies key trends that will have the greatest impact on Canada's tourism industry and can be taken into account when providing sector assistance and support in developing destination drivers. This report considers global changes in consumer behaviour and the shifting values associated with travel. These trends include³⁰:

²⁷ Finger Lakes Study Tours, norfolkcounty.ca

²⁸ Tourism's Big Shift: Key Trends Shaping the Future of Canada's Tourism Industry - November 2021 (destinationcanada.com)

²⁹ About the Travel & Tourism Development Index - Travel & Tourism Development Index 2021: Rebuilding for a Sustainable and Resilient Future | World Economic Forum (weforum.org)

³⁰ Tourism's Big Shift: Key Trends Shaping the Future of Canada's Tourism Industry - November 2021 (destinationcanada.com)

- **Frictionless Travel:** Capacity in the travel industry has been reduced and technological changes (e.g., artificial intelligence) and adaptations are being used to enhance and streamline the overall travel experience.
- **Domestic Travel:** Travel uncertainties across the globe and pent-up travel demand has led to a rise in domestic travel and is an opportunity to create renewed local sentiments.
- **Responsible Travel:** A trend to travel less frequently, but for longer stays has emerged post-pandemic to support more responsible travel lighten the carbon footprint on destinations.
- **Ascendence of Communities:** Instead of only focusing on tourism growth, there is a growing need to align the tourism industry, community, and governments to drive competitiveness.
- **Indigenous Connection:** Indigenous tourism experiences are in demand, particularly with international visitors, but tourism operators will require support to build this sector.
- **Wild for Wilderness:** Wide-open spaces are sought after by many travellers post-COVID with connections to nature and wellness are in line with Canada's overall brand.
- **Health and Wellbeing:** The growth of wellbeing has been accelerated in the post-COVID era with the global wellness sector growing 6.5% pre-pandemic, which was twice the growth rate of the overall tourism sector.
- **Affluent Travel Boom:** The affluent travel segment is where the pent-up travel demand is most prominent. These high-value travellers are demanding personalized travel experiences that fulfill their wellbeing and personal growth goals.
- **Great Resignation and Retirement:** Due in part to the pandemic, retirements are on the rise, and at an accelerated pace. Those aged 65 and higher will account for 11% of the world's population by 2025 and will double their international travel plans during this time.
- **Remote work and Residential Tourism:** Remote work is on the rise, lessening the divide between work and play and creating opportunities to attract this segment to work and play, and have extended stays in destinations.

Opportunities

The following opportunities have been identified that align product gaps with visitor demand among target market segments for both destination drivers.

Opportunity – Destination Drivers	Target Market	Strategic Priority
<p>Ensure a world-class downtown and waterfront to attract cross-border visitation through cross-border collaboration with Sault Ste. Marie, MI.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Example: Windsor and Detroit collaborate on cycling promotions and events, such as 	Cultural Consumers	Downtown/Waterfront Activation

Opportunity – Destination Drivers	Target Market	Strategic Priority
the cross-border Bike the Bridge Day and the International Greenways Visitor Map. ³¹		
Create a partnership with industry operators and the Waterfront Adventure Center that offers a central point for outdoor experience attraction and staging.	Fishing and Sport Enthusiasts	Downtown/Waterfront Activation
Facilitate conversations with Parks Canada and Indigenous organizations to support an Indigenous tourism driver on Whitefish Island.	Cultural Consumers	Outdoor Adventure
<p>Attract unique experience operators where it is difficult to have the experience elsewhere.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Example: Rail explorers³²: Companies like Revolution Rail Company and Rail Explorers are offering rail tours in destination throughout the United States on both vacant and active rail lines and are being touted as a soft adventure trend. A rail biking experience in Sault Ste. Marie could be the first in Canada that connects their major tourism products of both mountain biking and the Agawa Canyon Tour Train. • Example: Treetop Trekking³³ by the Trekking group. An Ontario-based company with a passion for creating lasting experiences through imaginative and exciting outdoor experiences at heights. Hiawatha Highlands could be a potential spot for a ziplining adventure park. 	Action Seekers	

³¹ City of Windsor, International Greenways, citywindsor.ca

³² Rail Explorers locations - the best rail bike experiences - Rail Explorers USA

³³ Our Parks in Ontario - Treetop Trekking

TRIP ENHANCERS

Trip enhancers are activities that visitors decide to do after they have made the decision to travel to a destination. Product development support from DMO's has seen an increase post-COVID to help support the recovery of the tourism sector, and that ultimately drives tourism spend and stay in a destination.

Key Trends

Using outdoor adventure trends such as the '*Adventure Travel Trade Association's Adventure Travel Industry Snapshot*' from June 2023 can help to prioritize product development.³⁴

This research highlights the following categories within the top 10 trending adventure tourism activities:

- Cultural activities (including culinary and wellness)
- Cycling (road, electric bikes, mountain bikes, and non-paved)
- Wildlife viewing (safari, birdwatching, and wildlife photography)

Opportunities

The following opportunities have been identified in each tourism sector that align product gaps with visitor demand among target market segments for trip enhancers.

Accommodations

High-value guests prefer high-end accommodations for their leisure travel. This is not measured by high-end furnishing, rather the ability to deliver an emotional impact.³⁵ Relaxation and wellness are of interest to cultural consumers, these wellness experiences are also important to the high-value guests whose values align with a desire for mental wellness and a desire to connect with nature. Having a diversity of accommodations types fits well with Tourism Sault Ste. Marie's vision of being a hub for urban outdoor adventure.

Opportunity – Trip Enhancers	Target Market	Strategic Priority
Support the development of unique accommodations within the city to be packaged with urban outdoor experiences.	Experiential Adventures & Cultural Consumers	Outdoor Adventure

³⁴ Adventure Travel Trade Association. Adventure Travel Industry Snapshot. June 2023.

³⁵ Destination Canada. Laws of Attraction for High-Value Guests.

Opportunity – Trip Enhancers	Target Market	Strategic Priority
<p>Examples of unique accommodations that can tie directly into an experience include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aurora viewing domes³⁶: These could be additions to campgrounds or at existing accommodations as a unique experience. • Teepees or teepee inspired accommodations³⁷: Indigenous Tour operators such as Thrive Tours could incorporate overnight tours using teepees as the accommodation component. Whitefish Island could be a possible location for this infrastructure, or at existing accommodations. • Outdoor firepits at hotels.³⁸ 		
<p>Support hotel packages that include outdoor, event and culinary experiences.</p> <p>Examples: Caribana Hotel Packages³⁹, Explore Pass⁴⁰</p>	<p>Experiential Adventurers & Cultural Consumers</p>	<p>Outdoor Adventure</p>
<p>Support more accommodations who want to cater to recreational users (parking, access, transportation to/from and other amenities and services for snowmobilers, motorcyclists, mountain biking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, hiking, etc.).</p> <p>Example: Touring Ontario: Rider-Friendly Accommodations⁴¹</p>	<p>Fishing and Sport Enthusiasts & Action Seekers</p>	<p>Outdoor Adventure</p>

³⁶ Canada Is Building A Northern Lights Resort With Giant Glass Igloos - Narcity

³⁷ Pemiska Tourism

³⁸ Best Western - The Hammondsport Hotel, thehammondsporthotel.com/hammondsporthotel-amenities

³⁹ Caribana Hotel Packages - 3 Night Packages, caribanatoronto.com

⁴⁰ Explore Pass, explorepass.ca

⁴¹ [Touring Ontario: Rider-Friendly Accommodations | Motorcycle.com](#)

Opportunity – Trip Enhancers	Target Market	Strategic Priority
Snowshoe and cross country at High Peaks Resort, Lake Placid, NY. ⁴²		

“Wellness is having a Moment”⁴³ and is a priority for High-Value Guests and Cultural Consumers. “Experience-led amenities, such as hotels offering guests the chance to immerse themselves in the natural landscape, local life, or sustainability initiatives, are also becoming increasingly popular.”⁴⁴



Back2Nature Wellness and Adventures Hot and Cold Therapy

Photo Credit: Back2Nature Wellness and Adventures

Food and Beverage

The availability of high-end food and beverage is the third highest factor for high-value guests when choosing a destination. Food and beverage tasting experiences is one type of travel that Cultural Consumers and Experiential Adventurers are most interested in. During the visitor survey research

⁴² [XC-Ski and Snowshoe | Hotel Offers at High Peaks Resort MB](#)

⁴³ Destination Canada. Laws of Attraction for High-Value Guests.

⁴⁴ Destination Canada. Laws of Attraction for High-Value Guests.

that was conducted, 26% of respondents felt more diverse dining options was what was missing from their experience in Sault Ste. Marie.

Opportunity – Trip Enhancers	Target Market	Strategic Priority
<p>Use mobile rental units to enhance the food and beverage experience in the downtown and waterfront areas.</p> <p>Examples: The Distillery District in Toronto⁴⁵</p>	<p>Cultural Consumers & Experiential Explorers</p>	<p>Downtown/Waterfront Activation</p>
<p>Encourage food trucks to fill any service gaps, and events through a municipal RFP process in designated areas.</p> <p>Example: City of North Bay, Waterfront Food Vendor⁴⁶</p>	<p>Cultural Consumers & Experiential Explorers</p>	<p>Downtown/Waterfront Activation Events</p>
<p>Encourage business collaborations on local food and drink experiences, facilitated by workshops for restaurant owners and chefs, food purveyors, and other food suppliers to explore opportunities.</p> <p>Example: Culinary Tourism Alliance Workshops⁴⁷</p>	<p>Cultural Consumers & Experiential Explorers</p>	<p>Downtown/Waterfront Activation</p>
<p>Increase culinary options for visitors through supporting development of culinary experiences.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-end exclusive culinary experiences: Exclusive, unique, and memorable dining experiences can be framed as mini events. Example: Long Table Dinner at UBC Farm⁴⁸ • Foraging experiences: “Foraging has exploded in popularity in recent year...”⁴⁹. 	<p>Cultural Consumers & Experiential Explorers</p>	

⁴⁵ [The Distillery District in Toronto Prepares to Launch Pop-Up Containers Housing Several Retailers \[Exclusive\] \(retail-insider.com\)](#)

⁴⁶ [Request for Proposal - Waterfront Food Vendor | City of North Bay](#)

⁴⁷ [Workshops — Culinary Tourism Alliance](#)

⁴⁸ [Long Table Dinner – Sign Up to Wait List | CSFS at UBC Farm](#)

⁴⁹ [Forage tourism \(wundermanthompson.com\)](#)

Opportunity – Trip Enhancers	Target Market	Strategic Priority
<p>Connect visitors with an outdoor hike and local food.</p> <p>Example: Gourmet by Nature⁵⁰</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn from Indigenous chefs: Hiawatha Osawamick owns and operates a restaurant on Lake Wahnapiatae near Sudbury and could provide advice to young people for a possible similar offering in other communities.⁵¹ 		

“To US travellers, food and drink are linked to the culture of a place, its people and a way to immerse oneself, though not all US travellers are interested in the local history and evolution of cuisines.”



Han Wi Dinner 2023 | Wanuskewin

Photo Credit: National Post

⁵⁰ [Gourmet by Nature | Outdoor Experiences | Nova Scotia](#)

⁵¹ CTV News, northernontario.ctvnews.ca

Transportation

Destination Canada’s research suggests that transportation is the third most stressful touchpoint in the travel journey.⁵² An overwhelming portion (72%-89%) of all identified market segments travelled by car during their last visit to Sault Ste. Marie.

Opportunity – Trip Enhancers	Target Market	Strategic Priority
Expanding transit services to support event-based tourism and visitor attractions outside of the downtown/waterfront. Example: Visitor Transportation at Niagara Parks ⁵³	Action Seekers & Experiential Adventures	Downtown/Waterfront Activation
Leverage the Trans-Canada Trails by connecting to Tourism product offerings and prioritizing experience development tied to the Voyageur Trail and the Lake Superior Water Trail. Example: Trans Canada Trail and Destination Canada Partnership ⁵⁴	Experiential Adventurers & Fishing and Sport Enthusiasts & Cultural Consumers	Outdoor Adventure
Expand urban bike/scooter/E-bike rentals/tours/ beyond Whitefish Island and into the downtown and waterfront areas. Example: e-Bike on World Bike Day ⁵⁵	Experiential Adventurers	Downtown/Waterfront Activation

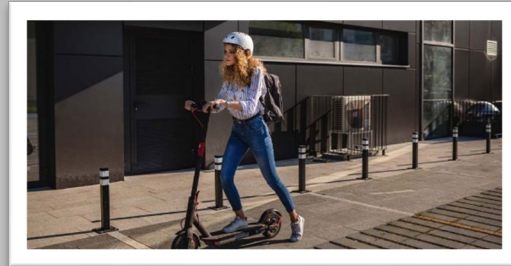
⁵² Destination Canada. Laws of Attraction for High-Value Guests.

⁵³ [Visitor Transportation at Niagara Parks](#)

⁵⁴ [Trans Canada Trail | Elevating Trail Experiences from Coast to Coast to Coast: Trans Canada Trail and Destination Canada Mark New Partnership \(tctrail.ca\)](#)

⁵⁵ [Growing e-bike popularity in Canada takes the spotlight on World Bike Day \(electricautonomy.ca\)](#)

“The province [of Ontario] has developed best practice guidelines to help municipalities safely integrate e-scooters in their communities. E-scooters have been launched in over 125 U.S. cities and are being allowed under pilot conditions in Quebec and Alberta.”⁵⁶



Ontario’s E-Scooter Pilot Program

Photo Credit: CAA

Recreation and Entertainment

Nature and wildlife are listed as the fourth most important factor when high-value guests are choosing a destination.⁵⁷ Action seekers are most interested in experiences related to snowmobiling, maintain/fat tire biking and road/gravel cycling. Cultural consumers are most interested in experiences related to food and beverage, relaxation, and wellness, urban/downtown, arts, music, and entertainment, and historical/education tours, while experiential adventurers are most interested in trail-based activities, paddle sports, arts, music, and entertainment events, leisure and road/gravel cycling, mountain biking, food and drink tasting. Focusing on tourism experiences and activities that appeal to the experiential adventurers would fit well with Tourism Sault Ste. Marie’s vision and strategic priorities.

Opportunity – Trip Enhancers	Target Market	Strategic Priority
Develop a trailhead facility designated for motorized and non-motorized recreational	Fishing and Sport Enthusiasts & Experiential	Outdoor Adventure

⁵⁶ <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/54754/ontario-announces-e-scooter-pilot-to-help-grow-ontarios-econom>

⁵⁷ Destination Canada. Laws of Attraction for High-Value Guests.

Opportunity – Trip Enhancers	Target Market	Strategic Priority
<p>vehicles that could act as a staging area for winter experiences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multi-day outdoor experience packages • Winter fat-biking tours • Snowmobile rentals/tours <p>Example: Iron Horse Trail in Alberta⁵⁸</p>	<p>Adventurers & Action Seekers</p>	
<p>Support tour offerings that connect the urban experience to the outdoor adventures beyond the City of Sault Ste. Marie to extend stay. Priority experiences may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indigenous cultural experiences: While Indigenous Tourism Ontario has identified Indigenous Food Tourism as a priority, there is an overall need for more tourism experiences in Ontario. Example: Indigenous Tourism Ontario Position Paper On Growing Indigenous Food Tourism In Northern Ontario⁵⁹ • Stargazing and Night photography: The Lake Superior Provincial Park is a Dark Sky Preserve, making it an ideal local for star gazing and night photography. Astro tourism is popular in remote destinations where there is little light pollution and offers tourists an outdoor, nighttime activity. Example: Kananaskis After Dark Stargazing Tour⁶⁰ • E-bike tours: “Canada is seeing a rapid uptake of battery-powered e-bikes from coast to coast...with recent data from a 	<p>Experiential Adventurers & Action Seekers & Fishing and Sport Enthusiasts & Cultural Consumers</p>	<p>Outdoor Adventure</p>

⁵⁸ [Plan Your Trip - Alberta's Iron Horse Trail](#)

⁵⁹ Indigenous Tourism Ontario. FEAST: Growing Indigenous Food Tourism in Ontario.

⁶⁰ [Stargazing Tour - Kananaskis After Dark \(viator.com\)](#)

Opportunity – Trip Enhancers	Target Market	Strategic Priority
<p>Canadian research firm, Precedence Research, shows that the global e-bike market was valued at US\$17.56 billion in 2021 and it's projected to be worth around US\$40.98 billion by 2030.”⁶¹</p> <p>Example: Banff Bow River E-Bike Tour and Sundance Canyon Hike⁶²</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Snowmobile tours: Snowmobiling is an activity identified as an activity of interest for the action seekers and Fishing and Sport Enthusiasts visitor profiles. Tourism Sault Ste. Marie is promoting this activity and a plan was developed in 2017 for a Northern Ontario Snowmobile Tourism Plan. There is however little opportunity for those without snowmobiles to participate in this activity. <p>Example: Guided Snowmobile Tour in Ontario⁶³</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wellness adventures – Saunas and Cold Plunges, forest bathing: “...wellness has become a major force in the global tourism market...”⁶⁴ Activities that connect visitors to wellness activities such as saunas and cold plunges or forest bathing are opportunities to tap into this trend. <p>Example: Forest Bathing - Treetop Trekking⁶⁵</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paddleboard tours: “Stand-up paddle board activities are growing highly popular 		

⁶¹ [Growing e-bike popularity in Canada takes the spotlight on World Bike Day \(electricautonomy.ca\)](#)

⁶² [Banff: Bow River E-Bike Tour and Sundance Canyon Hike | GetYourGuide](#)

⁶³ [Ride With The Pros—Guided Snowmobile Tours in Ontario | Northern Ontario Travel](#)

⁶⁴ [Wellness Tourism - Global Wellness Institute](#)

⁶⁵ [Forest Bathing - Treetop Trekking](#)

Opportunity – Trip Enhancers	Target Market	Strategic Priority
<p>among young tourists worldwide.”⁶⁶ This activity is a natural addition for tour operators already offering kayak and canoe tours, and a natural fit for a waterfront destination.</p> <p>Example: Overnight Stand-up Paddleboard Adventure — Back2Nature⁶⁷</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dogsledding tours: Dogsledding is a Canadian winter experience with connections to Indigenous traditions and culture and a great way to experience Canada’s winter. <p>Example: Wapusk Adventures - Indigenous Cultural Tours - Churchill Manitoba⁶⁸</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regenerative tourism experiences: Visitors enjoy outdoor experiences and allocate some of their time to making the natural landscape better, e.g., trail cleanup, fish habitat restoration, tree and native flower planting, charity work, etc. <p>Examples: Volunteers assisting K-8 Indigenous students – Road Scholar;⁶⁹ <u>Volunteers assisting at botanical garden - Hawaii</u>⁷⁰</p>		
<p>In the Canal District</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand culinary experiences, particularly during peak tourist times. • Expand boutique retail opportunities 	<p>Experiential Adventurers & Cultural Consumers</p>	<p>Downtown/Waterfront Activation</p>

⁶⁶ [Stand-up Paddle Boards Market Size, Trends, Demand | Research Report 2028 \(adroitmarketresearch.com\)](#)

⁶⁷ [Overnight Stand-up Paddleboard Adventure — Back2Nature \(back2naturewellness.com\)](#)

⁶⁸ [Wapusk Adventures - Indigenous Cultural Tours - Churchill Manitoba](#)

⁶⁹ [Road Scholar, Volunteering: Navajo Nation Schools, roadscholar.org](#)

⁷⁰ [National Tropical Botanical Garden, Volunteer, ntbg.com](#)

Opportunity – Trip Enhancers	Target Market	Strategic Priority
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use retail containers to create a winter market <p>Hiawatha Highlands</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use the trails as a staging for winter events <p>Example: Christmas Light Tour⁷¹</p>		

“Parks Canada works with Indigenous partners to provide Indigenous experiences at national historic sites, national parks, and national marine conservation areas across Canada.”



Parks Canadas Indigenous Tourism Experiences

Photo Credit: Parks Canada

Travel Services

Destination Canada’s research suggests that transportation is the third most stressful touchpoint in the travel journey and that blended travel (mixing leisure and business travel) is on the rise.⁷³ The target segments in the background report to this document all typically use either a trip organization or third-party provider to book their travel or book directly online.

⁷¹ [BHP Enchanted Forest \(enchanted-forest.org\)](http://enchanted-forest.org)
⁷² [Indigenous tourism experiences \(canada.ca\)](http://indigenous-tourism-experiences.canada.ca)
⁷³ Destination Canada. Laws of Attraction for High-Value Guests.

Opportunity – Trip Enhancers	Target Market	Strategic Priority
<p>Prioritize funding support for tourism operators and tour operators to encourage AI tools, e-commerce platforms or working with an in-bound tour operator.</p>	<p>Cultural Consumers & Experiential Adventurers & Fishing and Sport Enthusiasts</p>	<p>Outdoor Adventure Events</p>
<p>Connect tour operators with event organizers to encourage extended stays. Example: Tourism London Stay A Little Longer Campaign⁷⁴</p>	<p>Action Seekers & Experiential Adventurers</p>	<p>Outdoor Adventure Events</p>
<p>Support trip planning and in-market digital visitor services such as artificial intelligence (AI) applications.</p>	<p>Cultural Consumers & Experiential Adventurers & Fishing and Sport Enthusiasts & Action Seekers</p>	<p>Downtown/Waterfront Activation Outdoor Adventure Events</p>
<p>Encourage new fly-drive travel packages leveraging flights arriving at the City’s airport.</p>	<p>Cultural Consumers & Experiential Adventurers & Fishing and Sport Enthusiasts & Action Seekers</p>	<p>Downtown/Waterfront Activation Outdoor Adventure Events</p>

⁷⁴ [Tourism London Stay A Little Longer Campaign](#)

“There are new ways to use technology to help protect local interests while bringing better experiences to visitors.” ⁷⁵



Case Study: A Smart City (Beaumont, Alberta) Innovates with Smart Kiosks ⁷⁶

Photo Credit: Insight.tech

⁷⁵ [Engaging Local Communities Through Digital Technology During and Post Pandemic | Destinations International](#)

⁷⁶ [Case Study: A Smart City Innovates with Smart Kiosks | insight.tech](#)

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Tourism Sault Ste. Marie

STRATEGIC PLAN AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT ATTRACTION PLAN

Presentation to TSSM Board of Directors, October 31, 2023

Executive Summary

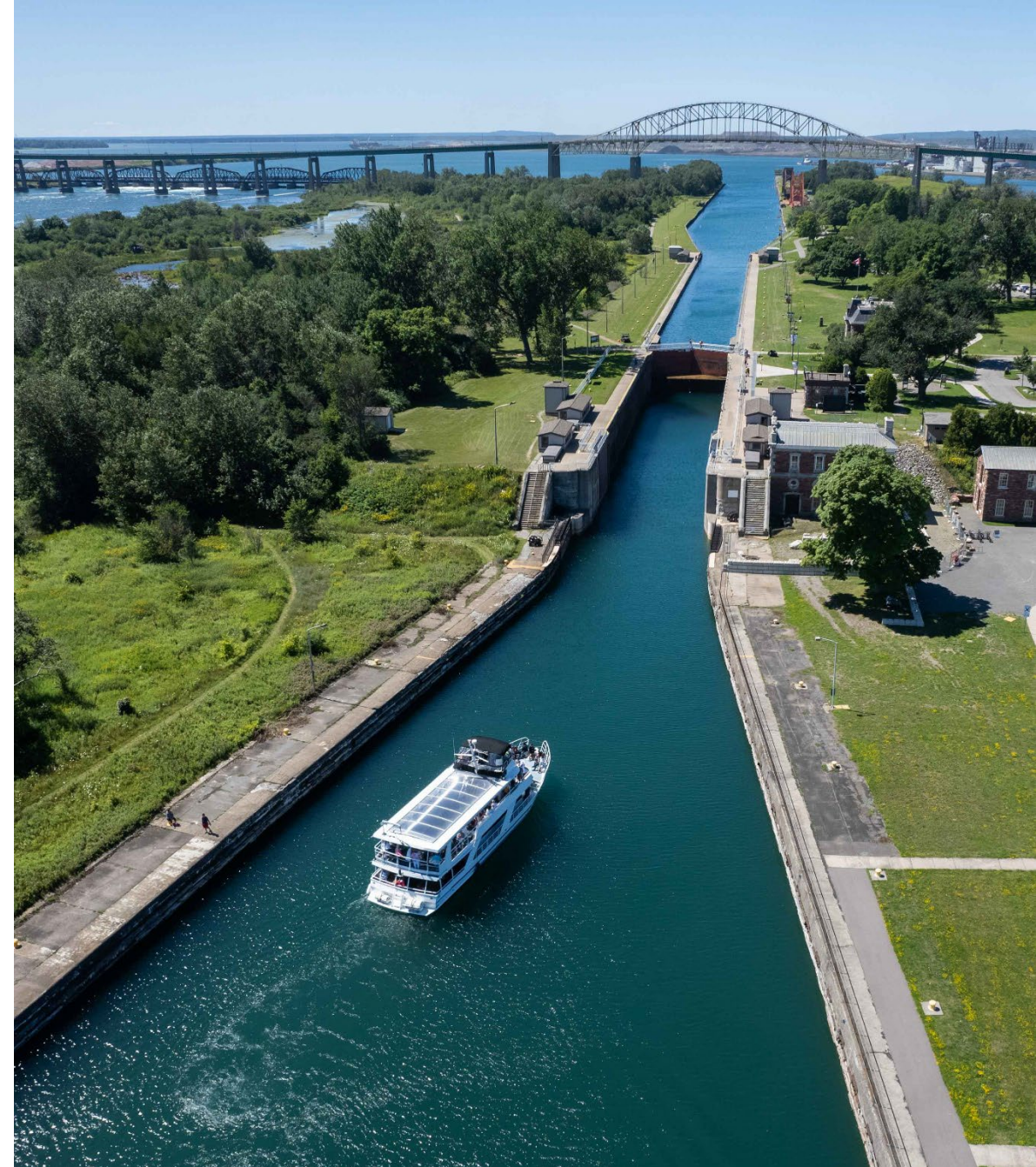
Tourism Sault Ste. Marie's new Strategic Plan and Business Development Attraction Plan provides a roadmap to diversify tourism products, promote the development of new tourism drivers and continue to expand Sault Ste. Marie's winter tourism season.

The **Strategic Plan** for Tourism Sault Ste. Marie provides alignment with their three strategic priorities:

- Sports tourism, festivals, and events
- Outdoor adventure
- Downtown/waterfront improvements/activations

The **Business Development Attraction Plan** showcases opportunities to enhance Tourism Sault Ste. Marie's product offerings.

The outcomes and tactics will help Sault Ste. Marie align its tourism products with its desire to be **Ontario's Best Adventure Town**.



Trends and Data

- Accommodation occupancy is increasing
- Canadian visitors spent \$130 million in debit/credit purchases in Sault Ste. Marie in 2022, up 61% compared to 2019
- Visitors want open-air, nature-based, rural experiences, particularly sightseeing and trails in the Soo
- Most visitors come from Toronto, Sudbury, Thunder Bay, Ottawa, and Barrie but new spending is coming from Hamilton/Burlington, and Kitchener
- Businesses face labour and skills shortages, product degradation, reduced access to capital, limited liquidity

Methodology

An aerial photograph showing a train with a red and white passenger car and a blue locomotive winding through a dense forest with vibrant autumn foliage. The forest is a mix of green, yellow, orange, and red trees. To the left, a calm lake is visible, reflecting the sky. The train is moving along a track that curves through the forest.

Project Process

Phase 1: Market Research and Consultation

- **Situational analysis:** Visitor profile analysis and perception assessment, spending analysis, tourism workforce analysis, transportation and accommodations analysis, tourism business attractions trends review.
- **Engagement:** Interviews and meetings with tourism operators and service delivery partners, tourism business survey (78 responses), and visitor/tourist panel survey (1,800 responses from Ontario, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota).

Phase 2: Strategy Development and Reporting

- **Analysis of Observations:** Gap analysis, SOARR assessment, drafting strategic objectives.
- **Selection of Future Directions:** development of goals, tactics, and KPIs, preparation of plans for business development and attraction.
- **Reporting:** Final Report presented.

Key Trends

**Frictionless
Travel**

**Domestic
Travel**

**Responsible
Travel**

**Ascendence
of Communities**

**Indigenous
Connection**

**Wild for
Wilderness**

**Health
and Wellbeing**

**Affluent
Travel Boom**

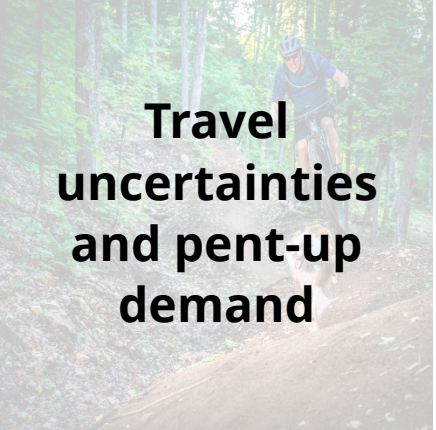
**Great
Resignation
and Retirement**

**Remote Work
and Residential
Tourism**


Key Trends



Enhance and streamline travel experience



Travel uncertainties and pent-up demand



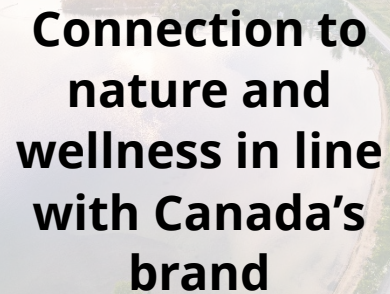
Less frequent, longer stays to lighten carbon footprint



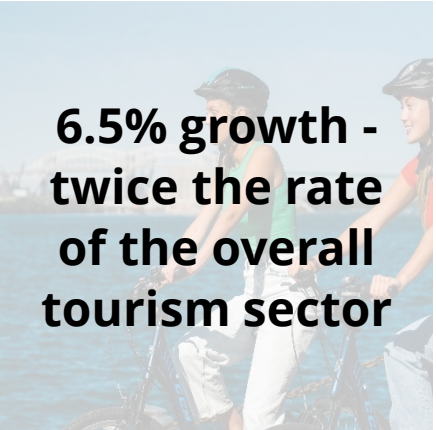
Alignment of tourism, community, governments



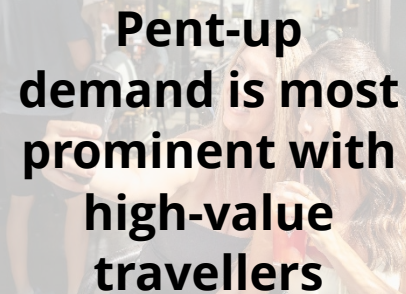
In demand with international visitors



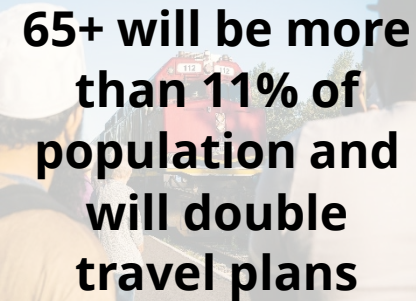
Connection to nature and wellness in line with Canada's brand



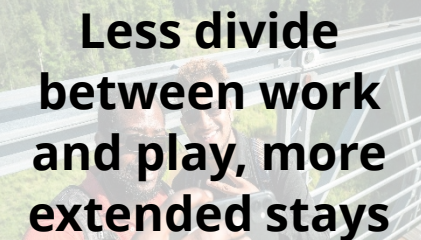
6.5% growth - twice the rate of the overall tourism sector



Pent-up demand is most prominent with high-value travellers



65+ will be more than 11% of population and will double travel plans



Less divide between work and play, more extended stays

Gap Analysis

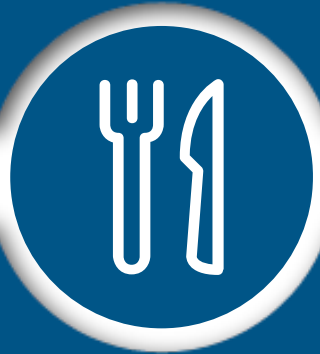
ACCOMMODATIONS



Boutique / unique
overnight experiences

Packaged outdoor
experiences

FOOD & BEVERAGE



Hours of operation

Indigenous culinary
experiences

Waterfront dining

Farm to fork

Fine dining

TRANSPORTATION



Flights to major
target markets

Adventure bus to
outdoor experiences

Bike, e-scooter rentals

ENTERTAINMENT & RECREATION



Equipment rental

Off-season
outdoor events

Winter experiences

Boutique retail

Waterfront/downtown
outdoor experiences

TRAVEL SERVICES



Online booking
options

Visitor services

SOARR Analysis

S	Strengths What are we doing well? What key achievements are we most proud of? What can we build on?	
O	Opportunities What our best possible future opportunities? What changes in demand can we expect in the future? What broader trends and policies may affect development and impact our aspirations?	
A	Aspirations What are we deeply passionate about and want to achieve? What difference do we hope to make for all?	
R	Risks What challenges do we need to be aware of? How will we recognize and mitigate or eliminate potential risks?	
R	Results How we know we are succeeding? What are the key goals we would like to accomplish to achieve these results?	

SOARR Analysis

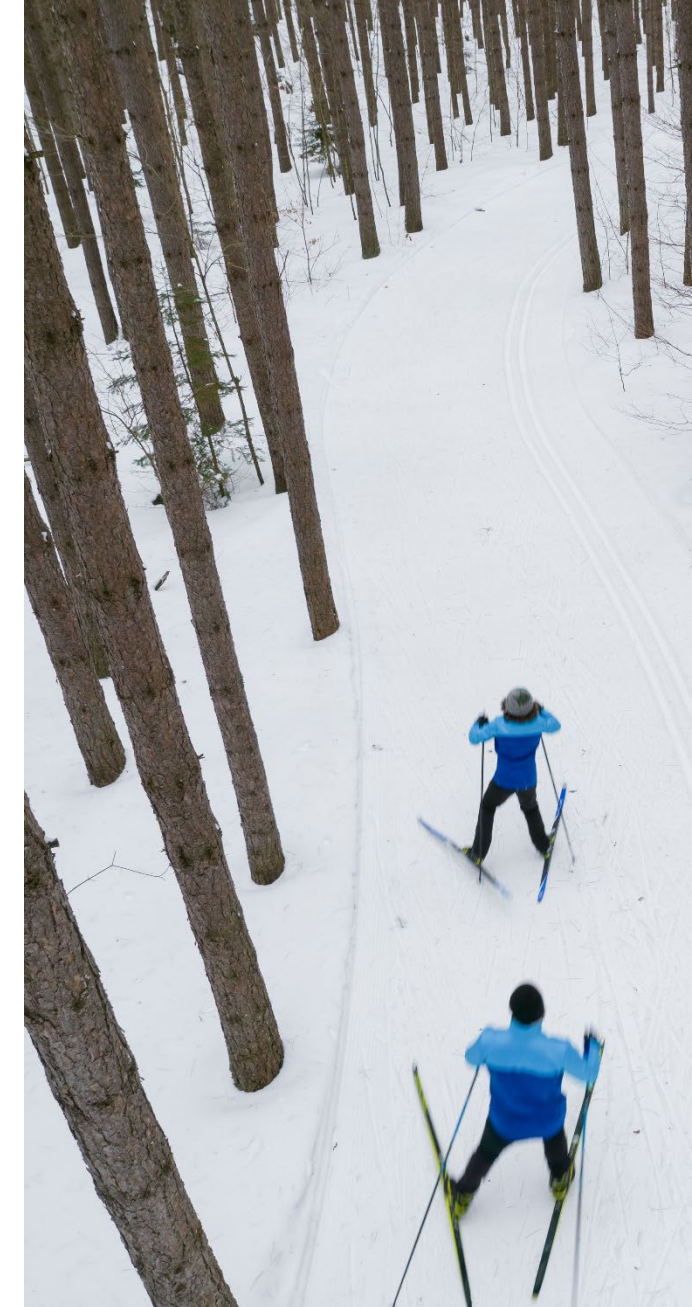
S

Strengths

What are we doing well? What key achievements are we most proud of? What can we build on?



- Outdoor adventure infrastructure (mountain biking, cross-country skiing)
- Location by an international border crossing and Trans-Canada Highway
- Proximity to the waterfront, including the Canal District
- Strong service sector in the accommodations and restaurant industries
- Supports and resources for tourism businesses
- Strategic priorities align with federal priorities
- Visitor satisfaction
- Wayfinding signage
- Some accommodations have partnered to offer flight and hotel packages



SOARR Analysis

O

Opportunities

What are our best possible future opportunities? What changes in demand can we expect in the future? What broader trends and policies may affect development and impact our aspirations?



- Enhance business supports (advice, grants) and awareness of Tourism Development Fund
- Expansion of adventure bus pilot to outdoor experiences
- Develop educational experiences, and arts, culture and entertainment
- Urban outdoors, waterfront and downtown amenities
- Align restaurant and retail operation hours with peak visitation hours
- Product development and marketing to boost American visitation
- Package offerings and provide online booking options for experiences
- Entice drive-through traffic visitation
- Expanding seasonally, particularly in winter



SOARR Analysis

A

Aspirations

What are we deeply passionate about and want to achieve?
What difference do we hope to make for all?



- The “Hub of Urban Outdoor Adventure Experiences” in Ontario
- The mountain biking capital of Ontario
- A major event (500+ attendance) in every season
- Improve and activate waterfront and downtown areas



SOARR Analysis

R

Risks

What challenges do we need to be aware of? How will we recognize and mitigate or eliminate potential risks?



- Visible industrial sites near the waterfront and some tourism areas
- Competition with Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan for American market
- Lack of direct flights from some target market areas
- Poor highway conditions deter Southern Ontario visitors
- Inconsistent hours of operations during peak visitation times
- The primary tourism drivers (Agawa Canyon Tour Train) is seasonal
- Lack of data and research to make data-driven decisions
- Stability of volunteer base and leadership in tourism organizations



SOARR Analysis

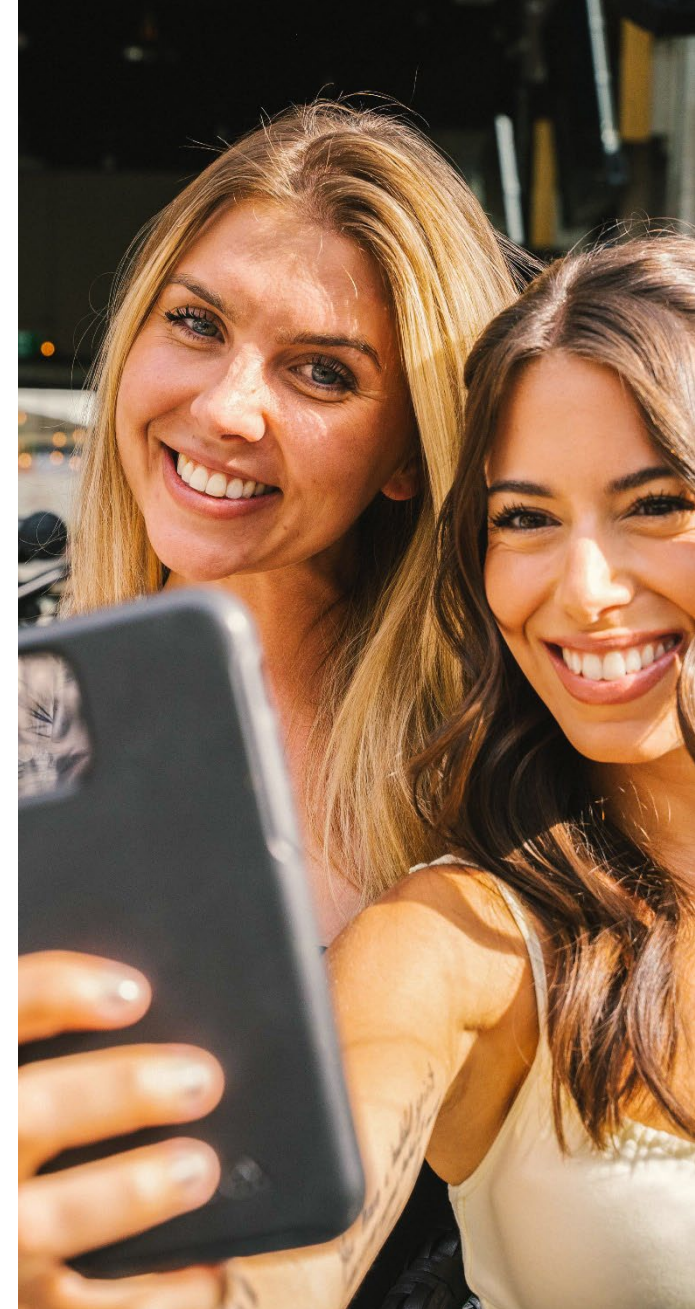
R

Results

How we know we are succeeding? What are the key goals we would like to accomplish to achieve these results?



- Increase in outdoor adventure tourism product offerings
- Connected downtown and waterfront areas with vibrant outdoor urban experiences
- Major tourism event in every season, attracting 500–1,000 attendees
- Winter visitation increases overall annual tourism spending
- Tourism Sault Ste. Marie makes data-driven decisions
- Increase in annual tourism development fund applications
- Familiarization tours for targeted priority areas (mountain biking)
- Consistent and expanded hours of operation during peak tourism season, long weekends, and cruise ship arrivals



Strategic Priorities

Tourism Sault Ste. Marie identified three strategic priorities in 2021, which serve as the foundation for this Strategic Plan. These strategic priorities were reinforced throughout the background review, stakeholder engagement, Tourism Sault Ste. Marie Board of Directors workshop, and the SOARR assessment and will be woven through the Strategic Plan and the Business Development Attraction Plan. TSSM's priorities align well with the Federal Tourism Growth Strategy, which includes embracing recreation and the great outdoors, attracting more international events, and investing in tourism assets.



**Sports Tourism,
Festivals and
Events**



**Outdoor
Adventure**



**Downtown and
Waterfront
Improvements
and Activations**

Visitor Market Segments

Experiential Adventurers

- Primarily interested in outdoor activities, such as trail-based activities, leisure cycling, and paddle sports
- Also interested in arts, music and entertainment events, and food and drink tasting experiences
- Uses internet searches, and word of mouth from family and friends to research potential destinations
- Typically book online or through a third-party provider, with trips lasting up to 3 nights
- This segment of tourists might have high spending due to their travel activities and preferences.

Visitor Market Segments

Fishing and Sport Enthusiasts

- Interest in outdoor activities such as hunting and fishing, snowmobiling, paddle sports, sports tourism/events, and trail-based activities
- Most likely to book travel online and least likely to book with a trip organizer
- Primarily take day trips or overnight trips of one night
- Younger demographic that is primarily men



Visitor Market Segments



Cultural Consumers

- Interest in food and drink tasting experiences, relaxation and wellness tourism, urban/downtown experiences, and arts, music and entertainment events
- Typically book day trips over overnight trips lasting one night
- Primarily uses online booking methods
- Slightly higher proportion of this group is women and are aged 45 - 64

Visitor Market Segments

Action Seekers

- Interest in outdoor sport activities
- More likely to use social media as a source of information
- Primarily uses a trip organizer or third-party provider to book travel
- Tend to take more overnight trips lasting over a week, and on average spend the most annually on tourism experiences
- Primarily made up of men, aged 25-44



Objectives

Building upon the strategic priorities, the following four strategic objectives create a foundation for Tourism Sault Ste. Marie to guide priorities and decision-making.

The tactics identified use research and engagement findings to grow market share, increase visitation, and create a four-season destination.

The strategic objectives align with Tourism Sault Ste. Marie's three priorities areas: Sports tourism, festivals and events, outdoor adventure, and downtown/waterfront improvements/activations.



Action Plan

OBJECTIVE #1: ENHANCE PRODUCT AND EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT

SHORT TERM	MEDIUM TERM	LONG TERM
Target support through Tourism Development Fund.		
Categorize visitor ready, market ready and export ready businesses.		
Increase communications with tourism operators.		
	Support experience development to strengthen tourism products and target high-value guests.	
	Support outdoor adventure infrastructure.	
		Support package development to encourage increased spend and stay.

Action Plan

OBJECTIVE #1: ENHANCE PRODUCT AND EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT

Target support through Tourism Development Fund.	Categorize visitor ready, market ready, and export ready (ready for international visitation) businesses.	Increase communications with tourism operators.	Support experience development to strengthen tourism products and target high-value guests.	Support outdoor adventure infrastructure.	Support package development to encourage increased spend and stay.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adjust Tourism Development Fund guidelines to prioritize specific gaps that align with strategic priorities. Allocate portions of the Tourism Development Fund to target tourism business start-ups, tourism business expansions, and export-ready product development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create tourism business readiness standards for operators and provide a self-assessment checklist. Create operator supports that are hyper-targeted to advance businesses towards export-readiness and high-end visitors using Tourism Sault Ste. Marie's tourism market profiles. Support tourism start-ups through a program such as Ontario Tourism Innovation Lab. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish an internal directory or database to track tourism operator details and interactions. Provide resources and information to enhance tourism businesses and product development through the following means of communication: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create channels of communications to operators through tools like an e-newsletter. Coordinate tourism business networking opportunities. Create an industry resources section on Tourism Sault Ste. Marie's website. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create an experience development program (e.g., workshops, webinars, study tours, speakers, etc.) for operators to participate in, targeting strategic priority areas. Funnel successful participants to Tourism Development Funding program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to support and invest in the implementation of the Mountain Bike Trail Master Plan. Identify and invest in opportunities to support the enhancement or development of hiking and wildlife viewing opportunities within the city. Invest in the development of natural surface trails between the City's core and Hiawatha Highlands. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine where packaged and/or multi-day experiences will be housed. (e.g., directly on operator's websites, on the Tourism Sault Ste. Marie website, through a third-party travel agent.) Partner with an e-commerce platform to educate tourism operators and negotiate a group rate.

Action Plan

OBJECTIVE #2: CONNECT THE DOWNTOWN AND WATERFRONT OUTDOOR EXPERIENCE

SHORT TERM	MEDIUM TERM	LONG TERM
	<p data-bbox="889 486 1651 629">Package downtown experiences with outdoor adventures.</p>	
	<p data-bbox="889 658 1651 801">Downtown revitalization and waterfront development.</p>	
	<p data-bbox="889 829 1651 972">Support outdoor adventure infrastructure.</p>	
		<p data-bbox="1666 1015 2433 1158">Expand Adventure Bus pilot as regular transportation route to trails.</p>

Action Plan

OBJECTIVE #2: CONNECT THE DOWNTOWN AND WATERFRONT OUTDOOR EXPERIENCE

Package downtown experiences with outdoor adventures.	Downtown revitalization and waterfront development.	Support outdoor adventure infrastructure.	Create a regular transportation route to trails.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage and support tourism businesses interested in expanding experiences into shoulder seasons and winter through the tourism development fund. Engage and support Indigenous businesses interested in expanding experiences and encourage collaboration opportunities through the tourism development fund. Encourage and incentivize packaged opportunities through local tour companies. Continue to promote the Adventure Bus pilot program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support the Waterfront Design Plan and expand opportunities to activate the waterfront. Embrace and celebrate industrial presence, educate, and make light where possible and where appropriate. For example, consider a dragon statue that lines up with the fire from the Steel Mill and use as an Instagramable photo opportunity. Incorporate Indigenous cultural components of the City’s history that speaks to visitors through a municipal RFP for the commissioning of an indigenous outdoor art piece that also doubles as an instagramable opportunity. Ensure the planning and development of the new Downtown Plaza incorporates a tourism development perspective. Partner with the City of Sault Ste. Marie to issue a solicitation of interest for tourism operators to express interest in offering experiences within the waterfront district. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore transportation options for tourism experiences, such as a self guided waterfront walking tour route, expanding and promoting bicycle rentals, opening a waterfront tourism tram to visit key locations, etc. Ensure all buses are bike accessible and have bike racks, and that cyclists are made aware (22 of 28 buses have bike racks). Institute transportation options for key dates or on request, e.g., horse-drawn wagon, trackless tour train, double-decker bus for tourism events to increase visits to Canal district, or on weekends from marina to downtown in peak seasons. Coordinate a shuttle partnership among hotels that takes guests to pre-identified locations across the city.

Action Plan

OBJECTIVE #3: HAVE A MAJOR EVENT IN EACH SEASON

SHORT TERM	MEDIUM TERM	LONG TERM
Actively pursue bids to host provincial and national level events.		
Incorporate tourism operators into events.		
Continue to grow the Bon Soo event and focus on expanding the visitor market.		
	Hire an events coordinator to focus on supporting homegrown events.	
		Use developing trail network to attract outdoor trail-based sports tourism events.
		Invest in infrastructure to support winter tourism events.

Action Plan

OBJECTIVE #3: HAVE A MAJOR EVENT IN EACH SEASON

Actively pursue bids to host provincial and national level events.	Incorporate tourism operators into events.	Continue to grow Bon Soo and focus on expanding visitor market.	Hire an events coordinator to focus on supporting homegrown events.	Use developing trail network to attract outdoor trail-based sports events.	Invest in infrastructure to support winter tourism events.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a sport-specific tourism strategy to provide a more inclusive and in-depth approach to developing sports tourism in Sault Ste. Marie. • Create a database or catalogue of current sports tourism events and organizers. • Conduct an infrastructure review of local sports facilities to determine their current and future capacity to host events. • Work with or establish a local Sports Network to cultivate new contacts and generate potential leads. • Create a financial plan 3-5 years in advance to host significant blockbuster events. • Utilize the support of the Tourism Development Fund to entice rights-holders to choose Sault Ste. Marie as a host community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with tourism operators to incorporate on site experiences as part of major events. • Encourage operators to create their own events where it makes sense. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capitalize on the unique winter experience in Northern Ontario and position Bon Soo as a must-do winter event. • Work with operators to incorporate purchasable add-ons. • Work with accommodation providers to create packaged opportunities. • Actively pursue funding to support tourism-specific events within the Bon Soo Winter Carnival. • Conduct economic impact assessment to communicate the importance of the winter festival to potential funders and outside community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritize best-bet events that offer growth opportunities. • Ensure community-based events are organized with tourists in mind. • Identify new areas for growth in off-peak season. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create an inventory of trail-based events over each of the four seasons. • Continue to build trails that are designed specifically to meet the requirements for event hosting. • Engage local trail user groups to increase awareness and access. • Build partnerships with tour operators to develop pre-post event opportunities that can extend the stay of event participants. 	<p>Support municipal outdoor winter recreational/events development.</p>

Action Plan

OBJECTIVE #4: USE VISITOR PROFILES TO INFORM MARKETING AND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT DECISIONS

SHORT TERM	MEDIUM TERM	LONG TERM
Communicate market segments with tourism operators.		
Create marketing campaigns based on geographic segmentation.		
Understand preferences of each segment and encourage product development in areas of interest.		
Build visual assets that align with the three strategic priorities.		

Action Plan

OBJECTIVE #4: USE VISITOR PROFILES TO INFORM MARKETING AND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT DECISIONS

Communicate market segments with tourism operators.	Create marketing campaigns based on geographic segmentation.	Understand preferences of each segment and encourage product development in areas of interest.	Build visual assets that align with the three strategic priorities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use market segments to help operators with their own marketing campaigns.• Provide workshops to tourism operators so they understand how to develop targeted marketing campaigns.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Using Facebook and Instagram as the primary social media tools for campaigns, target geographic regions highlighted in segmentation and focus on products that align with their interests.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promote the tourism development fund with tourism operators offering products related to segments areas of interest to encourage new tourism products.• Continue to support infrastructure that aligns with visitor’s areas of interest.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use software like CrowdRiff to compile images.• Solicit user-generated content through a photo-contest, using 3 strategic priorities as major themes and categories.

Business Development Attraction Plan

A focused effort to provide business supports so new and existing businesses can grow and expand their revenue and the economic footprint in Sault Ste. Marie.

- Encourage and prioritize tourism product development
- Support infrastructure investments
- Facilitate business visits, workshops, industry committees and business study tours.



Top 5 priorities for destination organizations

- 1. Destination marketing**
- 2. Data research and intelligence**
- 3. Brand management**
- 4. Destination and product development**
- 5. Community relations and partnership**

Key Trends revisited

**Frictionless
Travel**

**Domestic
Travel**

**Responsible
Travel**

**Ascendence
of Communities**

**Indigenous
Connection**

**Wild for
Wilderness**

**Health
and Wellbeing**

**Affluent
Travel Boom**

**Great
Resignation
and Retirement**

**Remote Work
and Residential
Tourism**

Destination Drivers

Assets that bring tourists to the destination



Outdoor Experiences:
Trails, Wildlife, Nature-based
Activities



Cultural Experiences:
Festivals, Events, Indigenous
Tourism, Sports Events



Non-Leisure Experiences:
Local Attractions, sightseeing, urban
experiences

Destination Drivers



Ensure a world-class downtown and waterfront to attract **cross-border visitation** and collaboration with Sault Ste. Marie, MI.

UNITED STATES-CANADA GREENWAYS VISION MAP

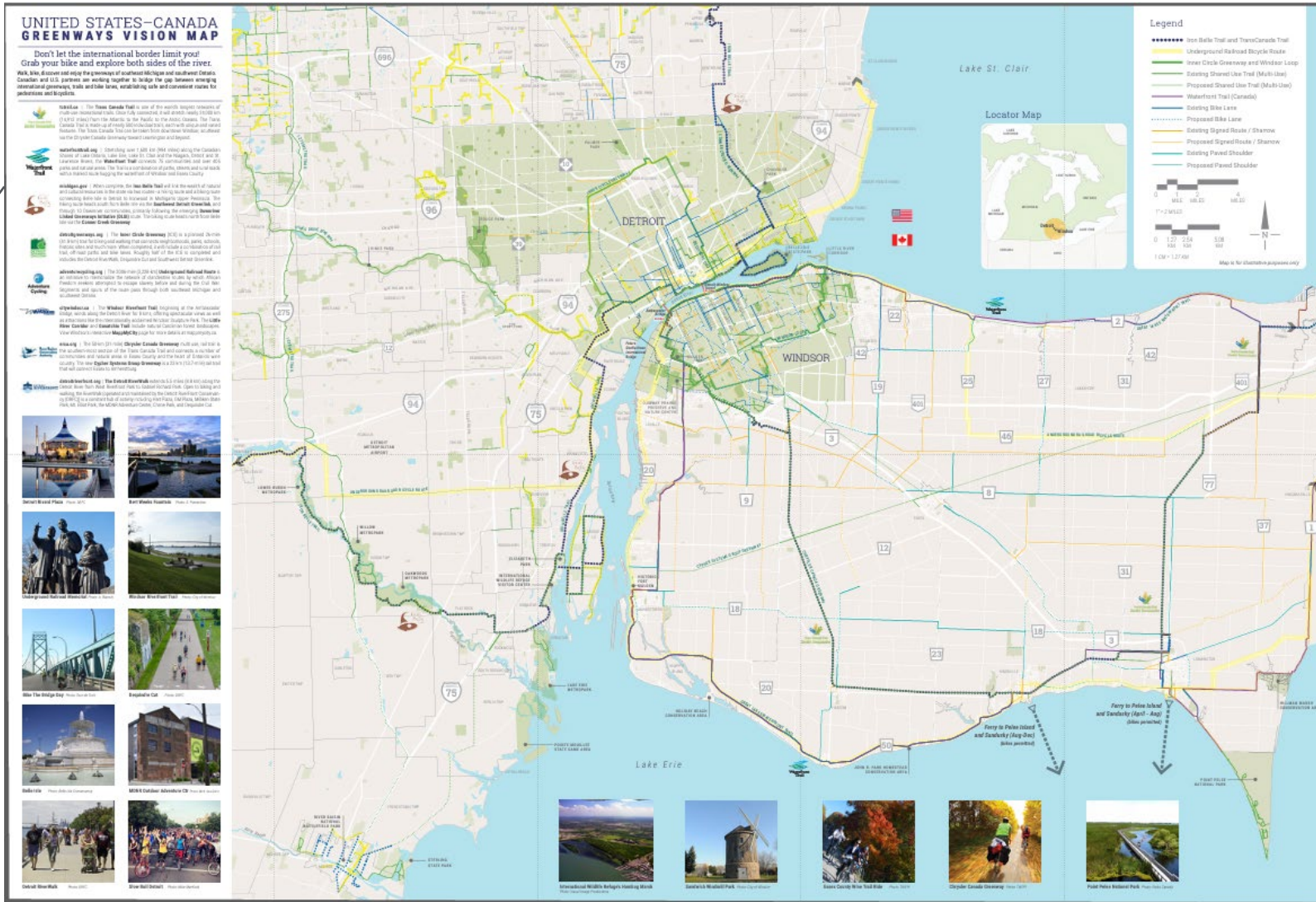
Don't let the international border limit you! Grab your bike and explore both sides of the river.

Walk, bike, discover and enjoy the greenways of southeast Michigan and southwest Ontario. Canadian and U.S. partners are working together to bridge the gap between emerging international greenways, trails and bike lanes, establishing safe and convenient routes for pedestrians and bicyclists.

tctrail.ca | The **Trans Canada Trail** is one of the world's longest networks of multi-use recreational trails. Once fully connected, it will stretch nearly 24,000 km (14,912 miles) from the Atlantic to the Pacific to the Arctic Oceans. The Trans Canada Trail is made up of nearly 500 individual trails, each with unique and varied features. The Trans Canada Trail can be taken from downtown Windsor, southeast via the Chrysler Canada Greenway toward Leamington and beyond.

waterfronttrail.org | Stretching over 1,600 km (994 miles) along the Canadian Shores of Lake Ontario, Lake Erie, Lake St. Clair and the Niagara, Detroit and Lawrence Rivers, the **Waterfront Trail** connects 75 communities and over parks and natural areas. The Trail is a combination of paths, streets and rural with a marked route hugging the waterfront of Windsor and Essex County.

michigan.gov | When complete, the **Iron Belle Trail** will link the world-class cultural resources in the state via two routes—a hiking route connecting Belle Isle in Detroit to Ironwood in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. The hiking route heads south from Belle Isle via the **Southwest Michigan Hiking Trail**. A second route heads north from Belle Isle via the **Northwest Michigan Hiking Trail**. The Iron Belle Trail will also connect to the **Chrysler Canada Greenway** in Windsor, Ontario.



Destination Drivers



Encourage partnerships between industry operators and property owners to create central points for **staging of outdoor experiences.**



Facilitate conversations with Indigenous organizations and others to support new **Indigenous experiences.**



Photo: thrivetours.ca

Trip Enhancers

Activities that visitors plan once they have made the decision to travel to a destination



Trip Enhancers



Accommodations: Support development of boutique and unique accommodations such as Northern Lights viewing domes or teepees, to be packaged with urban outdoor experiences and culinary packages.



Food and Beverage: Encourage increased culinary options for visitors through mobile rental units and waterfront food trucks, and by supporting development of unique experiences like foraging dinners, and Indigenous culinary experiences.



Transportation: Expand transportation options to include transit services to support event-based tourism outside the downtown and waterfront, developing experiences connected to the Trans Canada Trail, and expanding bike rentals and tours.



Chef Jenni Lessard at the Han Wi Moon dining experience at Wanuskewin, Saskatoon.
PHOTOGRAPH BY TOURISM SASKATCHEWAN

Trip Enhancers



Recreation and Entertainment:

Develop facilities and experiences for offerings that connect the urban experience to the outdoor adventures beyond Sault Ste. Marie to extend stay, such as guided snowmobile tours, winter fat-biking tours, stargazing excursions, and wellness adventures.



Travel Services: Support development of digital travel services such as trip planning and in-market visitor services aided by artificial intelligence.



Photo: [northernontario.travel](https://www.northernontario.travel)



Thank you from the Deloitte Economic Advisory Team.



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