



REGIONAL ROUNDTABLE

What We Heard Report

SAINT JOHN, NEW BRUNSWICK
NOVEMBER 12-14, 2024

Introduction

The roundtable discussions focused on key issues critical to enhancing tourism in New Brunswick. Participants explored strategies for growing the sector through targeted investments and stronger collaboration. Major challenges identified included extending the tourism season to capitalize on year-round opportunities, addressing labour shortages and skill gaps, and fostering more collaboration among stakeholders.

In addition, there was a clear call for strategic infrastructure investments and improved communication of available resources and programs to tourism operators. Proposed solutions to labour gaps included tapping into retired workers, developing more local experiences, and improving accessibility. To attract more talent to the tourism sector, participants highlighted the importance of cultural education, mutual respect, and diversity within the workforce.

The discussions also emphasized the potential for local tourism growth by connecting with New Brunswick's cultural roots and leveraging eco-tourism opportunities. Participants identified areas where provincial government support could be enhanced, including better signage and widespread high-speed internet access.



Discussion Highlights: What We Heard

Labour and Workforce Development

Overview

Building a strong, diverse, and sustainable workforce is crucial for the tourism sector's growth. Participants identified a clear need to attract talent, especially from underrepresented groups, and retain it through improved incentives and support.

Challenges

- **Labour Shortages and Skill Gaps**
The sector faces ongoing challenges in attracting and retaining enough skilled workers to meet demand.
- **Seasonality**
The tourism industry's seasonal nature makes it difficult to maintain a stable, year-round workforce.

Opportunities

- **Attracting Newcomers**
Partner with multicultural associations to attract newcomers and provide language skills training.
- **Engaging Youth**
Create programs in schools to raise awareness of tourism career opportunities and spark early interest.
- **Supporting International Students**
Remove the cap on working hours for international students to increase workforce flexibility.
- **Labour Incentives**
Offer salary incentives and job-sharing opportunities to encourage the return of seasonal employees and maximize workforce availability.

Industry and Operator Support

Overview

Supporting industry operators is key to fostering growth and ensuring the success of the tourism sector.

Challenges

- **Lack of Awareness**
Many operators are not fully aware of the resources and support programs available to them, limiting their ability to grow.

Opportunities

- **Mentorship and Resources**
Establish a tourism mentorship program to support new entrants and increase outreach to operators to raise awareness of available resources such as grants, collaboration opportunities, and educational certifications.



Investment in the Sector

Overview

Investment in tourism infrastructure and technology is essential to keep New Brunswick competitive and sustainable.

Challenges

- **High Costs and Limited Funding**
Tourism businesses, especially SMEs, face challenges securing funding for modernization and new initiatives.
- **Lack of Connectivity**
Inconsistent high-speed internet access across the province hinders the ability of operators to adopt new technologies and improve business operations.

Opportunities

- **Investment Priorities**
Modernize aging event infrastructure to remain competitive and prioritize investments in digitalization and automation for improved operational efficiency.
- **Strategic Investment Approach**
Focus on year-round tourism, particularly extending shoulder seasons. Consider multi-year funding to ensure sustainability and introduce tax breaks and non-repayable contributions to encourage tourism investments.
- **Becoming Investment-Ready**
Partner with university incubators to foster innovation, provide training and mentorship to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and develop shared workspaces for tourism start-ups.

Sustainability and Responsible Tourism

Overview

Sustainability should be at the heart of New Brunswick's tourism development, ensuring long-term environmental and economic benefits.

Challenges

- **High Cost of Certification**
The cost of obtaining sustainability certifications can be a barrier for many operators.
- **Limited Infrastructure**
The lack of widespread EV charging stations and recycling facilities in rural areas poses a challenge for eco-friendly travel.

Opportunities

- **EV Charging Infrastructure**
Invest in electric vehicle (EV) charging stations, especially in rural destinations, to support eco-friendly travel.
- **Regenerative Tourism**
Focus on regenerative tourism practices that promote both economic growth and environmental sustainability.
- **Recycling Initiatives**
Expand recycling efforts at provincial attractions and in rural destinations to reduce waste and improve sustainability.
- **Certification Costs**
Help alleviate the high costs of certification for operators by providing public funding or subsidies, making it easier for them to adopt sustainable practices.

Priority Action Items and Key Recommendations

To better position New Brunswick's tourism sector for growth and improvement, several key needs and actionable steps have been identified across various areas.

Destination Marketing Support

To boost tourism, the focus should be on attracting drive-through tourists and promoting multi-city destination campaigns.

- **Attract Drive-Through Tourists**
Promote multi-city destination campaigns, highlight shoulder-season activities, and collaborate with other Maritime provinces for joint marketing to expand reach.
- **Improve Wayfinding**
Enhance signage on provincial highways for better wayfinding and update online resources to showcase tourism offerings.



Priority Action Items and Key Recommendations

Education and Workforce Development

Raising awareness of travel trade best practices and improving education is essential for elevating the tourism experience.

- **Raise Awareness of Best Practices**
Educate accommodation operators on travel trade best practices to elevate the visitor experience.
- **Expand Visitor Programs**
Expand programs such as THRC's Propel to include seniors, helping extend the visitor information season.

Accessibility and Inclusion in Tourism

Tourism should be made accessible to all visitors, ensuring that New Brunswick's offerings are inclusive and welcoming.

- **Partner with Accessibility Initiatives**
Collaborate with provincial accessibility initiatives to ensure that tourism offerings are inclusive and welcoming to a diverse range of tourists.

Infrastructure and Investments

Improving transportation and digital infrastructure is key to enhancing the visitor experience and supporting business operations.

- **Enhance Visitor Infrastructure**
Conduct an assessment of the need for better signage and rest areas throughout the province to improve the visitor experience and ensure ease of travel.
- **Improve Connectivity for Operators**
Investigate ways to improve high-speed internet access for tourism operators, helping them to better serve visitors and streamline their business operations.
- **Improve Transportation**
Develop better intercity transportation options and expand public transport to key attractions. Additionally, develop transportation networks for cruise ship visitors.
- **Extend the Tourism Season**
Launch a pilot project to test strategies aimed at extending New Brunswick's tourism season, with a focus on attracting off-season visitors.



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