



REGIONAL ROUNDTABLE

What We Heard Report

NORTHERN REGION (VIRTUAL)

April 10, 2025

Introduction

The Northern Regional Roundtable was a key forum for stakeholders in Canada's northern tourism industry to discuss new opportunities for industry growth and find meaningful solutions to challenges across the regions. Participants in this roundtable included individuals working in the industry, operators, destination marketing organizations, and other key tourism industry stakeholders throughout Canada's North.

Discussions focused on business growth, Indigenous engagement, and sustainability. Participants emphasized cultural tourism and the need to cultivate Indigenous-led experiences by providing targeted resources, launching collaborative marketing campaigns, and ensuring economic benefits flow back to communities.

The conversation also explored expanding market reach through leveraging signature attractions, growing marketing capabilities, and facilitating more business events. This includes using data-driven campaigns and designing a cohesive narrative to position the North as a unique destination. Stakeholders highlighted the need for public-private collaboration, with an emphasis on infrastructure modernization and sustainable practices to ensure the long-term health of the tourism ecosystem.



Discussion Highlights: What We Heard

Indigenous-Led Tourism and Cultural Engagement

Overview

The Northern Regional Roundtable focused on the role of cultural tourism as a key driver of economic growth. Participants noted a promising increase in visitor awareness of Indigenous tourism offerings. Participants also noted that there is a continued need for investment in infrastructure and marketing capabilities to help local businesses attract foreign and domestic visitors. The conversation also touched on the importance of partnerships to amplify Indigenous voices, build career pathways for entrepreneurs, and target new markets.

Challenges

- **Limited Business Support**
Lack of resources, mentorship opportunities, and training programs to support Indigenous entrepreneurs in the development of tourism business across the territories.
- **Infrastructure and Marketing Needs**
Further investment in marketing capabilities and infrastructure to support Indigenous tourism businesses in attracting and sustaining visitors.
- **Workforce Development**
Persistent labour shortages and skills gaps for Indigenous people seeking opportunities in tourism, with a need for new programs and training opportunities to create clearer career pathways.

Opportunities

- **Collaborative Marketing Initiatives**
Collaborate with organizations such as the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC) to design joint marketing campaigns, elevating the profiles of Indigenous entrepreneurs and their businesses.
- **Empowering Local Entrepreneurs**
Work with local entrepreneurs to amplify Indigenous voices thereby developing new career pathways and opportunities for community members.
- **Driving Economic Benefits**
Leverage new and existing tourism products across the territories to ensure economic benefits flow back to Indigenous communities.

Leveraging Signature Attractions

Overview

The region's signature attractions must be leveraged to extend the tourism season and enhance the North's reputation as a tourism leader. Participants noted the success of previous initiatives, particularly one involving Destination Canada, Travel Manitoba, and the Yukon, executing a unified campaign to position Canada as the premier global destination for tourism in the North. Expanded flight offerings to the North were called for, as well as the opportunity for expanded expertise in destination attractions as significant drivers of year-round tourism growth.

Challenges

- **Lack of Marketing Capabilities**
Destinations and operators struggle to expand their digital presence and reach enough tourists to compete with similar attractions.
- **Expanded Expertise**
Accreditations and expanded expertise, including certification programs for guides and other labour measures, are needed to attract visitors to signature attractions.
- **Inadequate Flight Offerings**
Prioritizing seasonal flightpaths to Northern destinations prevents opportunities to grow interest in tourism offerings and attractions during off-peak seasons.

Opportunities

- **Data-Driven Insights**
Design targeted, data-driven marketing campaigns in priority markets to capitalize on such signature attractions as experiences involving the Northern Lights.
- **Regional Collaboration**
Expand regional partnerships to execute unified, high-impact tourism campaigns.
- **Shoulder Season Opportunities**
Grow interest in attractions during shoulder seasons and/or year-round to provide opportunities for local businesses.

Growing Global Market Reach

Overview

Discussions pointed to the importance of extending the region's global market reach. Participants noted a rise in visitors from Europe, particularly the United Kingdom and France, attributing this growth to new year-round direct flights from Toronto to Yellowknife. Dialogue also focused on the importance of collaboration to amplify the region's unique brand identity and compete effectively with other global destinations. The discussion also highlighted the value of working with the Indigenous associations to ensure authentic Indigenous experiences are featured and amplified in both local attractions and global marketing efforts.

Challenges

- **Competition in Global Markets**
Compose a strong and compelling brand narrative to effectively compete with other international tourist markets.
- **Need for International Cooperation**
Strengthen and design new collaborations outside of the region to expand market presence and facilitate new visitor streams.
- **Infrastructure and Product Gaps**
Diversify tourism offerings and modernize supporting infrastructure to grow the Northern tourism industry.

Opportunities

- **Leveraging European Interest and New Offerings**
Documented rise in European visitors to Canada's North due to expanded flight offerings presents an opportunity to build on momentum and implement more year-round flight offerings, expanding domestic and international travel service collaboration.
- **Amplifying a Cohesive Identity**
Collaborative efforts will allow for amplification of the North's unique brand identity and attract a diverse range of international visitors.

Expanding the Business Events Sector

Overview

The roundtable discussions highlighted a desire to expand the business events sector across the region. Participants emphasized the critical role that partnerships, both within the region and among national tourism bodies, could play in crafting a compelling marketing narrative that attracts high-value meetings and conferences. Conversations also addressed the expansion of networks through collaboration with local, regional, and national chambers of commerce and Indigenous organizations to build a supply chain capable of supporting a diverse range of business events spanning the five sectors of the tourism industry. Participants also noted a need for targeted marketing efforts that support the enhanced attraction of business events, highlighting the region's unique tourism strengths and value proposition.

Challenges

- **Identifying Regional Alignments**
It may be difficult to enhance inter-regional collaboration, with communities providing unique value propositions and perspectives across Canada's north.
- **Building a Robust Supply Chain**
Expansion of business events in Canada's North is contingent on identifying a network of suppliers to support high-value events. Aligning priorities and ensuring adequate representation across businesses is essential for equitable growth.

Opportunities

- **Unified Narratives**
Partner with regional and national bodies to create a powerful marketing narrative that highlights the North's unique value proposition as a premier destination for business events.
- **Network Expansion**
Work with local chambers of commerce and Indigenous organizations to build a robust chain of suppliers and venues to support a diverse range of business events.
- **Targeted Marketing**
Develop specialized marketing campaigns — highlighting environmental sustainability, resource management, and cultural industries— that attract industries aligning with the North's unique strengths.

Priority Action Items and Key Recommendations

Participants highlighted a critical need for strategic support to overcome challenges, seize opportunities, and enhance the resilience of the tourism sector. Four areas required action:

Workforce Development and Inclusivity

The roundtable identified bottlenecks in workforce development and a persistent need to attract and retain a skilled and diverse workforce. To eradicate these labour shortages and skills gaps, the tourism sector must invest in programs that create clear career pathways and development opportunities, particularly for youth, newcomers, and underrepresented groups.

- **Attract and Retain Talent**
Collaborate with organizations like Tourism HR Canada (THRC) to invest in programs that attract new talent and provide clear career pathways and skill development opportunities.
- **Promote Inter-Regional Collaboration**
Establish formal partnerships between northern and southern regions to facilitate resource and staff sharing. Businesses must identify opportunities for reciprocal staff sharing, training, and other workforce development opportunities.

Infrastructure and Investment

There is a need for strategic investment and modernization of infrastructure, especially in the aviation and marine industries. Northern infrastructure requires specialized design and maintenance to support tourism growth, increase connectivity, and ensure the long-term viability of the region.

- **Modernize Infrastructure**
Partner with provincial and federal governments to upgrade infrastructure, such as runways and marine facilities, to improve operational efficiency and accommodate growth.

Priority Action Items and Key Recommendations

Business Sustainability and Support

To ensure the long-term health of the region's tourism ecosystem, businesses need a robust support framework. This includes access to tools, training, and programs that help them build capacity, navigate challenges, and adopt sustainable practices to remain competitive, sustainable, and inclusive.

- **Foster a Sustainable Ecosystem**
Provide operators with tools, training, and support through dedicated programs to help them build capacity for long-term sustainability and navigate market challenges.
- **Empower Indigenous Voices**
Collaborate with Indigenous tourism associations and partners to ensure Indigenous voices are at decision-making tables, and that local Indigenous businesses receive tailored support.

Market Access and Diversification

The tourism sector must address challenges from evolving trade policies and enhance its digital presence to reach global markets. Fostering collaborative partnerships is also key to strengthening advocacy, expanding market access, and ensuring the industry remains competitive.

- **Enhance Digital Capabilities**
Invest in initiatives that enhance businesses' digital capabilities and strengthen their online presence and digital marketing potential to attract visitors.
- **Develop Diversified Tourism Products**
Support and incentivize the design of unique and diversified tourism products beyond traditional offerings to attract a wider range of visitors while creating new revenue streams.
- **Create a Powerful Narrative**
Work with national organizations to create a powerful tourism narrative that advocates for the sector with policymakers and helps Canadians understand its economic value: attracting investment, visitors, and business events to the region.



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