



REGIONAL ROUNDTABLE

What We Heard Report

**SASKATOON, SASKATCHEWAN
JUNE 3, 2025**

Introduction

The roundtable included participants from a wide assortment of backgrounds, including destination marketing organizations, local industry stakeholders, national associations, and individual operators. Discussions addressed challenges that prevent the long-term health, growth, and sustainability of the tourism sector. A primary concern is workforce development and chronic labour shortages—highlighting that public perception on tourism being a short-term job rather than a long-term career must be shifted.

Other key topics included cultural tourism and integrating Indigenous perspectives, as well as accessibility and inclusion. The discussions also underscored the importance of strategic partnerships and infrastructure modernization, including improved interprovincial transportation and digital connectivity.



Discussion Highlights: What We Heard

Workforce Development and Retention

Overview

The Prairies tourism sector faces significant labour shortages and high staff turnover, especially in seasonal positions. The discussions highlighted the need to change the public perception of tourism as a temporary job and instead promote it as a viable, long-term career path with opportunities for growth.

Challenges

- **Seasonal Employment**
The seasonal nature of many tourism roles makes it difficult to retain staff year over year, leading to high turnover of experienced employees.
- **Industry Perception**
The public perceives the tourism industry as a provider of only short-term, early-career development, rather than long-term opportunities, preventing it from attracting and retaining talent.

Opportunities

- **Targeted Training and Education**
Partner with local educational institutions to offer community members specialized tourism training in understaffed roles, with a focus on secondary school students and recent graduates.
- **Inclusive Hiring**
Position the tourism industry as a leader in the region for inclusion practices by making job descriptions and opportunities more inclusive and welcoming, driving further diversity and inclusion across tourism sectors.
- **Mentorship Opportunities**
Establish programs in which experienced tourism staff can share knowledge and best practices with newer colleagues, offering guidance and support for career transitions into the industry.

Destination Marketing and Expansion

Overview

The discussions highlighted the importance of invigorating the region's tourism brand and leveraging digital tools to reach new audiences. Participants noted a need for more strategic and collaborative marketing and for the expansion of tourist attractions to support the growth of individual operators.

Challenges

- **Lack of Digital Infrastructure**
Digital transformation is hindered by a lack of reliable digital connectivity in many remote areas, limiting the ability of businesses to leverage technology for marketing and operations.
- **Fragmented Marketing Efforts**
Tourism operators and destinations often lack a unified, collaborative approach to marketing, which can make it difficult to create comprehensive packages and itineraries that attract a wider audience and increase visitor length of stay.

Opportunities

- **Niche and Experiential Tourism**
Promote unique prairie experiences, such as winter activities, astro-tourism, and historical reenactments, that can be promoted to compete on the global stage.
- **Regional Connections**
Design a catalogue unique experience that can be consolidated for marketing efforts of the Prairie region, to instigate mutual growth throughout the provinces.
- **Local Promotion**
Encourage residents to become "tourists in their own land" by promoting local opportunities and supporting small businesses, while also fostering tourism from other prairie provinces.

Cultural and Indigenous Tourism

Overview

Discussion addressed cultural tourism and the integration of Indigenous perspectives into destination and their marketing. The goal is to expand authentic, Indigenous-led experiences that benefit the economy, address community priorities, and provide training for staff to ensure respectful and authentic interactions.

Challenges

- **Policy and Regulatory Hurdles**
Regulations hinder communities' ability to expand into new offerings, and delay project launches.
- **Infrastructure Barriers**
Inadequate infrastructure makes it difficult for tourists to access Indigenous communities and attractions in remote areas across the region.
- **Ensuring Authenticity and Representation**
It is crucial to respect Indigenous community values and ensure tourism initiatives are community-driven and authentic to their culture, avoiding misrepresentation.

Opportunities

- **Business Growth and Support**
Support the growth of Indigenous tourism businesses by providing market readiness, mentorship, and opportunities to build partnerships.
- **Community-Driven Sustainability**
Engage with local Indigenous communities on the value of tourism as a sustainable economic alternative to other industries, growing local sustainability initiatives while expanding tourism capabilities.
- **Community Support**
Address the issue of burnout among communities, ensuring that leaders have sufficient support to balance community and professional responsibilities as the region embraces Indigenous-led tourism.

Infrastructure and Interprovincial Collaboration

Overview

The discussions underscored the importance of strengthening the Prairies' tourism ecosystem through improved infrastructure initiatives and unified provincial efforts. Participants highlighted the need for better transportation, digital connectivity, and resource sharing to support businesses and enhance visitor experiences.

Challenges

- **Inadequate Infrastructure**
Transportation, digital connectivity, and rural signage are often inadequate and pose a major barrier to the growth of regional tourism.
- **Lack of Government Support**
Communities across the Prairies—particularly in the North—lack government support, which bears long-term consequences for the industry.
- **High Costs**
Unaffordable transportation continues to be a significant challenge for visitors to the Prairies.

Opportunities

- **Interprovincial Collaboration**
Opportunity for expanded collaboration among levels of stakeholders across provinces, expanding interprovincial supports for destination marketing, growth, and investment, especially in remote areas.
- **Cross-Sectoral Initiatives**
Drive economic growth by creating innovative tourism and workforce development opportunities across multiple provinces through cross-sectoral partnerships.
- **Multi-Purpose Infrastructure Upgrades**
Infrastructure challenges effect more than just the tourism industry. Upgrades will benefit multiple industries, driving economic growth across sectors.

Priority Action Items and Key Recommendations

Roundtable participants discussed industry challenges, community resilience, and visitor attraction. The following recommendations build on participant feedback and highlight the industry's growth potential.

Workforce and Talent Development

Chronic labour shortages, particularly for seasonal roles, lead to high staff turnover. There is a need to shift the perception of tourism as a temporary job to a viable, long-term career to attract and retain a stable workforce. To address this, participants recommended focusing on several key areas.

- **Implement Inclusive Policies**
Review and update organizational policies and recommendations across the region to ensure that businesses have the toolkits needed to remain more inclusive and supportive of all employees.
- **Implement Mentorship Programs**
Establish region-wide mentorship programs to support new employees – particularly those with barriers to employment – in navigating their roles and continuing to build meaningful careers in the industry.
- **Establish Employee Retention Initiatives**
Work with government to address the gaps in employee support that lead to high turnover across the industry, ensuring that businesses are empowered to keep employees full time year-round, ensuring stability and community growth.



Priority Action Items and Key Recommendations

Infrastructure and Connectivity

Inadequate transportation and digital connectivity hinder tourism growth in the region. Improved inter-provincial transportation and increased digital access will support visitor flow and tourism businesses in remote areas.

- **Improve Transportation Infrastructure**
Work with all levels of government to update the region's transportation infrastructure to grow the economy in their communities.
- **Introduce Accessible Infrastructure**
Collaborate with stakeholders and tourism associations to increase accessibility of tourism-support infrastructure, so that all visitors can enjoy the region's offerings.

Inclusive and Cultural Tourism

It is essential to ensure that the tourism sector more inclusive and accessible for all visitors and employees. The roundtable underscored that promoting authentic Indigenous tourism and supporting Indigenous leaders are crucial steps for continuing to build a respectful and culturally rich tourism ecosystem across the Prairies.

- **Indigenous Partnerships**
Introduce formal collaborations between government, destinations, and Indigenous communities to design and implement modern cultural tourism attractions across the region, while ensuring continued community ownership.
- **Entrepreneurship and Business Growth**
Support the growth and development of Indigenous tourism businesses by providing market readiness, mentorship, and opportunities to build partnerships.

Priority Action Items and Key Recommendations

Economic and Regulatory Support

Tourism operators require economic and structural relief to recover from past crises and ongoing challenges. The industry also needs more affordable and comprehensive insurance options, especially for small and seasonal businesses, to ensure their long-term viability. Participants highlighted the need for sustained economic support for operators across the region, enabling the industry's success in the long term.

- **Reduced Regulatory Burden**
Explore interprovincial collaboration and increased municipal engagement to streamline policies and reduce regulatory redundancies, such as harmonizing hunting licences and supporting more cross-jurisdictional experiences.
- **Increased Economic Relief**
Build security for businesses by providing economic and structural relief to ensure they can survive slow seasons, economic downturns, natural disasters, and other hardships.






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