



REGIONAL ROUNDTABLE

# What We Heard Report

RICHMOND, BRITISH COLUMBIA  
MARCH 28, 2025



# Introduction

The Western Regional Roundtable facilitated discussion by stakeholders who provided feedback on the state of the tourism sector in Western Canada and the systemic challenges it faces. Participants included individuals working in the tourism industry, operators, destination marketing organizations, and other key tourism industry stakeholders.

Priorities for the region include labour challenges, infrastructure development, the investment climate, sustainability, and market diversification. Participants underscored a need for strategic support from public and private investors to foster growth of the region's diverse tourism industry.



# Discussion Highlights: What We Heard

## Local Workforce Development

### Overview

The roundtable highlighted that the Western region's tourism sector faces significant challenges from labour shortages, staff retention, and public perception. Roundtable discussions emphasized a need for the industry to attract and retain a skilled and diverse workforce across sectors, exploring innovative human-resources practices to provide a more consistent talent pool, while also offering stable year-round opportunities. There is a need for innovative and stable workforce solutions that position careers in tourism as a viable option for those in post-secondary education.

### Challenges

- **Chronic Labour Shortages**  
The tourism industry faces ongoing labour shortages and a high degree of staff turnover, exacerbated by the seasonal nature of many roles, impeding the growth of small businesses across the country.
- **Career Pathway Perceptions**  
The tourism industry cannot attract talent due to the perception it comprises only entry-level jobs. Tourism roles must be presented as viable careers with many professional development opportunities.

### Opportunities

- **Policy Advocacy and Recruitment**  
Advocate for policy changes that improve pathways for newcomers and international workers, addressing chronic labour shortages in the region.
- **Innovative Employment Models**  
Explore new and innovative models for employment—including job-sharing and employment-sharing programs among local destinations with different peak seasons—providing year-round employment opportunities.
- **Educational Collaborations**  
Establish best practices for industry-institution collaborations, aligning curriculums with industry needs while promoting tourism as a viable career path.

## Infrastructure and Business Investment

### Overview

Participants in the roundtable highlighted a significant need for strategic investments to modernize infrastructure capabilities of the industry and foster growth in visitor numbers and sustainable practices. Public and private investment can ensure that the tourism industry will see positive shifts in tourist perception, visitor numbers, and the region's visitor economy.

### Challenges

- **Outdated and Insufficient Tourism Infrastructure**  
There is a recognized need for substantial improvements to infrastructure across the Western region, including transportation, digital connectivity, and clean public washrooms – especially for rural and remote destinations.
- **Accommodation Availability**  
Participants note that there is a shortage in hotel inventory, with significant practical and regulatory difficulties across the region impeding new projects.
- **Limited Investment**  
Lack of incentivization for private-sector investment in the Western tourism economy stifles the expansion of attractions, accommodations, restaurants, and critical infrastructure.
- **Challenging Funding Sources**  
Smaller destinations struggle to navigate complex funding sources and support programs, leading to inefficiency and duplication across efforts.

### Opportunities

- **Public-Private Partnerships**  
Leveraging public-private partnerships to encourage private-sector investment in tourism infrastructure and experiences that will increase capacity for visitors across the region.
- **Enhanced Connectivity**  
Increase digital connectivity to drive stronger online presences and marketing efforts throughout Western Canada, particularly its remote regions.
- **Resource Consolidation**  
Consolidate industry resources to support smaller, rural, and remote businesses in navigating programs.

## Sustainable and Regenerative Tourism

### Overview

As the region's tourism industry expands, there is a pressing need to balance economic growth with environmental stewardship and community well-being. Discussions focused on the transition to more environmentally conscious tourism practices, as well as tourism experiences themselves, particularly highlighting unique regenerative tourism opportunities available across the region.

### Challenges

- **Lack of Sustainable Infrastructure Solutions**  
Unsustainable waste management and a lack of sustainability initiatives impede environmental progress across the region.
- **Resource and Funding Gaps**  
A lack of ongoing funding prevents businesses from undertaking sustainability initiatives.
- **Priority Alignment**  
A balance must be struck that addresses both short-term economic growth and long-term sustainability.

### Opportunities

- **Community-Driven Initiatives**  
Promote local, community-driven initiatives and partnerships that leverage local resources, benefitting the region's economy across numerous channels.
- **Private-Sector Adoption**  
Foster private-sector involvement in the transition through a positive policy environment, encouraging the adaptation of regenerative practices that benefit the local economy.
- **Marketing Collaboration**  
Unify marketing approaches for sustainable and regenerative practices and highlight the region's unique sustainability value proposition.
- **Indigenous Collaboration**  
Leverage the knowledge provided by Indigenous entrepreneurs to incorporate regenerative tourism practices and integrate attractions with local indigenous communities and culture.

## Expanding Tourism Offerings

### Overview

The roundtable participants stressed that the Western tourism industry suffers from heavy seasonality, with a reliance on a select few peak months. The extension of tourism offerings beyond peak times to generate a more stable economy year-round was a major point of discussion among participants.

### Challenges

- **Dependence on Peak Seasons**  
The region's tourism sector relies dependent on a few peak months—shortened by climate change—casting uncertainty during off-peak and shoulder seasons.
- **Lack of Year-Round Opportunity**  
The seasonal nature of tourism impedes destinations from attracting and retaining workers who seek year-round, stable employment, resulting in high staff turnover and a lack of available labour.

### Opportunities

- **Coordinated Marketing**  
Design collaborative marketing initiatives across the region to showcase off-season travel opportunities, benefitting year-round economic growth.
- **Data and Visitor Insights**  
Leverage data analysis and direct insights from visitors to identify new markets for tourist attraction efforts, alongside opportunities for off-season attraction development.
- **Expanding Existing Initiatives**  
Capitalize on the success of high-value local attractions across the region to build new off-season attractions and events, expanding opportunities year-round.



## Priority Action Items and Key Recommendations

Participants highlighted the need to overcome the various challenges faced by destinations and operators across the region through the efforts of government and industry stakeholders. The following recommendations were put forth to realize the growth potential of the region's tourism industry.

### Labour Attraction, Retention, and Development

The roundtable discussions highlighted a pressing need for action taken to address workforce development, talent attraction, and retention challenges. Participants stressed that the region's workforce must remain strong and adaptable to changes across the tourism industry.

- **Workforce Advocacy**  
Coordinate efforts across governments to streamline training programs and grow the tourism talent pool, thereby addressing chronic labour shortages.
- **Employment Programs**  
Design employee-sharing programs for businesses with different peak seasons, generating stable and year-round opportunities for tourism professionals.



## Priority Action Items and Key Recommendations

### Infrastructure Modernization and Investment

The roundtable stressed the need for strategic investments and modernization of critical infrastructure to support the tourism industry's continued growth. Investment reduction has hindered project launches, infrastructure development, and, consequently, has negatively impacted the growth potential of the industry. Discussions surrounded the importance of engaging public and private actors to drive investment was discussed and to ensure that the region's tourism industry can thrive and remain competitive on a global scale.

- **Public-Private Partnerships**  
Leverage public-private partnership models and fund matching programs to sustain investment in tourism infrastructure and attraction projects.
- **Enhanced Transportation Infrastructure**  
Increase connectivity across the region by supporting regional air, highway, and rail services that improve overall accessibility and encourage a stronger, more comprehensive visitor experience.

### Community Partnerships, Sustainability, and Stewardship

Roundtable participants emphasized the importance of fostering collaboration across the tourism industry, while also balancing economic growth with social responsibility. Fostering community-first programs across tourism that would support capacity building and economic prosperity was discussed.

- **Indigenous Tourism Framework**  
Implement an Indigenous tourism framework to develop and integrate Indigenous tourism attractions across the region so that communities may support their economic development and tourism growth.
- **Community-Driven Initiatives**  
Leverage local leaders and resources to launch community-driven initiatives to support regenerative tourism activities, marketing initiatives, and other industry-enhancing ventures.
- **Resource Navigation Support**  
Create a resource for small business, rural destinations, and other groups to navigate complex government-funding and support programs, removing barriers to entry for all tourism providers.



## Priority Action Items and Key Recommendations

### Market and Product Diversification

Participants in the roundtable discussed a critical need to expand tourism offerings beyond the traditional – driving new attractions for travellers, more opportunities for businessowners, and growth for broader communities. To create this stability, the roundtable highlighted that the industry must continue to diversify its offerings and drive new marketing strategies to attract visitors throughout the year.

- **Coordinated Marketing Across Destinations**  
Coordinate marketing and promotional campaigns among regional destinations to attract visitors beyond peak months, showcasing unique off-season experiences and events.
- **Data-Driven Marketing and Product Development**  
Leverage data to understand visitor sentiment towards different attractions and destinations, using information to design targeted marketing campaigns and destination product development.





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