



REGIONAL ROUNDTABLE

What We Heard Report

Northern Region
November 7, 2025

Introduction

TIAC's Northern Regional Roundtable in Inuvik, Northwest Territories included participants from a wide range of backgrounds, including destination marketing organizations, local industry owners and operators, associations, and other local stakeholders. Conversations at the roundtable addressed the issues that the region is facing, and that are having impact on local tourism development. Participants noted concerns with business sustainability, and the ability for local operators to maintain continued growth in times of economic uncertainty.

Many topics were raised during the day with a strong focus on key drivers of growth and areas of concern for local industry members – including labour, infrastructure development, and regulation. The participants underscored the importance of increased collaboration between all stakeholders in the tourism industry – including government, operators, local businesses, and associations – to ensure that the region's tourism sector continues to thrive in the coming years.



Discussion Highlights: What We Heard

Workforce Development

Overview

Canada's Northern tourism sector depends heavily on skilled labour, yet training pipelines are limited and retention is undermined by functional and policy barriers. Participants noted that without a stronger workforce development foundation, strategies for continued tourism success will not have meaningful impact on communities and the broader region.

Challenges

- **Seasonality**
All workers face limited opportunities outside of peak tourism months. The lack of off-season employment, particularly for youth, make tourism roles unattractive for long-term career progression.
- **Skilled Labour Shortages**
The north's transportation industry, in particular, faces a pressing skilled labour shortage. Regional airlines are struggling to recruit and retain qualified pilots and mechanics. Training programs are scarce, and regulatory requirements make entry into the profession costly and time-consuming.

Opportunities

- **Youth Training Programs**
Accredited summer placements and apprenticeships with lodges, outfitters, and operators could give young people hands-on experience while earning school credit. This builds a pipeline of future workers and embeds tourism opportunities into their long-term career planning.
- **Immigration Streaming**
Dedicated immigration pathways for tourism workers could help fill critical gaps, particularly in specialized roles like pilots or culinary staff, while also diversifying the workforce. The region needs to see specialized roles filled in order to maintain growth of access for visitors.

Infrastructure

Overview

Participants highlighted infrastructure gaps as a major barrier to tourism growth. From community amenities like public rest areas to advanced needs like digital connectivity, participants stressed that the visitor experience is shaped by the quality and accessibility of infrastructure.

Challenges

- **Highway Facilities**
The Inuvik–Tuktoyaktuk Highway lacks rest areas, pull-outs, and bathroom facilities. Visitors note the lack of this infrastructure, which diminishes the appeal of road trips and associated outdoor activities in the region.
- **Digital Connectivity**
Limited cellular coverage and internet access make it difficult for visitors to plan, navigate, or share experiences. This presents safety concerns and dampens marketing potential for destinations and attractions across Canada's North.
- **Accessibility**
Accessibility was discussed not only in terms of mobility but also invisible disabilities, highlighting the need for inclusive design and accessible infrastructure to ensure universal accessibility for visitors and employees alike.

Opportunities

- **Federal Funding**
Programs like the Enable Accessibility Fund can be leveraged to upgrade facilities, ensuring compliance with accessibility standards and improving inclusivity across destinations and in individual attractions.
- **Collaborative Infrastructure Planning**
Partnerships across all levels of government and various participating industries – such as the mining sector – could share costs for rest areas, signage, and fuel logistics.
- **Interpretive Signage**
Pull-outs and rest areas could be enhanced with cultural and educational signage, turning necessary infrastructure upgrades into an opportunity for cultural storytelling and visitor engagement.

Transportation Regulation and Investment

Overview

Participants highlighted how regulatory frameworks and the challenging investment climate of today are directly affecting transportation businesses and the broader tourism viability across the region. Transport Canada rules, insurance costs, and fuel prices were seen as major obstacles for small airlines and charter operators. Without reform, many of these businesses risk closure, however, collaborative investment models and partnerships offer a key path forward.

Challenges

- **Regulatory Burdens**
Flight duty regulations, insurance premiums, and fuel costs make it difficult for small airline operators to remain competitive. Small businesses are unable to navigate complex regulatory hurdles, hurting tourism access in the region.
- **Aging Businesses**
Many airlines and attraction operators are owned by older operators who are retiring, with no succession plans in place. This creates instability for access and opportunities for visitors to the region, affecting the sector's continued growth.
- **Limited Incentives**
The current economic environment discourages people from starting new businesses, as regulatory and financial hurdles outweigh potential rewards. .

Opportunities

- **Collaborate Advocacy**
Targeted advocacy with Transport Canada could highlight northern realities, and a combined effort would help foster and sustain support measures such as scholarships, regulatory reviews, and training incentives to grow the local pool of skilled talent in the transportation industry.
- **Cross-Sector Synergies and Joint Investment Models**
New collaboration with other major sectors in the region, such as with the mining sector, could align transportation needs, reduce costs and create shared benefits for industries across the region. Businesses could combine resources to sustain airline and charter capacity, ensuring reliable access to remote destinations

Tourism Diversification

Overview

Seasonality is a core challenge in northern tourism, with long winters limiting visitor numbers and the accessibility of destinations. However, roundtable participants emphasized that cultural events, workshops, and culinary experiences could transform the region's off-season into an opportunity. Diversification not only extends the tourism calendar but also deepens visitor engagement with local communities.

Challenges

- **Off-Season Gaps**
The darkest winter months deter visitors, and few activities are currently marketed to fill this gap – it is necessary to develop infrastructure and attractions to bring new visitors to communities during off peak seasons.
- **Promotion and Marketing**
Local festivals and cultural events would benefit from increased promotion to boost the total visitation and potential economic impact of local community events throughout the year.

Opportunities

- **Package Offerings**
Bundling events like the Sunrise Festival into winter tourism packages could attract visitors during off-peak months, integrating new opportunities for sector growth throughout the year.
- **Culinary Tourism**
Collaborative industry partnerships with local restaurants, lodges, and bakeries help to broaden the local tourism ecosystem. Encouraging culinary partners to highlight northern cuisine, ingredients and traditions creates unique food-based experiences for visitors.

Collaboration and Partnerships

Overview

The roundtable discussions highlighted that increased collaboration is essential for the continued growth and success of the region's tourism industry. Participants underscored the importance of partnerships across communities, industries, and operators to generate more economic growth, increased visitation, and support local communities.

Challenges

- **Fragmented Efforts**
Participants noted that operators often work in isolation, limiting their collective ability to succeed and thrive in an increasingly complex landscape.
- **Scaling Risks**
Operators that are seeking opportunities to scale their businesses are met with significant challenges and risks – undermining the sustainability of new business ventures.

Opportunities

- **Regional Partnerships**
Joint marketing campaigns and visitor-ready training can strengthen competitiveness, ensuring that communities across the region are able to benefit equitably from greater visitation.
- **Familiarization Tours**
Hosting site visits and conferences allows partners to experience each other's products, building trust and collaboration. Participants noted the opportunity for operators to collaborate on package offerings, and for inter-industry collaboration for ongoing economic development.



Priority Action Items and Key Recommendations

Workforce Development

Labour shortages in the region require immediate remedies to ensure that the sector can remain stable and growing. Participants emphasized that without new training pathways, policy reform, and immigration support, the industry will struggle to sustain growth and attract new visitor streams.

- **Expand Accredited Training Programs**
Develop summer placements and apprenticeships with lodges and operators, formally recognized by schools and colleges, to build a pipeline of skilled youth workers.
- **Reform Housing and Subsidy Policies**
Advocate for adjustments to housing supports and income assistance thresholds to remove disincentives for employment, ensuring residents can take jobs without losing critical benefits.
- **Establish Tourism Immigration Pathways**
Work with federal partners to create dedicated immigration streams for tourism, targeting specialized roles with significant employment gaps such as pilots, mechanics, and culinary staff.

Infrastructure and Investments

Visitor experience is directly tied to infrastructure quality and accessibility. The roundtable underscored that gaps in highway amenities, digital connectivity, and accessible facilities undermine competitiveness and inclusivity. Addressing these issues requires coordinated investment and advocacy, ensuring that all infrastructure development is produced sustainably and with all end users in mind.

- **Upgrade Highway Amenities**
Integrate rest areas, bathrooms, and interpretive signage into reconstruction plans for infrastructure upgrades – ensuring increased safety, better accessibility, and a growth in cultural awareness.
- **Leverage Accessibility Funding**
Promote use of the federal Enable Accessibility Fund to retrofit facilities, making tourism inclusive for people with visible and invisible disabilities.
- **Expand Digital Connectivity**
Prioritize investments in cellular coverage and internet access across the region and specifically along tourism routes, enabling visitors to plan, navigate, and share experiences more effectively throughout the region. This connectivity will also support the ongoing safety of visitors and locals alike, with increased support and access to information.

Priority Action Items and Key Recommendations

Economic and Regulatory Support

Tourism operators in the North face disproportionate financial and regulatory pressures. Small airlines and seasonal businesses are particularly vulnerable to high insurance costs, fuel prices, and complex Transport Canada rules. Without targeted relief, many risk closure, undermining access to remote communities and weakening the tourism ecosystem.

- **Transportation Advocacy**
Persistent advocacy is needed to highlight northern realities, including pilot shortages, flight duty rules, and insurance costs and propose measures such as regional regulatory review, and training incentives to support workforce development.
- **Collaborative Investment Models**
Encourage operators and regional tourism stakeholders to pool resources into shared airline and charter ventures, reducing individual risk and sustaining reliable access to remote destinations.

Tourism Diversification and Partnerships

Seasonality and fragmentation limit tourism's potential in the North. By embedding cultural programming, culinary tourism, and collaborative marketing into tourism products, operators can extend the visitor calendar and strengthen regional competitiveness.

- **Festival and Event Packaging**
Create bundled tourism products around cultural events, offering curated itineraries that attract visitors during off-peak months.
- **Visitor Welcoming Tools**
Developing welcome primers and short videos would help visitors understand cultural nuances across destinations, enhancing both respect and integration of visitors into communities.
- **Cooperative Marketing Campaigns**
Initiate joint international marketing efforts, particularly around Aurora viewing and seasonal packages, to expand reach and attract new markets.



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