



TOURISM BRITISH COLUMBIA
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Research & Planning

Profile of Visitors to Williams Lake Summer 2008

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Profile of Visitors to Williams Lake study was a comprehensive survey of travellers to the Williams Lake region between June and August, 2008. In addition, this study was part of Tourism British Columbia's Value of the Visitor Centre research program, which examined the users of the Williams Lake Visitor Centre between June and August, 2008.

Funding for this study came from Tourism British Columbia's Visitor Centre Network and Community Tourism Foundations® programs.

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- Williams Lake Visitor Centre
- Museum of the Cariboo Chilcotin
- The Station House Gallery
- Scout Island Nature Centre
- The City of Williams Lake

This report was written by Karim Dossa on contract with Research & Planning, Tourism British Columbia.

Executive Summary

The Profile of Visitors to Williams Lake study was undertaken in the summer (June 2 through August 29) of 2008. The study was designed to provide information on the characteristics of travellers to Williams Lake for two purposes; to support marketing plan design and product development in the Williams Lake region, and to assess the impact of the Williams Lake Visitor Centre (VC) on the Williams Lake region and British Columbia. Funding for this project was provided by Tourism British Columbia's Visitor Centre Network and Community Tourism Foundations® programs. The project was managed and carried out by Tourism British Columbia's Research & Planning department.

The study objectives were:

1. To profile travellers who visit Williams Lake in terms of traveller and trip characteristics.
2. To profile travellers who use the Williams Lake VC in terms of traveller and trip characteristics.
3. To estimate the influence of the Williams Lake VC on the decision-making process of travellers in British Columbia, on the length of stay, expenditures, and selection of additional or alternative activities, attractions or destinations.

A multi-location survey design developed to achieve the study objectives included interviewing travellers at the Williams Lake VC and at a number of Reference Sites (i.e. Scout Island Nature Centre, the Museum of the Cariboo Chilcotin and the Station House Gallery) that are frequented by travellers. Due to low volumes of travellers at the Reference Sites it was decided midway through the field season to interview travellers only at the Williams Lake VC to satisfy the objectives of the Value of the Visitor Centre research program. As a result, the Profile of Visitors to Williams Lake study focused on study objectives #2 and #3.

A two-stage survey design was used, which included on-site interviews that collected information from travellers during their trip and a mailback questionnaire that collected information from travellers after their trip. The purpose of the mailback questionnaire was to gather information about trip motivation, planning, experiences and activities, to compare mid-trip and post trip perceptions regarding the VC's impact on traveller behaviour, and to understand travellers' perceptions of Williams Lake and British Columbia upon trip completion.

- Between June 2 and August 29 of 2008, 1,380 people were approached at the Williams Lake VC, 983 agreed to the interview, but 36 were excluded because of previous participation and another 357 were excluded because they were from the Williams Lake region. Thirty-four surveys were excluded from analysis due to small sample sizes, which included tour group travellers, business day trippers and non-business day trippers. Also excluded were eight respondents that were either long-term travellers or incomplete surveys resulting in a total of 540 useable surveys that were analyzed for the purposes of this report.
- Fifty percent of travellers at the Williams Lake VC agreed to complete the mailback survey and of those who agreed, seventy percent completed the survey.

Overnight Non-Business Travellers

- At the Williams Lake VC, almost half (49%) of travellers were from British Columbia, a fifth were from the U.S. (20%) or from outside North America (18%), while fewer were from other provinces or territories in Canada (13%).
- Overall, the average party size was 2.4 people and 19% of travel parties had children. Those parties with children had an average of 3.7 people travelling in their group.
- On average, respondents had taken 4.6 leisure trips over the previous 12 months.
- Half (50%) of the travellers had previously been to the Williams Lake region. British Columbia residents (74%) had the highest incidence of previous visitation followed by Canadians from other provinces (11%), the U.S. (9%) and other international travellers (7%).
- The majority of travellers at the Williams Lake VC were travelling for leisure purposes (76%), while fewer were travelling to visit friends and family (23%) or other purposes (2%).
- Half (50%) of the travellers were staying in campgrounds/RV parks and over a quarter (30%) were staying in resorts/hotels/motels. Fewer were staying with friends or relatives (15%), cabin/cottages (2%), B&B (1%), fishing lodge (<1%) or in other types of accommodations (2%).
- Almost half of the travellers (46%) had a destination somewhere within British Columbia, a third (33%) were touring with no particular primary destination and the remaining 22% had primary destinations outside British Columbia. Most of the visitors who were travelling to destinations within British Columbia were travelling to the Cariboo Chilcotin Coast (18%).
- Travellers at the Williams Lake VC planned to spend an average of 26 days away from home, including 13 days in British Columbia and 2 days in Williams Lake. One-fifth (20%) of the travellers indicated that they were just passing through Williams Lake.
- Most travellers (71%) at the Williams Lake VC used a car/truck/motorcycle as their primary mode of transportation, whereas fewer travelled in a recreational vehicle (28%).
- In the mailback survey, travellers were asked about leisure activities they participated in during their trip. The three most frequently cited activities by visitors at the Williams Lake VC were visiting municipal/provincial/national parks (74%), wildlife viewing (63%) and visiting museum, heritage or historic sites (61%).
- Travellers were asked about leisure activities they participated in while in the Williams Lake region. The most frequently cited activities included shopping for local arts and crafts (39%), visiting municipal/provincial/national parks (29%), wildlife viewing (25%) and visiting museum, heritage or historic sites (25%).
- The majority of travellers (79%) spent three weeks or more planning their trip.

- When planning their trip, only 34% of travellers in Williams Lake considered another destination or route for their trip. Of those that considered other destinations, more than four-fifths (84%) considered a destination within British Columbia, 11% considered other Canadian destinations, 3% considered Alaska, 2% considered other U.S. destinations and none considered other international destinations. The majority of travellers that considered a British Columbia destination mentioned the Cariboo Chilcotin Coast.
- Past experience/been there before (62%), visitor guides and brochures (58%) and advice from friends/relatives (47%) were the top three information sources used before travel. Also important, but less frequently used information sources included visitor centres (40%), local/regional tourism sites (33%) and other internet sites (33%).
- Visitor Centres (84%) and visitor guides and brochures (65%) were most frequently cited as information sources used during the trip by mailback respondents. Also important but less frequently used information sources included past experience/been there before (34%), advice from friends/relatives (31%) and travel guide books (22%).
- One-third of the travellers (33%) were very flexible with the amount of time that they could spend in Williams Lake. Overall, respondents were somewhat more flexible in terms of spending additional time in British Columbia, as almost half of the travellers (46%) indicated they could extend their trip in British Columbia by an extra day or days.
- In addition to planning ahead, travellers like to book some aspects of their trips prior to leaving their residence. Accommodation (30%) and transportation (30%) were the two areas where a large proportion of pre-booking was observed.
- Positive images of the Williams Lake region were dominated by the beautiful scenery/landscapes of the region, the presence of family and friends and friendly people, the visitor information centre, lack of crowds and the lakes and rivers.
- Negative images of the Williams Lake region focussed on social problems/drugs/crime, unattractive run-down town, dirtiness, traffic and the lack of major attractions.
- Beautiful scenery/landscapes, stampede/rodeo and ranching were most frequently cited as unique characteristics of the Williams Lake region by mailback respondents.
- A friendly town, relaxed, safe and calm with informative and helpful people were mentioned often by mailback respondents in describing the mood or atmosphere of Williams Lake.
- Almost three-quarters (73%) of all travellers at the Williams Lake VC spoke with a Visitor Information Counsellor.
- Almost three-fifths (59%) of mailback respondents visited another visitor centre in British Columbia during their trip.

- Respondents to the mailback questionnaire were asked to rate various components of their trip and their overall travel experience in the Williams Lake region. Ratings were high for overall travel experience and for each trip component, especially access to information about Williams Lake and customer service.
- Over three-quarters (79%) of respondents reported spending time in the Williams Lake region. While in the region, one in four (25%) respondents visited the Scout Island Nature Centre, almost a quarter (23%) visited the Museum of the Cariboo Chilcotin, over an eighth (15%) visited the Station House Gallery whereas only a handful (4%) reported visiting the Williams Lake Stampede.
- Over two-thirds of mailback respondents were 'very likely' (43%) or 'likely' (25%) to return to the Williams Lake region.
- In terms of likelihood of taking another leisure trip in British Columbia, an overwhelming majority of travellers indicated that they were either 'very likely' (75%) or 'likely' (15%) to take another trip.
- Respondents to the mailback questionnaire were asked about their satisfaction with their trip in British Columbia. The majority of travellers were either 'very satisfied' (78%) or 'somewhat satisfied' (10%) with their experience in all of British Columbia.
- Travellers at the Williams Lake VC spent an average of \$164.44 per party per day. Average daily expenditure **per person** was also calculated, with the result being \$67.41 per person per day. There were notable differences in expenditures when broken down by origin of the travellers, primary accommodation type, travel party size and age.
- The Williams Lake Visitor Centre had a positive impact on traveller behaviour. Almost half (48%) of the travellers said that they learned about new trip activities as a result of their stopping at the Visitor Centre. Over a quarter (29%) replied they would spend extra time in the Williams Lake region, 32% would spend extra time in other parts of British Columbia, and half (50%) would make another trip in/to British Columbia as a result of the information obtained at the Visitor Centre.

Overnight Business Travellers

- Overnight business travellers comprised about 9% of all travellers in the Williams Lake region in the summer of 2008.
- Over three-quarters (77%) of these business travellers were from British Columbia, almost a sixth were from other provinces or territories in Canada (15%) whereas fewer were from the U.S. (4%) or from outside North America (4%).

- Overall, the average party size for overnight business travellers was 2.1 people and 13% of travel parties had children. Those parties with children had an average of 3.8 people travelling in their group.
- The average trip length for overnight business travellers was 25 days away from home, of which 20 days were spent in British Columbia and 8 in the Williams Lake region. Trip length was noticeably different based on the origin of the business traveller. British Columbians spent less time away from home (21 days) and in the Williams Lake region (6 days) than did the average overnight business traveller interviewed at the Williams Lake VC.
- The average daily expenditures for overnight business travellers visiting the Williams Lake region was \$197 per travel party or \$105 **per person**. On a per person basis, overnight business travellers from British Columbia spent the least amount during their visit to the Williams Lake region. Larger parties also spent noticeably less, on average, than did solo travellers.
- Compared to overnight non-business travellers, overnight business travellers stayed longer (8 days vs. 2 days) and spent noticeably more during their visit to the Williams Lake region (\$197 vs. \$164 per party; \$105 vs. \$67 per person) during the summer of 2008.