



OKANAGAN VALLEY

DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

HIGHLIGHTS



DESTINATION
BRITISH COLUMBIA

THANK YOU

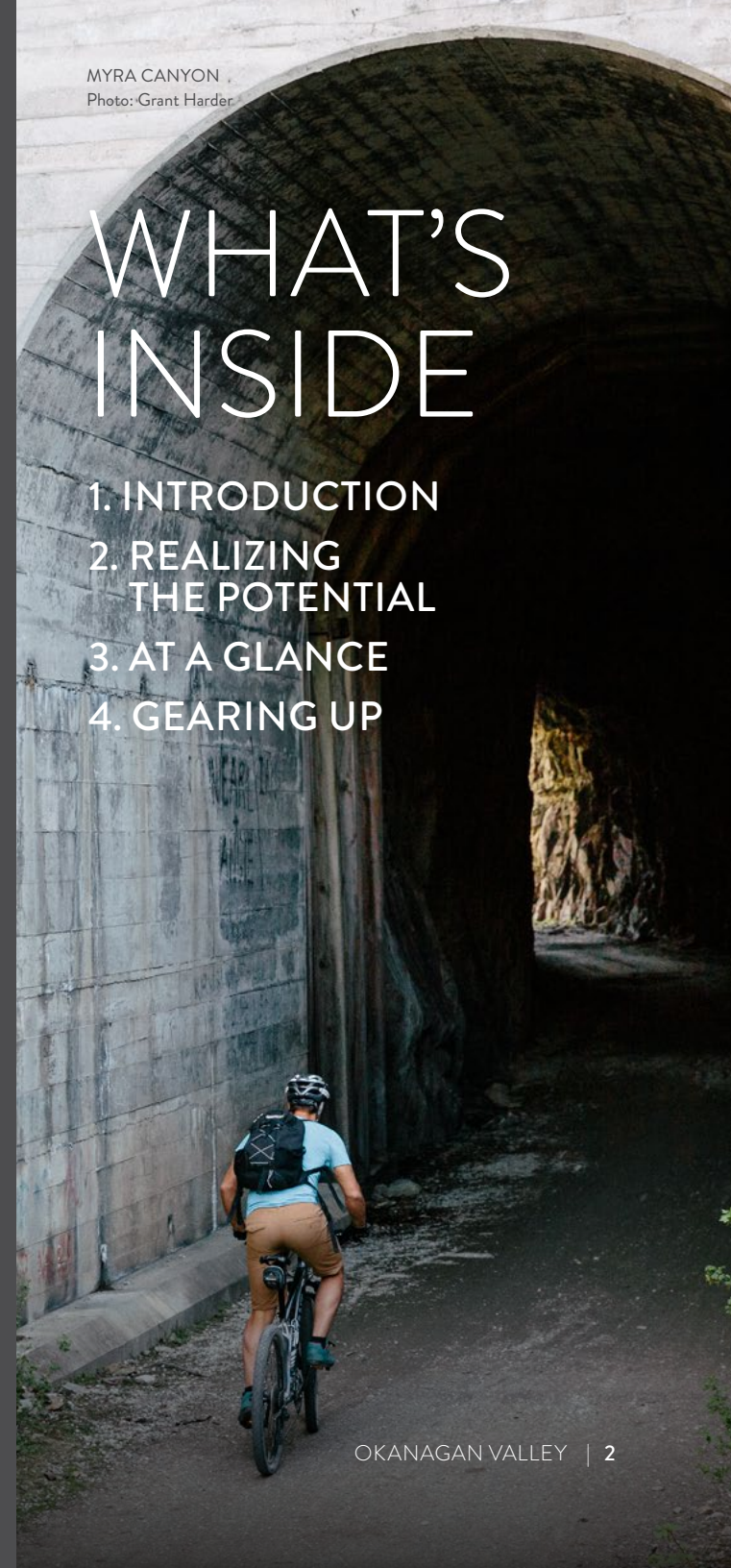
The Okanagan Valley Destination Development Strategy is the outcome of a nineteen-month, iterative process of gathering, synthesizing, and validating information with tourism partners about the current status and future direction of tourism in the Okanagan Valley planning area.

We thank the Syilx people and the Okanagan Nation on whose traditional territories we gathered for meetings in Kelowna and Summerland.

Thank you to our tourism partners who participated in the process by attending community meetings, participating in surveys and interviews, engaging in follow-up conversations, and forwarding relevant documents and insights. Special thanks to the members of the Working Group, as well as the facilitator of the destination development process.

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1 INTRODUCTION

WHY A STRATEGY?

The Okanagan Valley Destination Development Strategy was developed to enhance the competitiveness of the Okanagan Valley planning area over the next 10 years and beyond. The strategy was developed as part of Destination BC's Destination Development Program to support and guide the long-term growth of tourism in British Columbia. This document presents some of the key highlights of the Okanagan Valley strategy.

WHO IS IT FOR?

The Okanagan Valley Destination Development Strategy is a guide for tourism partners in the planning area as they work collaboratively to grow the visitor economy. The strategy will be reviewed and updated to reflect changing tourism objectives, priorities, and market conditions. Results will be tracked and learning outcomes will inform future implementation activities, thereby optimizing their effectiveness in increasing economic, social, environmental, and cultural benefits for the entire Okanagan Valley planning area.

WHERE IS IT FOR?

The Okanagan Valley planning area encompasses the Regional District of Central Okanagan (RDCO), electoral areas A (Osoyoos Rural), C (Oliver Rural), D (Kaleden/OK Falls), E (Naramata), and F (Okanagan Lake West/West Bench) of the Okanagan Similkameen Regional

District, and part of electoral area E (West Boundary) of the Regional District of Kootenay Boundary. Municipalities include Lake Country, Kelowna, West Kelowna, Peachland, Summerland, Penticton, Oliver, Keremeos, and Osoyoos. The planning area includes most of the Okanagan Valley, Sakha Lake, and the Okanagan River.

WHERE DOES IT FIT?

The Okanagan Valley is one of 20 planning areas across BC for which destination development strategies are being developed. Each planning area represents a logical destination for visitors in and around the province. As planning areas span across multiple jurisdictions, the importance of adopting an integrated approach with a shared vision and coordinated investment is critical. The Okanagan Valley Destination Development Strategy is one of seven that will be prepared for the Thompson Okanagan tourism region. The other six planning area strategies include the Shuswap-North Okanagan, the North Thompson and Nicola Valleys, the Gold Rush Trail, Interlakes, the Highway 1 Corridor, and the Highway 3 Corridor. In time, informed by the outcomes of all relevant planning area destination development strategies, regional strategies will be developed. In the case of the Thompson Okanagan tourism region, these planning area strategies will work towards an update of the 2012 regional strategy called Embracing Our Potential. These will, in turn, inform

the creation of a provincial destination development strategy thereby ensuring a truly integrated and cohesive combination of bottom-up and top-down destination planning.

A KEY IMPERATIVE

The recommendations contained within the Okanagan Valley Destination Development Strategy form the foundation for additional, focused, and aligned discussions regarding implementation. It will be important to ensure the strategy becomes embedded in local, regional, provincial, and federal decision making processes. It is only by working collaboratively, in an integrated way with a shared agenda, that the full potential of the Okanagan Valley planning area will be realized.

AT A GLANCE

In what follows, the distinctiveness of the destination is summarized, and its vision for tourism introduced. While acknowledging the challenges the sector faces, its potential for growth is set out in terms of key opportunities and experience development potential. A consideration of each development priority and associated actions then follows. While further detail on each of these elements is available in the full strategy, they are brought together "At A Glance" to demonstrate the scope of the integrated nature of the approach being taken.

2 REALIZING THE POTENTIAL

A DISTINCTIVE DESTINATION

The Okanagan is a landscape of low hills, oblong lakes, and large glacial deposits left by the last ice age. Sediments eroded by water and wind resulted in large alluvial fans and deltas on which the major cities of Kelowna and Penticton stand. The Okanagan Valley watershed drains south through the Okanagan River into the Columbia River.

The dry, sunny climate and fertile landscapes have created a rich agricultural and recreation legacy, vibrant lakeshore communities, and a relaxing and fulfilling lifestyle. With an average of more than 2,100 hours of sunshine per year and very little precipitation, the area is an exceptional setting for nature-based activity and agritourism.

Visitors participate in many activities including golfing, hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking, swimming, parasailing, water sports, winery tours, and more. Next to the Fraser Valley, the Okanagan Valley is the most important agricultural region in British Columbia, with the primary crop being fruit trees. The Okanagan is home to many award-winning wineries. In winter, some of the best downhill skiing in North America can be found at its three major ski resorts. Skiing, snowboarding, Nordic skiing, ice fishing, and other winter activities are popular in the planning area.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES

The planning area faces a number of challenges, including the affordability and availability of accommodations, the lack of integrated regional transportation, lake access, signage and way-finding, the sustainability of trails, market awareness of experiences, seasonal closures, and the management of natural disasters. However, these challenges lead to key opportunities including:

- A Regionally coordinated water management plan
- Ongoing development of trails and experiences
- Sustainability policies and building on the Biosphere Destination certification program
- Regional transit/transportation plans and active transportation plans
- Building on Summerland's Affordability Study
- Coordination of regional festivals and events
- Strengthening of Indigenous tourism and developing protocols for sharing stories and important sites
- Larger event venue(s) in Kelowna
- Building on the semi-arid character of the area
- Improved lakefront development policy
- Greater diversity of accommodations

EXPERIENCE POTENTIAL

The current and future experiences that will motivate travel and differentiate the destination with a compelling, sustainable visitor experience include:

- **A RECREATION: OASIS** — water-based recreation and beaches, mountain biking, golf, ski, winter fun, rail trails, indulgent experiences, and sporting excellence.
- **ECO-DIVERSITY** South Okanagan grasslands, brush, desert, wetlands and rivers, geology, and the agrarian and natural environment.
- **THE OKANAGAN FIRST NATIONS** the geography of the territory, Interior Salish-authentic stories and traditions, arts, crafts, fisheries and use of natural resources, and contemporary experiences.
- **VALLEY LIFE** agrarian diversity and wineries, farm gate and roadside stalls, artists and artisans, small town hospitality, new technologies, and The Brigade Trail, and mining heritage.
- **RELAXED URBAN ENERGY** the sophistication of larger urban areas, entertainment, resorts and lifestyle accommodations, shopping, and niche culinary.

3 AT A GLANCE

VISION STATEMENT A semi-arid valley and plateau region offering a distinctive diversity of lakes, orchards and vineyards, pine forests, and mountain backcountry — bursting with a cornucopia of flavours and providing a backdrop for year-round active fun and challenge. A destination offering relaxed urban energy fused with the inter-play of traditional and living Okanagan First Nations culture, and the heritage and stories of more recent times.

THEME 1

A SUSTAINABLE APPROACH: PLANNING AND SUSTAINING THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

SEE IT THROUGH

Drawing on the Biosphere Interdepartmental Committee, develop a method to oversee the implementation of the destination development strategy and monitor its progress. Develop a simple model that can be used to organize metrics, indicators, and sources required to benchmark and measure change.

SECURE ACCESS

Prepare a digital handbook which provides advice on how to access Crown tenures and guidelines on appropriate use. Consider setting up a regional advocacy group to facilitate tourism access to Crown lands. Raise awareness of new regulations through the hosting of one-day workshops or seminars for tourism operators.

TOURISM MATTERS

Encourage local government to address the needs of tourism in Official Community Plans, regional growth strategies, regional context statements, and implementation agreements. Continue regular dialogue on destination development with local government and harness the latter's technological capacity to improve tourism services such as trail mapping.

BE PREPARED

Develop a comprehensive tourism disaster and emergency program that helps communities and industry prepare for, educate, measure, mitigate, and adjust to major natural environmental events.

MEASURE, MITIGATE, AND MANAGE

Develop a carrying capacity framework for the Okanagan Valley to address the biophysical, economic, and social impacts of tourism. Enable communities and businesses to measure existing and potential imbalances and guide them in adopting appropriate mitigation measures.

FOCUS ON WATER

Work with the Okanagan Basin Water Board and the Okanagan Water Stewardship Council to profile water-based tourism within water, river, and lake management planning. Ensure water-related stories are interpreted within the visitor experience. Promote best practices in water quality standards, use, efficiency, conservation, and encourage industry to adopt water sustainability accreditation.

REALIZE THE AMBITION

Notwithstanding the complexity of the process, work with First Nations and all levels of government to realize the proposed South Okanagan Grassland National Park Reserve (NPR). In profiling tourism within the process, establish a local working group to mediate the potential tourism impacts as well as the benefits arising from NPR designation.

PURSUE EXCELLENCE

Within the context of the Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association's (TOTA) Biosphere destination accreditation, work with local government to develop initiatives in sustainable product development, energy efficiency, and carbon footprint tracking. Address persistent gaps in visitor services through the promotion of shared provisions.

HARNESS BIG DATA

Continue to work with partners to find the most effective ways to employ big data in understanding and influencing the pattern of visitor movement within the destination.

DELIVER EXCEPTIONAL TRAILS

Develop a trail destination identity for the entire region. Adopt an integrated approach to trail development that includes consideration of hiking, rail trails, mountain biking, road biking, and equestrian trails. Develop a guidebook for communities and tour operators to help them evolve exceptional trail-based experiences.

3 AT A GLANCE

THEME 1 CONTINUED

FOLLOW THROUGH

Work with strategic partners to ensure that the Kettle Valley Railway (KVR) masterplan is supported by local governments and provincial ministries to further maximize the tourism potential of the KVR trail corridor. Encourage the government of BC to manage the trail in collaboration with local regional districts and trail stewardship groups in alignment with the KVR masterplan's vision for enhanced recreational opportunities for all user groups. Understanding sacrifices by certain user groups should be made in certain areas in order for the trail potential to be reached.

FOCUS ON FIRST NATIONS

Identify opportunities for First Nations to become more actively involved in trail activities. Within the context of an Okanagan Indigenous Tourism Strategy, explore developing Indigenous-themed huts on long distance trails; an Indigenous Youth Mountain Biking initiative, and indigenous-themed interpretation on the trail networks, amongst other opportunities.

OFF-ROAD TOURING

Building on the Recreation Sites and Trails British Columbia's (RSTBC) Bear Creek Off Road Vehicle Recreation Site infrastructure, promote motorized trail services and guided experiences. Engage with BC Parks and Off Road Vehicle (ORV) groups to develop a marketable visitor experience supported by services and amenities that could be provided over time.

KEEP IMPROVING

In conjunction with RSTBC and local government, develop a framework for building, operating, maintaining, and managing the trail networks in the Okanagan. Research best practices in inter-regional trail alliances; develop guidance on volunteering, conflict resolution, project prioritization, and funding for stewardship groups. Identify options for deriving sustainable revenue streams from trail users.

ADOPT AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

Work to ensure that trail signage and wayfinding is clear, coherent, and consistent. Deploy real-time information technology to direct visitors to locations that can accommodate more use thereby relieving areas under pressure. Develop better trail use metrics and tracking programs.

THEME 2

GET GOING: TRANSPORTATION, CONNECTIVITY, AND SUPPORTING INFRASTRUCTURE

ADDRESS VITAL CONNECTIONS

Work with local stakeholders to integrate and connect their transportation strategies and infrastructure. Address inter-regional transportation and transit connections between communities and the airports. Promote private sector shuttle services between airports, resorts, wineries, trailheads, as well as lake transportation, car rentals, ride-sharing, and bike sharing.

FUTURE PROOF

Develop a research repository of electrification trends and developments in transportation. Host a Tourism and Transportation Forum to align and leverage transportation infrastructure investments across different levels of government, consider the role of the private sector in providing transit solutions, and share best practices in technology-enabled

customer services

BETTER CONNECTED BY AIR

Investigate how the smaller airports in Penticton, Oliver, and Osoyoos might leverage an increase in inbound visitors through Kelowna Airport. In exploring opportunities for air tourism, work with smaller air service providers to encourage and promote more air travel to the planning area. Assess the feasibility of providing an airport.

INNOVATE TO COMPETE

Create a Technology Taskforce to promote the use of technology and innovation to enrich the visitor experience and increase product competitiveness. Explore the potential of provincial open data initiatives to support tourism technology innovation.

STAY CONNECTED

In working to improve broadband services throughout the Okanagan Valley planning area, develop a regional strategy designed to close gaps in coverage. Work with DMOs to clearly inform visitors of mobile coverage and wi-fi availability, especially in remote locations.

WAKE-UP CALL

Work with local government to address the affordable housing issue. Review best practices adopted elsewhere and identify remedies that could be applied in the planning area. Adopt short-term rental policies that balance visitor choice with regulatory equity, and explore the innovative use of housing stock to accommodate seasonal workers.

3

AT A GLANCE

THEME 3

FULLY PREPARED: INDUSTRY READINESS

TRAIN, RECRUIT, AND RETAIN

Work collaboratively with educational institutions to identify industry requirements, the need for better skills, training for seasonal jobs, and other labour supply issues. Establish a tourism education and training advisory committee to make recommendations on training needs/opportunities. Create more flexible access to temporary workers from abroad.

PROVIDE INDIGENOUS SUPPORT

Support the expansion of training programs and tourism career opportunities for Indigenous Peoples. Encourage Indigenous Tourism Association of British Columbia (ITBC) to identify tailored solutions for connecting Indigenous workers with local tourism employers and encourage more local uptake and delivery of labour market programs.

EXPAND THE PROGRAM

Continue to enhance tourism operator competitiveness through the delivery of the Remarkable Experiences workshops. Work with local DMOs to deliver the workshops in smaller communities to increase outreach and uptake.

VALUE AND COMMUNICATE

Communicate the findings of relevance for the planning area from DBC's Value of Tourism findings. Create an online tool and dashboard that communities can use to determine the local value of tourism. Encourage local DMOs to apply the tool and promote the results to their communities.

MEASURE AND EVALUATE

Within the context of a performance measurement framework, develop a vital signs report card or dashboard to enable the planning area to track the performance of tourism. Explore opportunities to utilize public data sets as a way to facilitate operators who may be keen to investigate new product development.

THEME 4

EXCEED EXPECTATIONS: VISITOR EXPERIENCE

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Building on the strength of the destination's reputation for producing quality produce, develop new experiences based on existing agritourism products. Develop a farm tour program, promote farm camping and farm study, and create themed winery tours and events. Explore opportunities to link and package these experiences with outdoor recreation, culture and heritage, and culinary activities.

GREAT TASTE

Further build and connect existing culinary trails. Encourage the "farm to table" concept thereby connecting local producers with visitors through dining, farmers' markets, and farm gate initiatives. Create more accessible and user-friendly "Buy Local, Buy Fresh" maps.

SIP AND SAVOUR

Survey winery visitors to better understand their travel motivations, behaviours, activities, and satisfaction levels. Work with the BC Wine Institute to expand the scope of wine tourism by linking the experience to the wider tourism offer in terms of recreation, food, culture, and/or heritage.

A DISTINCTIVE STORY

Work with museums and historical organizations to develop a "story project" that captures the essence of the area's cultural and historical significance. Provide story narratives for tourism operators to use in enhancing the appeal and distinctiveness of the experiences they offer.

A DISTINCTIVE VOICE

Work with First Nations to increase the availability and competitiveness of Indigenous experiences. Assist Indigenous operators in developing and packaging Indigenous experiences that can be augmented with other product development opportunities such as glamping, camping, nature encounters, heritage tours, storytelling, and arts and crafts trails.

ENGAGE AND INVOLVE

Engage First Nations in tourism planning across all levels in the destination. Work with ITBC to identify and develop market-ready Indigenous tourism experiences. Within the context of adding depth to the visitor's experience of the heritage offer, engage First Nations in the cultural mapping of their traditional territories, watersheds, and place names.

SENSE OF PLACE

Increase the touring appeal of rural towns and their experiences. Expand on DBC's tourism asset inventory to include consideration of the cultural heritage of towns (architecture, art, commerce, customs, cuisine, history, geography, people) and use this information to diversify and bundle experiences.

4 GEARING UP

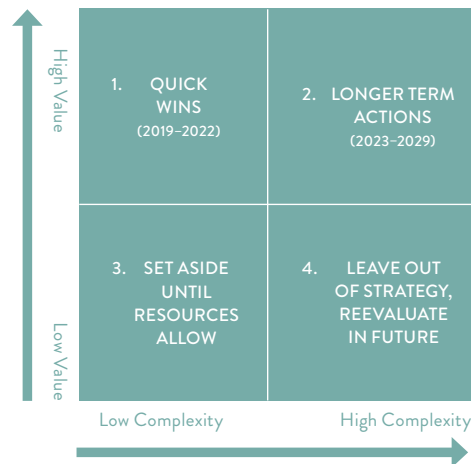
SUCCESS NETWORKS

This strategy is intended to inform actions for the future, which over time may be embedded in local, regional, and provincial decision making. The result will be an integrated system of priorities to achieve better development decisions, drive greater tourism revenues, and realize benefits for businesses and communities in the Okanagan Valley planning area. All of this will contribute to a thriving, vibrant, and growing economy.

Joint strategy ownership among all planning area tourism partners is a critical component of this program's success. The strategy identifies a suggested success network of tourism partners to champion and move actions within each objective forward.

FRAMEWORK

The strategy presents the destination development objectives using a consistent framework to determine the prioritization of each objective, and the relative timing for implementation. Objectives with a provincial or regional scope are identified as well and will inform the regional and provincial destination development strategies.



FINTRY
Photo: Andrew Strain

4 GEARING UP

CATALYST PROJECTS

The following ten actions were identified as catalyst projects for immediately moving the strategy into implementation.

A Sustainable Approach: Planning and Sustaining the Natural Environment

- Design a tourism disaster and emergency program that helps communities and industry prepare for, educate, measure, mitigate, and adjust to major natural environmental events.
- Develop a greater sense of place in terms of the Okanagan Valley's special relationship with water.
- Foster sustainability practices that improve the capacity and competitiveness of the tourism industry while leveraging TOTA's Biosphere destination accreditation.
- Utilize big data in the planning and management of tourism within the planning area and the Thompson Okanagan tourism region.
- Develop a vision and planning forum for an integrated trail network in the Thompson Okanagan region.

- Work with RSTBC and local government to develop a framework for building, operating, and maintaining the trail networks in the Thompson Okanagan region.

Get Going: Transportation, Connectivity, and Supporting Infrastructure

- Promote inter-regional transportation and transit shuttle service between communities and the airports.
- Support local government housing initiatives that address worker housing and visitor accommodation options.

Fully Prepared: Industry Readiness

- Develop a model that communities and stakeholders can use to promote the value of tourism.

Exceed Expectations: Visitor Experience

- Work with First Nations to increase the availability and competitiveness of Indigenous experiences.

GOD'S MOUNTAIN ESTATE
Photo: Andrew Strain



LOOKING FOR MORE INFORMATION?

Read the Okanagan Valley Destination Development Strategy
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FRONT COVER PHOTO: KETTLE VALLEY RAILWAY, Kari Medig.

