

*Valleys &
Vineyards*

BRITISH COLUMBIA 

DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

JULY 2025



DESTINATION
BRITISH COLUMBIA®





OSOYOOS
Photo: Hubert Kang

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Destination British Columbia acknowledges with gratitude the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam Indian Band), Skwx̱ wú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish Nation), and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh Nation) on whose shared territories we operate our main office.

We respectfully recognize that we carry out our work on the territories of First Nations throughout BC. We honour our ongoing and developing relationships with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. We are on a path of learning and are committed to working together.

As an organization, we are committed to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People's Act, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action, the BC Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, and the Declaration Act Action Plan. We are working with the Government of BC, Indigenous Tourism BC, and the tourism industry to develop and implement actions of reconciliation. This includes the development of an action plan for Destination BC and collaboration with Indigenous communities interested in the benefits of tourism.

THANK YOU

Thank you to all the tourism partners who contributed to the co-creation of this destination development strategy by participating in workshops, providing feedback, and sharing follow-up insights and information.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 WHY A STRATEGY?

The Invest in Iconics Strategy is a long-term strategy to responsibly and sustainably increase tourism revenue to British Columbia, in more places and in all seasons, by marketing and supporting the development of globally compelling destination brands. Originally identified as a key pillar in Destination BC's 2020-2023 Corporate Strategy, it is now reflected within the 'Compelling Reasons to Explore BC' pillar in Destination BC's 2023-2025 Corporate Strategy.

Together, the six core Iconics will differentiate BC on the world stage and grow the benefits of tourism across the province. Each new destination brand will be recognizable as part of the Super, Natural British Columbia® brand family. To help guide aligned and strategic implementation of the Invest in Iconics Strategy on the ground, a destination development strategy for each Iconic will identify high-potential opportunities where tourism partners can coordinate efforts.

This *Valleys & Vineyards* Destination Development Strategy outlines how tourism businesses and organizations in the Okanagan and Similkameen Valleys can bring the *Valleys & Vineyards* brand to life on the ground for visitors, the industry, and communities. With emphasis on the three focus areas identified in the Iconics Destination Development Framework—encounters, experiences, and touchpoints—this strategy helps bring the brand to life on the ground by guiding the development of an enhanced visitor experience. It identifies experience development opportunities aligned to deliver on the brand promise and sets out key priorities to make that happen.

1.2 HOW IT ALIGNS

Considerable work is already underway at various levels and locations across the province as part of implementing the regional and planning area destination development strategies co-created by various partners throughout BC. These

strategies and plans focus on progressing a broad range of themes, including transportation, workforce development, infrastructure, product development, and visitor service provision, all of which continue to be important considerations for destination development.

What sets destination development apart within the Invest in Iconics Strategy is its clear focus on the visitor experience.

Recognizing the destination development work already underway, this *Valleys & Vineyards* Destination Development Strategy builds on achievements to date and identifies ways to elevate, support, and, where necessary, recalibrate activities already in progress, enabling them to better align with *Valleys & Vineyards*.

1.3 WHO IT'S FOR

The *Valleys & Vineyards* Destination Development Strategy is primarily intended for tourism partners including Destination BC, Indigenous Tourism BC (ITBC), Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association (TOTA), and the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport (TACS), all of whom are involved in destination development, experience development planning, visitor servicing, and destination management.

Beyond these partners, the goal for the opportunities presented in the *Valleys & Vineyards* Destination Development Strategy will support all those directly involved in the tourism ecosystem, as well as those in government roles supporting the sector, in adopting a consistent, coherent, and cohesive approach to experience development for the *Valleys & Vineyards* area. This could include First Nations, tourism businesses, local governments, Community Destination Management Organizations (CDMOs), Sector associations, development corporations, not-for-profits, and community groups, among others.

1.4 HOW IT WAS DEVELOPED

In keeping with a collaborative approach, Destination BC worked with ITBC, TACS, and TOTA to host workshops with First Nations communities, BC Parks, CDMOs, and other tourism partners across the Okanagan and Similkameen Valleys. Strategic follow-up conversations with TOTA helped to validate engagement outcomes and refine development priorities.

As engagement is ongoing, this strategy continues to hold space for the inclusion of Indigenous community perspectives and further insights, guided by ITBC.



2. REALIZING THE POTENTIAL OF VALLEYS & VINEYARDS

2.1 THE VALLEYS & VINEYARDS PROPOSITION

A generous land, where lush valleys, refreshing waters, and rolling hills nourish connection and renewal.

We respectfully acknowledge that *Valleys & Vineyards* is situated on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the Syilx Okanagan Nation and the Secwépemc Nation. Since time immemorial, the Syilx and Secwépemc peoples have stewarded these lands, waters, and all living beings in accordance with their laws, languages, and traditions. Their deep connection to the land continues today, shaping the cultural and ecological integrity of this region. We recognize the ongoing strength, resilience, and contributions of the Syilx and Secwépemc peoples and are committed to honoring their rights, histories, and perspectives as we move forward in a spirit of respect, reconciliation, and collaboration.

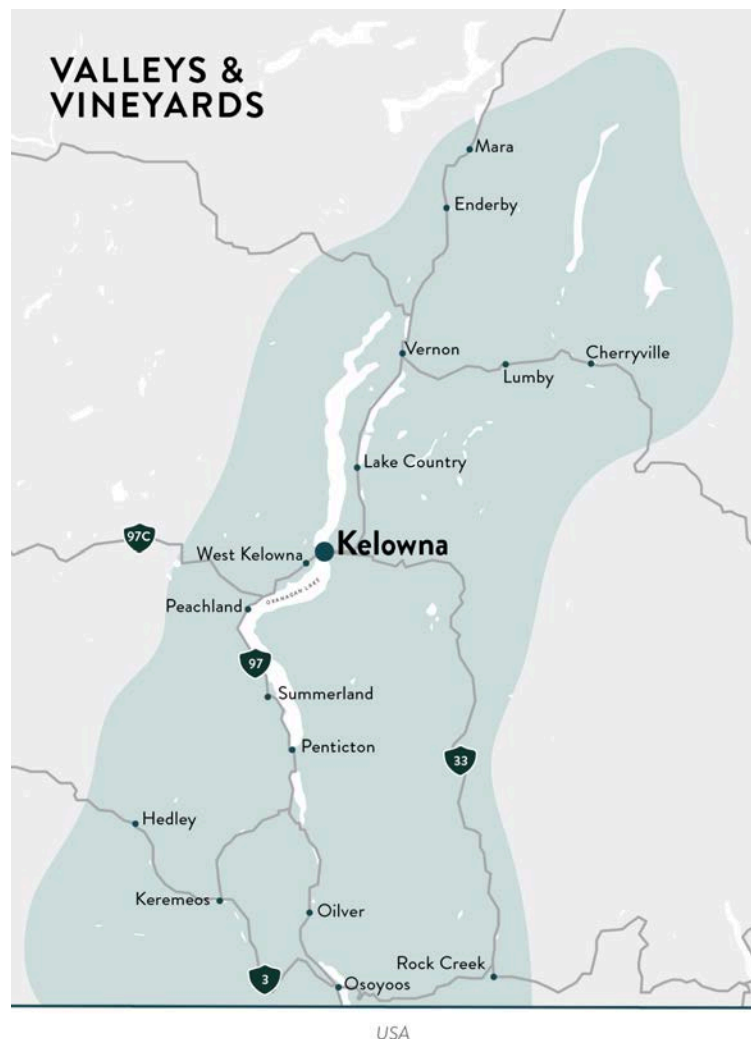


FIGURE 1: VALLEYS & VINEYARDS AREA MAP

Overview

Valleys & Vineyards is set against a backdrop of diverse landscapes and a welcoming climate, making it ideal for year-round exploration. With warm summers and mild winters, its dry, sunny climate supports a range of ecosystems, from Canada's only desert and semi-arid grasslands to dry pine forests, lush mountain ranges, and ribbon lakes. This fertile land sustains vineyards, orchards, and sustainable croplands, creating a rich foundation for the area's renowned farm-to-table experiences. Visitors can explore vibrant communities through wine tours, hiking, water sports, and scenic bike rides, while acclaimed restaurants, wineries, and lively farmers' markets highlight the area's culinary excellence.

Beyond its natural beauty, *Valleys & Vineyards* invites mindful connection through soft adventure, cultural richness, and immersive experiences. Rolling hills, shimmering waters, and fertile landscapes set the stage for leisurely exploration at a relaxed pace, encouraging visitors to develop a deeper personal connection to the destination. The area's First Nations traditions, agricultural heritage, and immigrant influences further enhance this sense of place, reinforcing the importance of thoughtful, meaningful travel.

As home to the Syilx Okanagan Nation and Secwépemc Nation, the area is rooted in First Nations traditions and cultural heritage, encouraging visitors to engage respectfully and meaningfully. Year-round art, music, and cultural events enrich the visitor experience, nurturing a deep connection between people and place while preserving the area's ecological and cultural integrity.

Distinctive Attributes

Valleys & Vineyards offers a dynamic blend of rural and urban experiences, from the city life of Kelowna to small towns and resort communities nestled along lakes and mountains. Its diverse topography, ecosystems, and agricultural economy shape the area's natural landscapes and urban communities, creating a unique and immersive visitor experience.

First Nations Leadership — The *Valleys & Vineyards* area is located on the lands of the Syilx Okanagan Nation and Secwépemc Nation, whose deep connections to the land shape its history, culture, and future. Indigenous-led tourism is a vital part of the destination, with First Nations and Indigenous entrepreneurs leading trail development, hospitality, guided experiences, and cultural tourism. The following examples highlight some of the ways First Nations are leading and contributing to tourism development across *Valleys & Vineyards*:

- The Splatshin First Nation partnered with local governments to develop and maintain the Shuswap North Okanagan Rail Trail (SNORT).
- The Okanagan Indian Band owns part of the Okanagan Rail Trail (ORT) and is planning an interpretive centre at Wood Lake.
- Westbank First Nation prioritizes tourism development and is working on strengthening partnerships with TOTA, ITBC, and Kelowna International Airport (YLW).
- The Osoyoos Indian Band is a leader in Indigenous tourism, including operating the Nk'Mip Desert Cultural Centre, Nk'Mip Canyon Desert Golf Course, and Nk'Mip Campground and RV Park.
- The Penticton Indian Band runs Coyote Cruises on the Penticton River Canal and is developing a golf resort at Skaha Hills.
- The Upper Similkameen Indian Band, in collaboration with Parks Canada, has worked to commemorate the Similkameen Spirit Trail as a National Historic Site of Canada since its original designation in 2007. This trail holds immense historical and cultural significance, symbolizing the connections between the spiritual and physical realms within their traditional territory.
- The Lower Similkameen Indian Band hosts the annual Similkameen Powwow of Champions at the powwow arbour at Snaḥsnulaḥtn Campground in Keremeos, attracting guests from both near and far.

Indigenous-owned wineries, arts and crafts businesses, guided tours, and hospitality services also contribute to the broader visitor experience. The First Nations in the area are not just participants in tourism—they are leaders, storytellers, and stewards, ensuring that visitors engage with the land and culture in authentic and respectful ways.

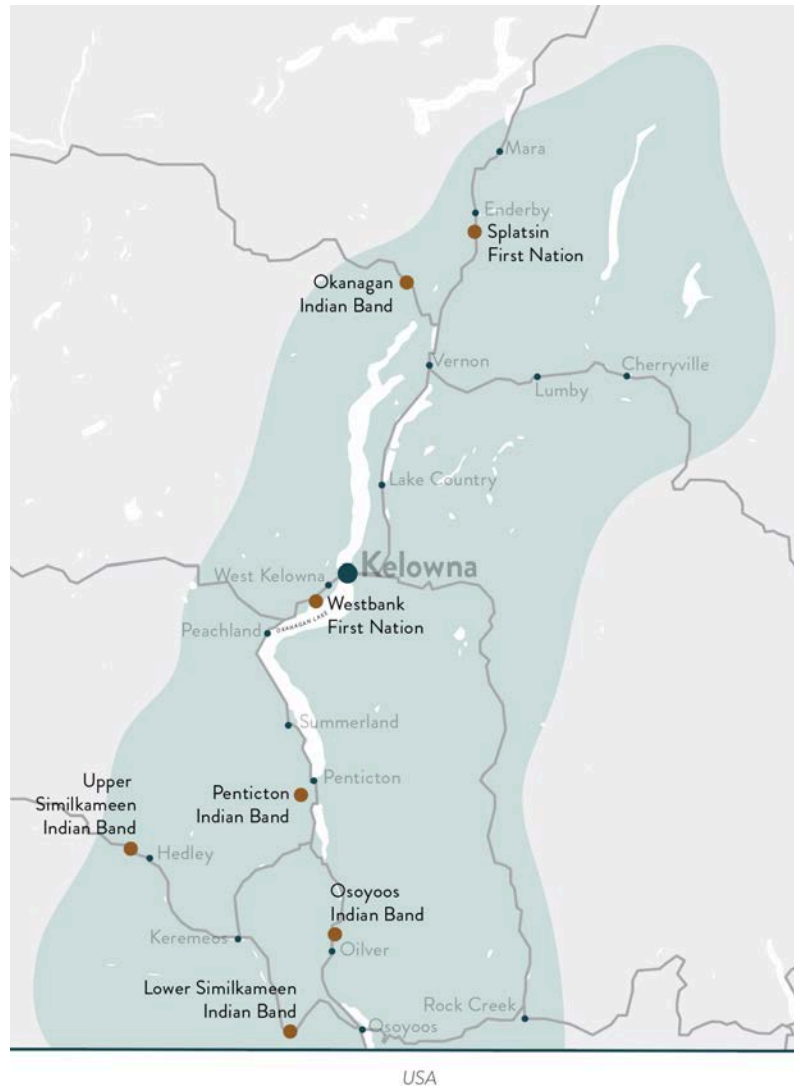
FIGURE 2: FIRST NATIONS COMMUNITIES

Inspirational

Landscapes—Valleys &

Vineyards is known for its distinctive, inspirational landscapes, including lakes and beaches, fertile valley bottoms, high-elevation forests, and mountain resorts. The landscapes provide an array of geotourism opportunities. Geotourism is defined as tourism that focuses on the unique geology and geography of a place, and that sustains or enhances its environment, heritage, aesthetics, culture, and the well-being of its residents. The unique semi-arid landscape south of Okanagan Falls

features many unique plant species and is home to a shrub-steppe ecosystem, a low-rainfall natural grassland that is considered fragile and at risk of ecosystem conversion due to the potential impacts of overgrazing, invasive species, and fire. The farmed landscape features vineyards, orchards, mixed crops, dairy farms, and cattle ranches. The valleys were shaped by glaciation, leaving erosional features like Skaha and McIntyre Bluffs. Several parks offer camping and day-use facilities, allowing visitors to experience the diversity of ecosystems and wildlife viewing.



Soft Adventure & Outdoor Recreation—*Valleys & Vineyards* offers an exceptional trail network, including three rail trails that are unmatched in Canada in terms of their concentration and ability to link numerous communities up and down the valley. These trails support off-road touring, mountain biking, bouldering, rock climbing, and hiking, while Nordic trails provide winter options for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. Globally recognized ski resorts like Big White, SilverStar, Apex, and Baldy attract winter sports enthusiasts. The area features approximately 30 scenic 18-hole golf courses, with its long, dry, and sunny season providing a competitive advantage over other golf destinations in Canada. Land- and water-based activities, such as kayaking, boating, and e-biking, as well as guided nature-based experiences like parasailing, are supported by a strong network of tourism operators.

Arts and Culture—A rich cultural scene brings history and creativity to life through heritage sites, museums, and performing arts. Visitors can explore the Kettle Valley Steam Railway, O’Keefe Ranch, and small-town museums, or experience live performances at venues like the Caravan Farm Theatre. Cultural, music, and food festivals celebrate the area’s biodiversity, heritage, and local talent, while the Okanagan Wine Festivals highlight its year-round appeal as a culinary-wine destination. The Dominion Radio Astrophysical Observatory adds a scientific element, complemented by regional dark sky initiatives like the Mount Kobau Star Party. There is a lively community of artists and artisans, supported by a range of public art galleries, private studios, and shops and events that showcase local and visiting talent.

Food and Flavours—As a premier culinary destination, the area’s vineyards, wineries, breweries, cideries, and distilleries thrive alongside orchards, farms, and agri-tourism experiences. Set along majestic lakes, the area stands out among global wine destinations for its scenic beauty and visitor engagement. Self-guided wine trails, guided tours, and seasonal festivals enhance the experience, making it a more tourism-oriented destination than many other wine regions. A growing craft brewing and distilling scene adds to the diversity of offerings, while strong industry partnerships continue to fuel culinary innovation.

2.2 OUR VALUES

At its core, this strategy is about building strong relationships—with the First Nations who are the first and ongoing stewards of these places; with tourism businesses and not-for-profit organizations that work tirelessly to create memorable visitor experiences; with regional and community destination management partners; and partners across all levels of government who have a key role to play in enabling tourism to contribute to the well-being of communities in BC.

In developing this strategy, we are focused on ensuring that it reflects the following values:

- Respectful sharing and celebration of Indigenous cultures, traditions, and languages, which must be Indigenous-led
- The maintenance and restoration of ecological integrity of natural systems
- The profitability of tourism businesses and the prosperity of the area
- Enriching the experience of visitors who value and respect what the destinations and places in the area offer
- The well-being of communities and the support of residents

Respecting community aspirations and resident attitudes toward visitors travelling into host communities is essential, as destination development efforts can be challenging without the support of host communities.

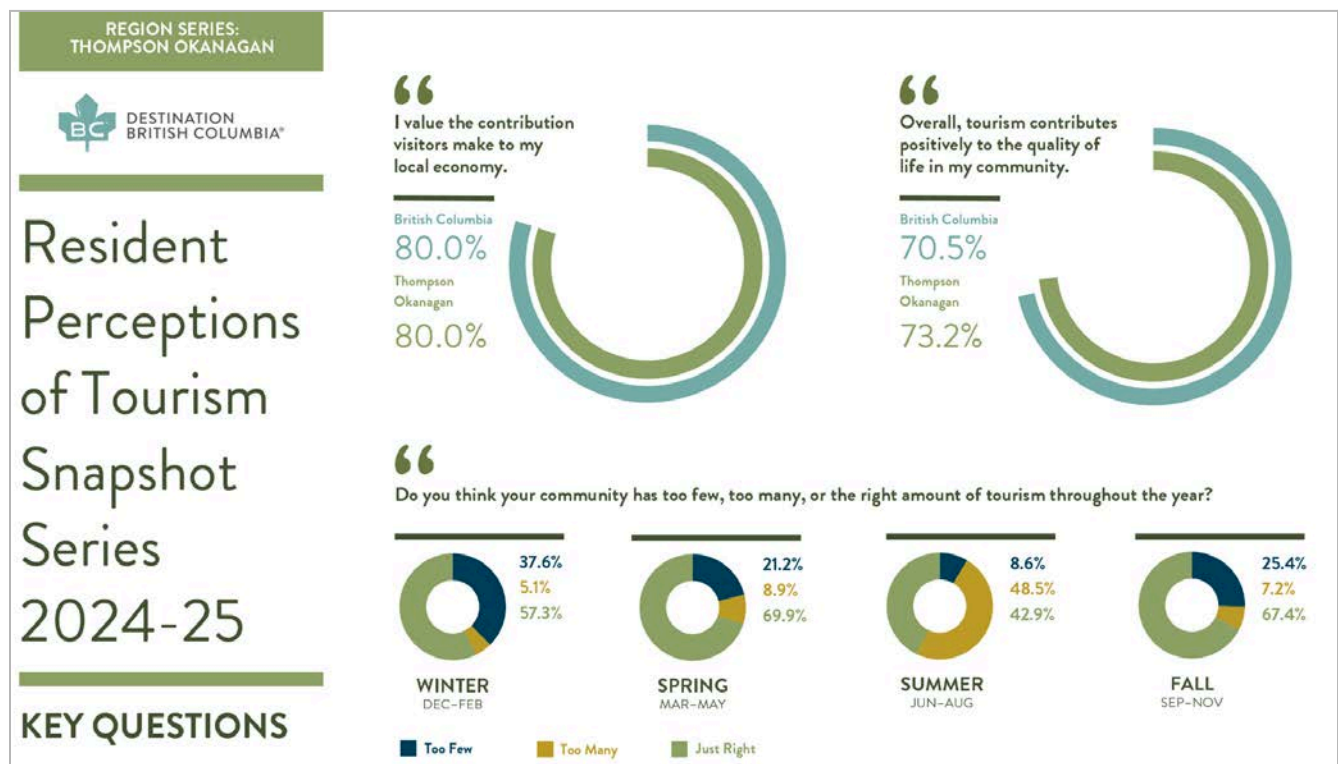


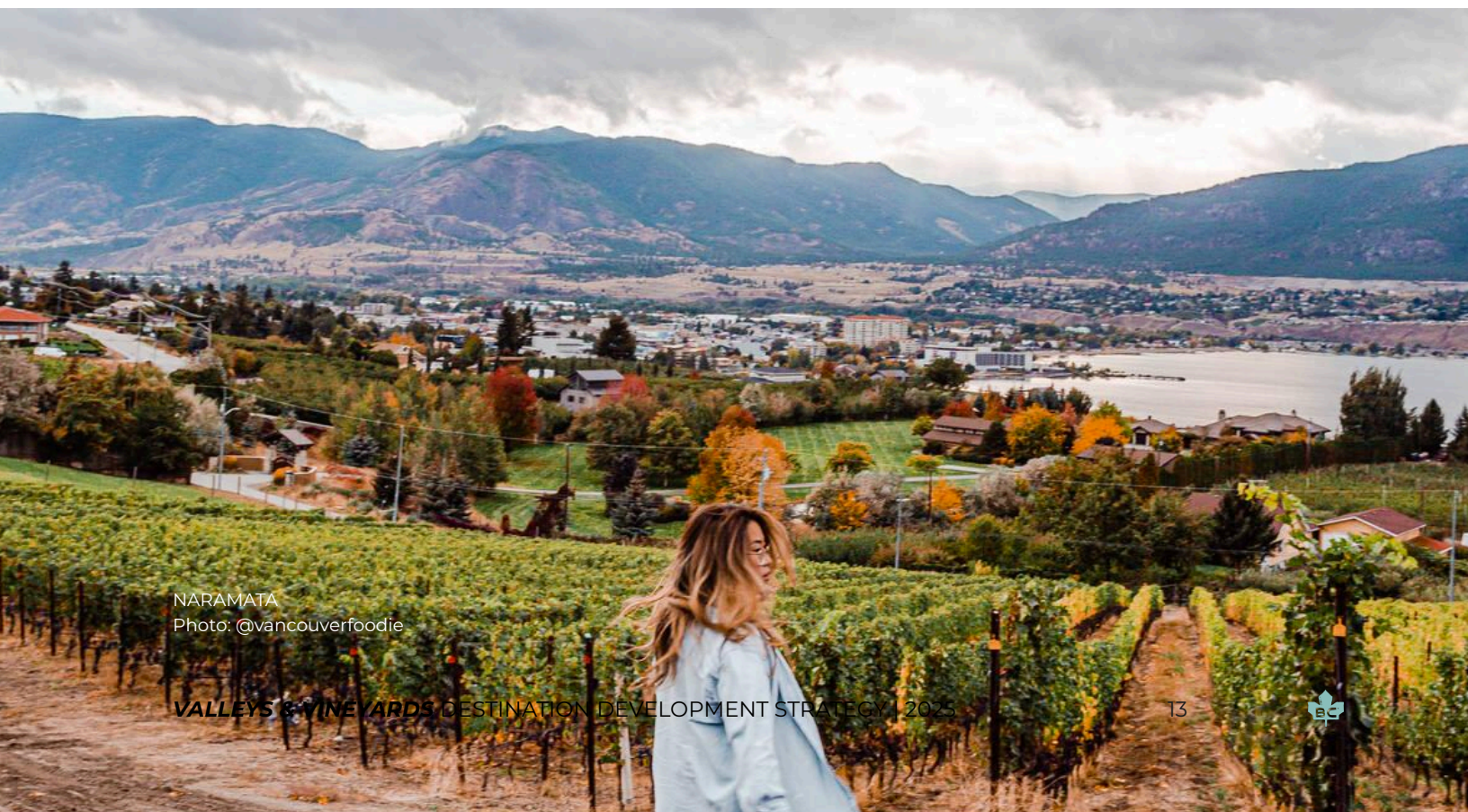
FIGURE 3: RESIDENT PERCEPTIONS OF TOURISM SNAPSHOT SERIES 2024-25

Sustainability has long been a core value in *Valleys & Vineyards*, beginning with the First Nations' stewardship of the land, waters, and ecosystems. This ethos has since influenced agriculture, industry, and tourism, culminating in TOTA's leadership in the [Biosphere Certification Program](#). This certification affirms the area's commitment to the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets of the 2030 Agenda of the United Nations, ensuring that tourism development aligns with environmental, social, and economic sustainability.

As climate and environmental concerns grow, sustainability and regeneration are reshaping travel demand. Visitors are increasingly seeking:

- **Eco-friendly** accommodations and carbon footprint reduction.
- **Regenerative tourism** that actively improves destinations.
- **Alternative transportation**, including combined travel modes and expanded electric vehicle infrastructure.
- **Longer stays** to reduce travel frequency and enhance local economic impact.
- **Inclusive tourism**, ensuring accessibility for travellers with disabilities and equity-deserving communities, aligning sustainability with Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) goals.

Numerous regenerative tourism opportunities exist throughout *Valleys & Vineyards*. What's needed is a commitment to bring together natural resource management leaders and tourism leaders and operators to define a process for developing them.



NARAMATA
Photo: @vancouverfoodie

2.3 OUR VISION FOR VALLEYS & VINEYARDS

A vision provides a clear, compelling, and bold picture of the preferred future for the destination and takes into consideration how values and visitor experience are connected to the brand promise. Below are the three core pillars of the *Valleys & Vineyards* brand promise.

Share the quiet luxury in nature—Express refinement that feels natural, never manufactured. Elevate unique accommodation, culinary, and other experiences shaped authentically by the land, using visuals and language that harmonize beauty, balance, and a grounded sophistication.

Movement feels natural—Convey motion and activity that is never too rushed or intense. Engage travellers' senses, keeping them fully present in moments that evoke ease, rejuvenation, and the relaxed joy of softly active experiences in nature.

Elevate human connection—Highlight the passion of those who share the gifts and stories of the land, using intimate visuals and storytelling that bring to life Indigenous traditions and local narratives shared warmly around the table, and highlight the connections formed that last beyond their time in *Valleys & Vineyards*.

Based on this, a vision statement was developed to visualize a future state of *Valleys & Vineyards*' true potential as a destination.

To attract greater international visitation to *Valleys & Vineyards* by positioning the destination as an area where quiet luxury emerges organically from the land and authentic, place-based experiences offer discerning travellers an opportunity to ground themselves in the natural beauty, culture, and culinary traditions of the Okanagan and Similkameen Valleys. We aim to create a sense of natural movement and gentle exploration that leave visitors feeling rejuvenated and deeply connected to the place and the people they meet there. We feel gratitude for the Indigenous Peoples who have stewarded these lands for countless generations and celebrate Indigenous storytelling and immersive experiences which highlight local traditions. We encourage visitation from respectful and responsible travellers who are eager to explore *Valleys & Vineyards* in a manner that sustains and enhances the environment and well-being of local communities.

2.4 VISITOR EXPERIENCE AND THE IDEAL TRAVELLER

The [Invest in Iconics Strategy](#) brings together branding and destination development by integrating marketing efforts with the creation of immersive, memorable experiences for visitors in destination. This integration will be achieved by highlighting the attributes that make the places and communities in *Valleys & Vineyards* distinctive and compelling to those visitors who are most likely to come here, while ensuring that both destination and in-market efforts reflect the aspirations and values of the provincial parent brand, Super, Natural British Columbia®.

As part of the brand development process for the parent brand, a “traveller mindset” is defined. This mindset reflects the values that the brand shares with the ideal traveller and guides how to connect with their deeper motivations through our creative expression. It informs both brand-building and experience development efforts.

Together with the brand pillars developed for each Iconic (refer to Section 5.2), which stem from the parent brand pillars, this approach helps create sharper messaging and differentiates the Iconics from one another as well as from competing destinations.

From a more tactical perspective, the target audience for *Valleys & Vineyards* is the “Refined Globetrotter,” as guided by [Destination Canada’s Traveller Segmentation Program](#). This segment is considered a “highly engaged guest,” —travellers who not only travel frequently and spend more, but, more importantly, align closely with the brand’s values. Refined Globetrotters prioritize travel above all, seeking world-class destinations, gourmet dining, and exclusive experiences. They are experienced travellers who are always on the lookout for new, unique places to cross off their list. They immerse themselves in history, museums, and the authentic charm of new places, ensuring smooth travel with all-inclusive packages and expert-guided tours. They travel to have authentic experiences, explore and discover new things and places, and to enjoy themselves and have fun. The ideal destination for Refined Globetrotters is charming, unique, authentic, luxurious, and exclusive.



3. DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT FOR VALLEYS & VINEYARDS

3.1 OUR OBJECTIVES

- Develop a continuous multi-use trail system connecting the entire *Valleys & Vineyards* area from north to south by 2035.
- Partner with private operators to develop 10 multi-day, multi-modal trail experiences along the length of the trail by 2027, with expansion as new sections are completed.
- Capture and curate the authentic stories of *Valleys & Vineyards* and share them through a diverse range of storytelling methods by 2028.
- Create an exceptional visitor welcome and support experience, ensuring well-trained staff and a brand-aligned presence by 2030.
- Develop a new suite of unique and memorable visitor experiences, connecting people to place through the sharing of its natural and cultural heritage by 2027.
- Guided by First Nations, embrace Indigenous knowledge, teachings, and processes within new experience and amenity development, where appropriate and welcomed.

3.2 DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK: AREAS OF FOCUS

To achieve the objectives, the *Valleys & Vineyards* Destination Development Strategy considers the many aspects of the visitor experience. These are broadly defined as **experiences**, **touchpoints**, and **encounters** in the Iconics Destination Development Framework, which was co-created by Destination BC, ITBC, and the regional destination management organizations (RDMOs) to guide the implementation of the [Invest in Iconics Strategy](#) through destination development. This supports a consistent, coherent, and cohesive approach to destination development for the Iconics by integrating experience development efforts with those already underway at the regional level.

EXPERIENCES

Experiences include all the ways visitors can enjoy, explore, engage with, learn about, and develop a deeper appreciation of the area they are travelling through. The tangible aspects of experiences include products and activities such as guided tours, wildlife viewing, fishing, and events, which alone or in combination can motivate travel and provide value for visitors. Equally important are the intangible aspects, including the thoughts, feelings, and emotions that are awakened through the experience, and the lasting impact it creates through memories, impressions, and personal transformation.

TOUCHPOINTS

Touchpoints are the places of arrival, welcome, orientation, and decision making experienced by visitors when in the destination. They raise awareness of what a place has to offer while providing reassurance to visitors that they are on the right track and know where to explore next. They can provide a physical manifestation of the brand on the ground, and include the physical elements of signage, interpretation, and other navigational tools. Touchpoints also include key sites and facilities such as museums, interpretive centres, and Visitor Centres, which provide learning opportunities and serve as points of orientation to the story of place and the people who live there.

ENCOUNTERS

Encounters are the ways in which the stories of places are authentically and respectfully shared with visitors, with approval from the story owners. This can happen through the interactions visitors have with local people, the tourism experiences they participate in, or the interpretative materials they encounter. The stories we choose to tell can change the way visitors experience a place and enable them to reach a deeper understanding of the significance of the places they visit.



4. NAVIGATING VALLEYS & VINEYARDS

4.1 ACCESS

The *Valleys & Vineyards* area is readily accessible via road, including:

- From the North: Via Highways 97, 97A, and 97B, connecting with Highway 1, providing an important linkage to the *Rainforest to Rockies* (R2R) route.
- From the East: Via Highways 1, 3, and 6, connecting *Valleys & Vineyards* with the *Birthplace of Adventure* Iconic area.
- From the South: Through the United States via the Osoyoos–Oroville Border Crossing on Highway 97, the longest continuous north-south highway in North America, as well as the Chopaka–Nighthawk Border Crossing, which is located roughly three kilometres south of Highway 3 at Cawston.
- From the West: Via Highway 3, as well as Highway 97C, the Okanagan Connector, providing a high-volume link to Metro Vancouver through Merritt.

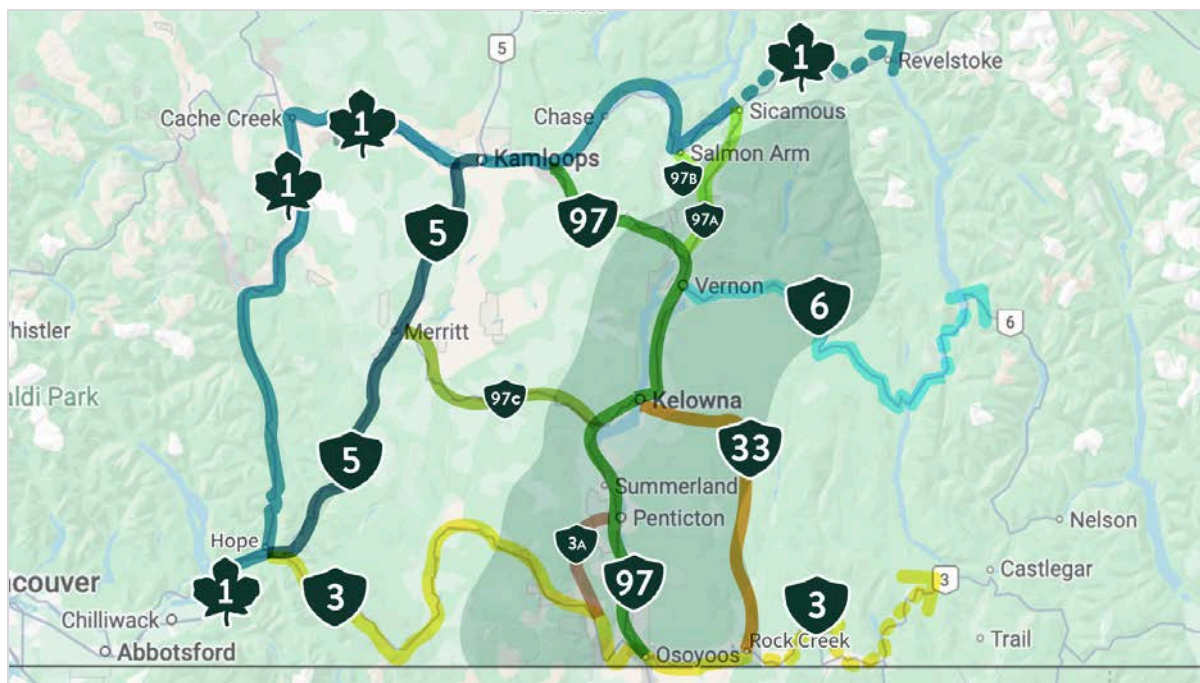


FIGURE 4: HIGHWAY/ACCESS MAP OF THE VALLEYS & VINEYARDS AREA

Convenient air access to *Valleys & Vineyards* is available via Kelowna International Airport (YLW) and Penticton Regional Airport (YYF), which also connect travellers to other iconic destinations.

4.2 KEY CHALLENGES

Despite a strong tourism economy, *Valleys & Vineyards* faces key challenges in building a more competitive visitor destination.

- **Limited Awareness:** Beyond BC, Alberta, and Washington, the area struggles with recognition in long-haul markets. Visitor data shows reliance on regional markets, with food, wine, and lake experiences lacking differentiation from better-known competitors.
- **Seasonality:** Historically, tourism is highly concentrated in summer, with winter travel primarily tied to mountain resorts. Other shoulder season and winter experiences lack the exposure and scale needed to attract consistent visitor demand.
- **Transportation & Accessibility:** Intra-community travel is difficult at best and, at worst, a major challenge to growth. Without a personal vehicle, access to outlying areas like the Similkameen Valley and parts of the North Okanagan is challenging. Winter road safety concerns further impact mobility.
- **Supply-Side Limitations:** Seasonal demand fluctuations lead to reduced hours, services, and closures in shoulder seasons, limiting investment and innovation in destination development. Staffing shortages and housing access further constrain growth. The net effect is a lack of strong enough concentration of high-yield, year-round products and experiences to attract consistent visitor interest, except at major resorts.
- **Land Use & Infrastructure:** Securing land and permissions for trails, high-use activity areas, and agri-tourism is complex due to regulatory hurdles, funding constraints, and land-use policies. In the Okanagan Valley, Recreation Sites & Trails BC (RSTBC) ownership of sections of the Kettle Valley Rail Trail (KVR) complicates management. The Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen (RDOS) is considering Crown tenures (lease) rather than simple maintenance agreements but faces red tape and liability concerns. Additionally, sustainable funding for trail maintenance remains a major issue.
- **Accommodation Costs & Capacity:** Rising accommodation costs, compounded by short-term rental restrictions, create capacity challenges during peak seasons. At the same time, they present an opportunity to attract higher-yield international visitors.
- **Rural Disparities:** The above challenges are often amplified in smaller, rural communities. Seasonal and geographic growth in these areas may take additional time and effort due to limited cell connectivity and Wi-Fi, hospitality

options, highway signage, and staff availability, all of which can affect the overall visitor experience.

In today's changing world, tourism in *Valleys & Vineyards* is being shaped by several notable trends, driven by shifting consumer priorities, technological advancements, and global challenges. These trends can cause challenges for destination development efforts if not thoughtfully addressed. These include:

- **Climate change** is shaping destination management and travel behaviour.
- **Travellers seek deeper connections** and personal growth through experiences.
- **Passion-driven travel** (e.g., wine tours, adventure trips) is growing in popularity.
- **Technology adoption** for booking, personalized itineraries, and virtual planning continues to rise.
- **Wellness travel** focuses on enhancing well-being through physical, mental, and spiritual activities. Unlike conventional travel, which often involves sightseeing or relaxation, wellness tourism aims to improve health and quality of life.
- **Overcrowding concerns** are driving interest in off-peak and lesser-known destinations.
- **Sustainable travel options** like train travel, electric vehicles, and low-carbon alternatives, are gaining traction.
- **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA)** is driving innovation in tourism.



VERNON
Photo: Andrew Penner

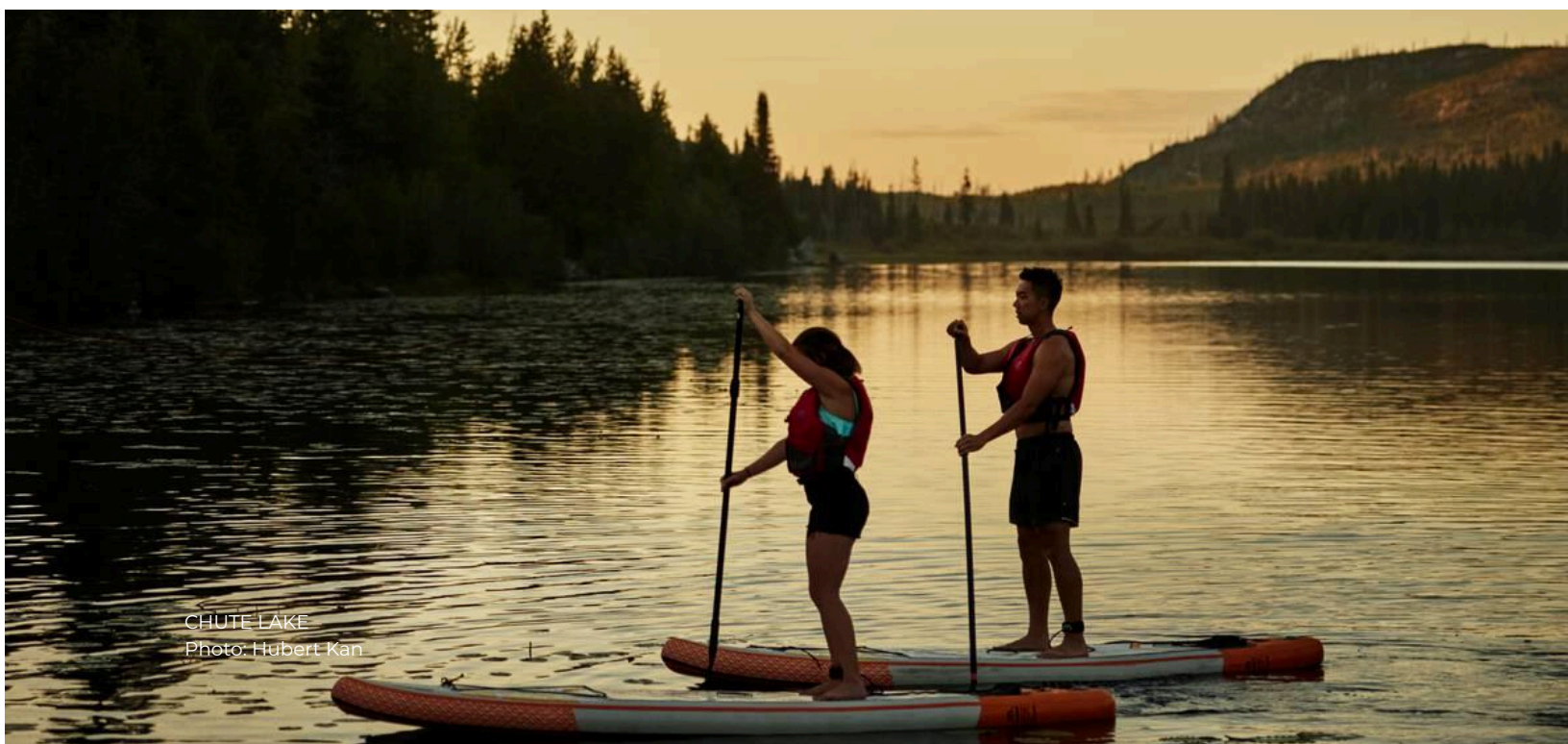


4.3 KEY OPPORTUNITIES

In line with destination development objectives, key opportunities for *Valleys & Vineyards* include:

- **Strategic Connectivity:** Leverage proximity to Highway 1, Highway 3, and the R2R route to enhance itineraries for international visitors. Improve access via the Okanagan Connector and regional transportation options.
- **Trail and Experience Development:** Expand cohesive trail networks to connect wineries, culinary experiences, agri-tourism, and soft adventure. All communities within *Valleys & Vineyards* have the potential to add and develop infrastructure around a common set of development, management, signage, and marketing principles.
- **Indigenous Storytelling:** Strengthen Indigenous-led storytelling and programming. One best practice example is cultural tourism developed by the Māori, the Indigenous Peoples of New Zealand, where every aspect of the overall visitor experience is highlighted by Indigenous themes, signage, food, tours, and entertainment.
- **Heritage Storytelling Integration:** Further incorporate settlement, industry, and agricultural heritage stories into tourism offerings.
- **Brand & Visitor Experience Alignment:** Enrich touchpoints, encounters, and experiences through enhanced digital outreach, signage, air service options, and frontline staff, ensuring a seamless connection between marketing messages and on-the-ground experiences.
- **Sustainable & Off-Season Tourism:** Align with TOTA's Regional Tourism Strategy to expand off-season visits and experiences through outdoor adventure, wellness, wineries, agri-tourism, and Indigenous tourism. Strengthening competitiveness of smaller communities will boost economic resilience, year-round jobs, and sustainability.
- **Indigenous Tourism Development:** While some First Nations have led major tourism projects, others prioritize different economic sectors. With each First Nations community having different levels of interest in pursuing tourism initiatives, there is an opportunity to provide support to First Nations who are receptive to tourism with access to training, resources, and information on the value of tourism.
- **Infrastructure & Industry Growth:** Building on a strong foundation of hospitality, accommodation, and industry services, the area will support seasonal and geographic growth. Strengthen connections between urban and rural areas, expand trail networks, enhance wellness offerings, and encourage innovative, sustainable product development.

- **Improved Transportation Access:** Enhance visitor mobility by expanding vehicle rental options, developing intercommunity shuttles, and strengthening urban-rural connectivity. Improving air travel and groundside access at Kelowna International Airport (YLW) and Penticton Regional Airport (YYF) is key to boosting accessibility, visitor spending, and travel experiences. Working with airlines to increase route capacity to major hubs like Seattle, Los Angeles, Vancouver, and Toronto, as well as establishing new connections to central U.S. hubs such as Minneapolis and Denver, will significantly enhance international visitation to the region.
- **Regenerative & Slow Travel:** Enhancing trail networks for biking, walking, and hiking will encourage eco-conscious visitors to explore at a relaxed pace, cultivating deeper connections with local culture and landscapes. Supporting local operators in adopting regenerative practices will further strengthen the leadership of *Valleys & Vineyards* in offering responsible, nature-based tourism.
- **Luxury & Long-Stay Market:** Expanding unique accommodation options, such as luxury resorts (e.g., Sparkling Hill) and wineries (e.g., Burrowing Owl and Hester Creek) will attract high-yield, long-stay international travellers and position the area as a premium destination. Focusing on long-stay visitors aligns with the luxury market's sustainability and regenerative principles, helping offset the carbon footprint associated with luxury travel.



CHUTE LAKE
Photo: Hubert Kan



5. THE DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Every story shared, every experience offered, and every touchpoint introduced across *Valleys & Vineyards* contributes to both localized expression of place and to the cohesiveness of the larger destination experience. Story encounters, experience development, and tangible touchpoints were explored as foundational components of the destination development framework. These elements helped frame the engagement sessions and guided the development of the destination development priorities.

5.2 STORY AS A MECHANISM FOR CONNECTING VISITORS TO PLACE

The ability to meaningfully share the stories of *Valleys & Vineyards* and, in doing so, enhance the traveller's overall sense of wonder and connection to the brand is essential. Such investments bring life to the journey and add meaning to the overall travel experience for the visitor.

The brand promise and brand pillars identified for *Valleys & Vineyards* manifest on the ground through the experiences the destination has to offer. Compelling experiences are inspired not only by the essence and diverse nature of this place but also by the stories of the destination which local communities want to share with visitors.

The engagement sessions for the development of *Valleys & Vineyards* revealed a wide range of stories and story themes. The focus was on “root stories”, defined as those unique, foundational narratives of people and places that are important to communities, distinctive, and add a layer of depth to the experience. These themes and stories were then organized through the lens of *Valleys & Vineyards* brand pillars to identify those Priority Story Themes which would best amplify the brand positioning.

The brand appeal of *Valleys & Vineyards* was also considered by outlining the unique features and assets of the region that differentiate it from the other Iconics. This approach involved examining these features and assets through the lens of the Super, Natural British Columbia® core brand pillars: Nature, Adventure, and Culture.

VALLEYS & VINEYARDS			
Brand Positioning	<i>A generous land, where lush valleys, refreshing waters, and rolling hills nourish connection and renewal.</i>		
Brand Pillars	HILLS, VALLEYS & SHINING WATERS	NATURAL MOVEMENT	A GATHERING PLACE
	<p>Life-Giving Waters: Deep, cooling lakes shape the land, nourishing soil and soul, and reflecting a deep history of Indigenous stewardship.</p> <p>From Desert to Lush Valley: An unexpected expanse of desert gives way to grasslands, groves and freshwater. Here, arid hills and lush valleys coexist, creating a layered and connected experience that transforms with the seasons.</p> <p>Generous Lands: The land's rich, volcanic soil has sustained life for generations, from the first Indigenous peoples to multigenerational wine growers - nurturing not only more than 200 vineyards but also orchards, honey, lavender, specialty crops, and wild foods, and fueling a vibrant wine and culinary scene.</p>	<p>Spontaneous and All-Seasons: A relaxed, go-with-the-flow approach to adventure, where movement and wellness feel social and natural. An all-season place that connects us to nature's rhythms.</p> <p>Soft Adventure: Outdoor activities like hiking, cycling, and paddleboarding connect you to the land and waters. Adventure is rejuvenating or energizing depending on what you seek, with something for all activity levels.</p>	<p>Sustainable Innovation: A place where wine and food culture thrives, shaped by creativity and a deep respect for the land. Entrepreneurs and growers are committed to protecting their harvests for future generations, alongside Indigenous practices of sustainable harvesting. Home to the Seven Generations pledge, this is a place that honors its roots while embracing the future.</p> <p>Savour Together: Warm, welcoming locals and travellers connect around the table over shared meals, stories, and traditions. Here, food is more than sustenance - it is a form of storytelling, carrying the history, knowledge, and spirit of this uniquely giving land.</p>
Story Themes	History of agriculture and wineries. Geo-tourism, ecology and topography. Volcanoes and other unique features.	History of the trails. Stories of activities unique to the area. Ogopogo and the Okanagan name. Stories about the unique outdoor opportunities.	Interior Salish people's history and culture. Four Chiefs story. The Sacredness of the Salmon. Immigrant history. Cultural exploration through culinary offerings.

5.3 PROVIDING REASSURANCE: ENHANCING TOUCHPOINTS

Another consideration when assessing destination development priorities is cohesively connecting the touring and road trip experience by providing reassurance to travellers through investments in touchpoints.

Tangible connections to place can be established through physical touchpoints, such as signage, which provides comfort and assurance that the traveller is in the right place. Additionally, a consistent and frequent brand presence reinforces this sense of place. *Valleys & Vineyards* brand presence can occur in many forms throughout the area, such as on signage at Visitor Centres, static signs at interpretive kiosks, as well as on digital applications. Destination BC can support in providing signage guidelines, specifications, and recommendations to support partners in bringing the iconic brands to life on the ground through physical signage. It also identifies opportunities to align with signage systems that are already in place, as well as possibilities for co-branding with partner organizations.

Interpretive signage, public art, exhibits in local museums, cultural centres, and Visitor Centres offer both a tangible connection to place, as well as the intangible connection that arises when stories of place are shared through encounters.

The identification of touchpoint development opportunities emerged through the engagement sessions. The touchpoint development opportunities are detailed in [Section 6 - Development Priorities](#).

5.4 DEVELOPMENT FOCUS

When assessing destination development priorities, it is important to consider the anticipated contribution of an investment to the local community and the broader area. Additionally, experience development should focus on enabling travellers to move through the destination throughout the seasons with a sense of **mindful connection**. This development concept of **mindful connection** aims to ground the destination and experience development initiatives in *Valleys & Vineyards* in slow, intentional travel where travellers can develop a meaningful relationship with local communities, cultures, and landscapes.



6. DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

6.1 DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES BY THEME

Well-considered and strategic destination development priorities can help a destination or community achieve its future aspirations while also delivering on the brand promise made to visitors.

The development opportunities align with industry consultations, reflect the essence and strengths of *Valleys & Vineyards*, and aim to drive growth from the ideal visitor. Each priority theme intersects with the others, providing a network of implementable strategies that work together to elevate the area and its brand. Following the identification of overarching development opportunities for *Valleys & Vineyards* in [Section 5](#), the next step is to examine the emerging priorities in more detail. Although these priorities were identified by partners during the engagement process, they do not commit any partner to their delivery.

Please refer to [Section 7.5](#) for a detailed outline of each sub-theme below.

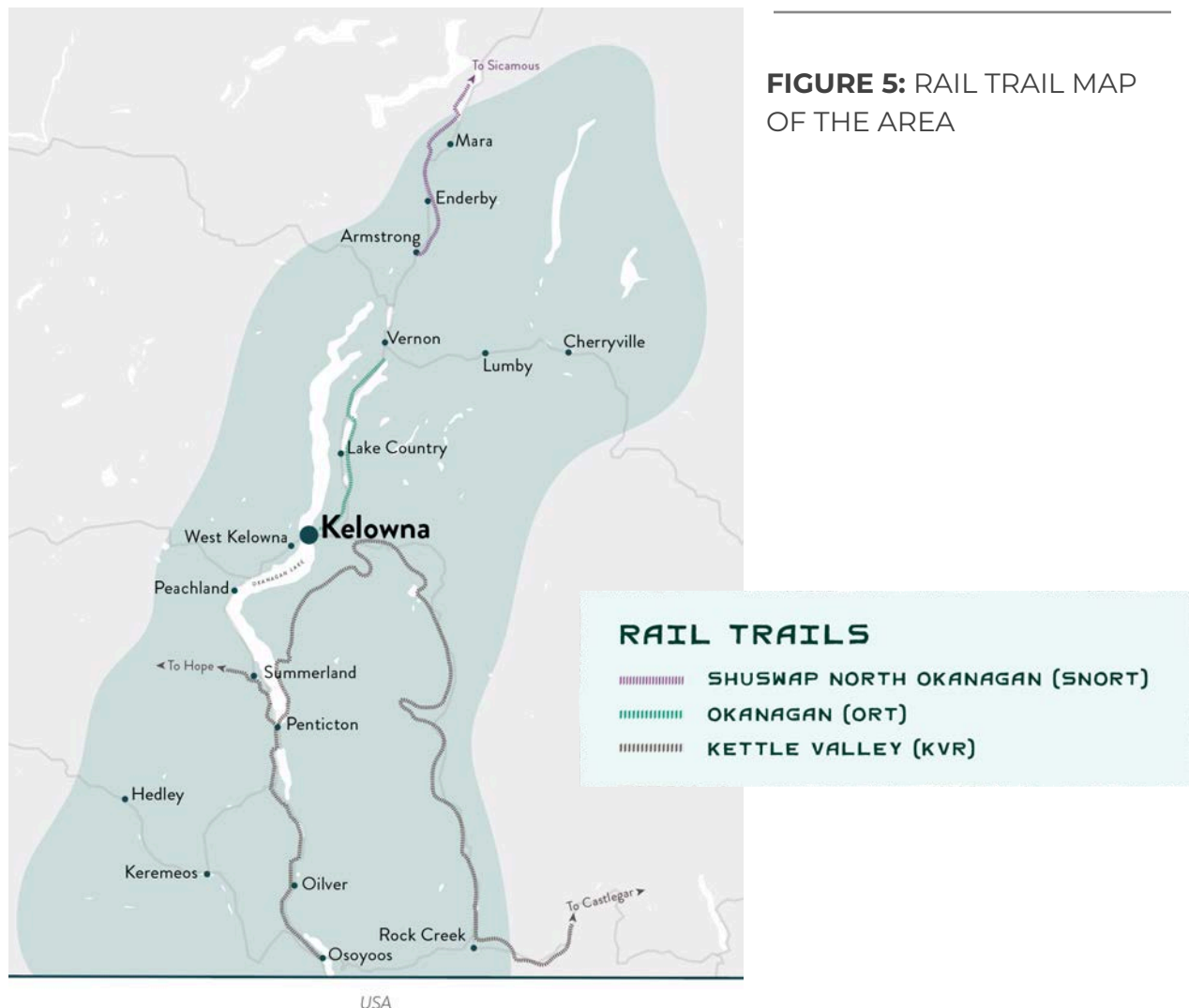
THEME 1: Iconic Journeys

The rail trails in the area present a unique opportunity to create an iconic experience that reflects the area's rich history while aligning with the brand pillars of nature, adventure, and culture. This approach also supports the experience development focus on mindful connection.

The Iconic Journeys theme aims to continue to work to transform the *Valleys & Vineyards* rail trail network into a unified, branded tourism asset. This initiative capitalizes on the area's unique trails, promoting economic growth, sustainable tourism, and diverse visitor experiences. By addressing gaps in coordination, infrastructure, and connectivity, the theme seeks to create market-ready experiences

that encourage seasonal and geographic growth while integrating community and Indigenous partnerships.

1.1 Connecting the Rail Trail System will improve trail continuity by addressing key gaps in the rail trail network and developing a seamless system for multi-day rides and shorter excursions. The current trails—KVR, ORT, and SNORT—are disconnected and vary in quality, limiting their appeal as a unified tourism product. Strategic priorities include linking ORT and SNORT via Swan Lake, improving continuity at Wood Lake, and creating crossings at Vaseux Lake to connect Penticton and Osoyoos. Additional projects, such as a west-side trail along Okanagan Lake, could diversify trail options and expand tourism potential. These initiatives will require collaboration with local trail societies, Indigenous partners, and governments to address land ownership and infrastructure challenges. By closing gaps and enhancing accessibility, this effort will enhance the *Valleys & Vineyards* trail system, creating new opportunities for diverse tourism experiences.



1.2 Building a Master Plan for Trails emphasizes creating a 10-year Rail Trail Master Plan to guide strategic improvements and branding for the rail trail network. The plan will align with the existing master plan for the Midway to Glenfir segment of the Kettle Valley Rail Trail (KVR) to prioritize trail sections with high market potential, identify necessary amenities and signage, and outline a capital plan for upgrades. It will also seek alignment with the Province's work on a BC-wide rail trails master plan. To achieve this goal, establishing an overarching *Valleys & Vineyards* Rail Trail (VVRT) Committee would facilitate the development of a cohesive valley-wide network. This committee would ensure collaboration among relevant partners from Sicamous to Osoyoos, guiding the vision from concept to reality.

The Thompson Okanagan Tourism Foundation (TOTF) could be a key partner in achieving a cohesive, marketable regional rail trail system. Through coordinated planning and engagement with communities and tourism operators, the initiative aims to elevate the trail system to world-class standards, attracting greater private sector investment and expanded tourism opportunities.

THEME 2: Iconic Stories

Stories are foundational to enriching experiences and the unique stories of the area help anchor experiential development priorities. The prioritization of stories outlined below reflect the views of the partners.

Iconic stories enrich visitor experiences by immersing visitors in the rich history, culture, and natural beauty of *Valleys & Vineyards*. This theme aims to showcase the area's heritage, elevate Indigenous voices, and create meaningful connections between visitors and the destination through innovative initiatives such as interpretive signage, audio tours, and storytelling. These initiatives increase international appeal, promote seasonal and geographic growth, and strengthen the destination's tourism brand while emphasizing inclusivity and cultural authenticity.

2.1 Enriching Visitor Experiences through Storytelling will incorporate narratives of Indigenous heritage, agricultural traditions, and ecological wonders. This will allow visitors to gain a deeper connection to the destination. Success stories like the Nk'Mip Desert Cultural Centre illustrate the power of storytelling to enhance tourism appeal. Initiatives will focus on empowering Indigenous communities to lead storytelling efforts, establishing a repository for curated stories, and incorporating narratives into signage, itineraries, and digital tools. A regional storyteller program will further amplify these efforts, promoting geographic growth and elevating the visitor experience.

2.2 Developing Interpretive Signage will connect visitors to *Valleys & Vineyards*' key stories through graphically rich, media-enhanced touchpoints at museums, visitor centres, and trail nodes. These signs will share Indigenous and regional narratives, advancing cultural understanding and environmental stewardship. Enhanced with QR codes linking to additional content, the signage can overcome language barriers and provide a cost-effective alternative to on-site staff. Collaboration with Indigenous knowledge keepers and local partners will ensure authenticity and consistency with the *Valleys & Vineyards* brand. Establishing a representative working group and creating a brand strategy will kickstart the development of impactful signage.

2.3 Creating Digital Tours offers an accessible, immersive way to explore *Valleys & Vineyards* across various transportation modes, from driving and hiking to biking and paddling. These tours integrate **audio, video, photos, and interactive elements**, providing authentic, multilingual storytelling that encourages inclusivity and cultural connection. By enhancing visitor engagement and promoting responsible exploration, digital tours can drive seasonal and geographic tourism growth while supporting sustainability efforts. Initial pilot tours could target key segments, with content developed by First Nations and local storytellers to ensure cultural authenticity. A phased rollout would establish a comprehensive, adaptable system, exploring gamification, interactive mapping, and real-time updates to enrich the experience and encourage ongoing engagement.

THEME 3: Iconic Linkages

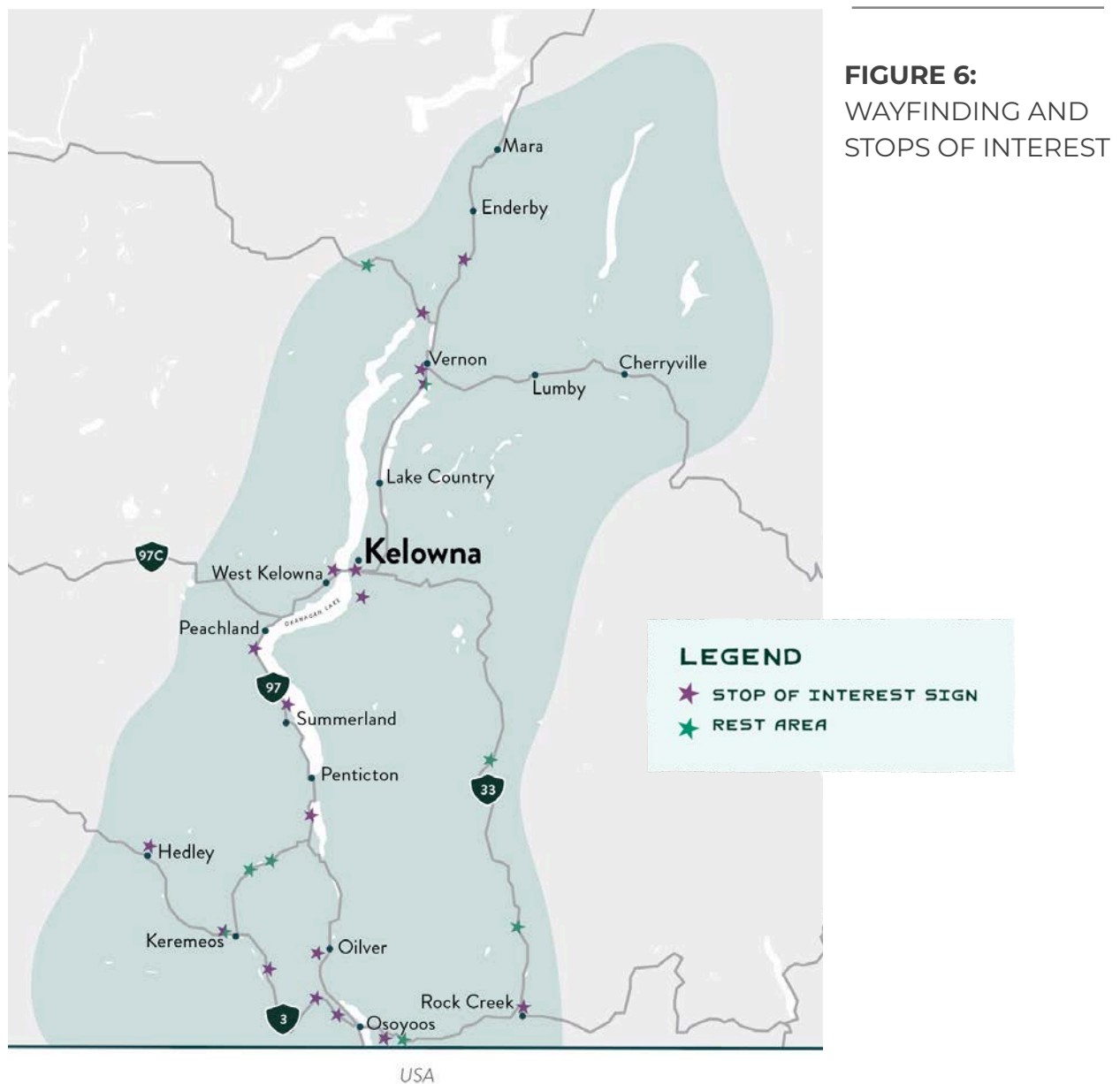
The Iconic Linkages theme focuses on enhancing access, wayfinding, and visitor services to support visitors from trip planning, to arrival, and throughout their journey. This includes improving air and land connection points, refining wayfinding, and providing seamless, immersive visitor services. The goal is to create an interconnected visitor experience that enhances access, boosts tourism, and strengthens the brand while promoting growth.

3.1 Welcoming Visitors to Valleys & Vineyards encompasses ground access along with meaningful welcome services. Efforts will also focus on enhancing the airport arrival experience with cultural and event-specific welcome programs in collaboration with First Nations communities. Enhanced ground transportation services, including seamless land transfers and on-airport hotel stays, will support a smooth experience.

3.2 Training the Frontline will build a cohesive visitor experience by enhancing the ability of frontline workers in hotels, restaurants, and attractions to promote the Iconic area's offerings. This initiative is a ground-up strategy, building standardized training on Iconics themes, destination highlights, and visitor engagement

strategies. It will also encourage seasonal and geographic growth of tourism by guiding staff to direct visitors to communities throughout the area.

3.3 Enhancing Provincial Signage, Wayfinding, and Rest Stops will improve visitor navigation and safety. It is important to support visitor reassurance and destination interpretation through methods like high-quality signage, enhanced rest stops, and complementary digital services. The initiative will also prioritize safe, accessible rest stops with essential amenities, including clean washrooms and proper lighting, to improve the visitor experience.



THEME 4: Iconic Experiences

As noted, the area is relatively well developed and offers an array of experiences designed for domestic travellers. The priorities identified reflect the need to elevate experiences to attract international visitors, as well as drive geographic and seasonal growth.

The Iconic Experiences theme focuses on creating distinct and memorable visitor experiences in *Valleys & Vineyards* by enhancing unique attractions. It aims to leverage the area's natural beauty, cultural heritage, and outdoor activities to create sustainable experiences that appeal to international tourists. The theme promotes both geographical and seasonal growth of visitors, ensuring year-round tourism growth throughout the area. Key initiatives include developing wellness tourism, geotourism, Indigenous tourism, shoulder season recreation, and export-ready packages to offer a comprehensive and diverse range of market-ready experiences that will elevate *Valleys & Vineyards* as a premier destination.

4.1 Developing Culinary and Agri-tourism Experiences focuses on elevating *Valleys & Vineyards*' existing vibrant culinary scene and agri-tourism offerings, both deeply rooted in the Valleys' rich agricultural heritage. Enhancing access to on-farm and producer facilities through trails and tours, strengthening collaboration between wineries, orchards, farm-gate operators, and restaurants on marketable packages, and developing innovative experiences that link culinary/agri-tourism to the trail system and trail users are priorities.

4.2 Championing an Indigenous Experience Ecosystem is an Indigenous-led initiative supporting the development of authentic, market-ready tourism experiences that emphasize cultural exchange, respect, and sustainability. First Nations communities will guide tourism efforts, while maintaining cultural integrity, with support from ITBC. By establishing resources such as an Indigenous tourism incubator and mentorship programs, Indigenous leaders will support entrepreneurs and businesses while nurturing partnerships, increasing engagement, and raising awareness of Indigenous tourism opportunities across *Valleys & Vineyards*.

4.3 Developing Export-Ready Packages will cater to international and long-haul visitors. By developing themed itineraries and experiences in areas like outdoor recreation, Indigenous tourism, and wine tourism, *Valleys & Vineyards* can diversify its offerings and attract new markets. The initiative includes promoting sustainable practices, supporting smaller communities with limited tourism infrastructure, and leveraging digital tools to enhance visibility. It also encourages local businesses to collaborate and package their services, creating cohesive, market-ready experiences that drive seasonal and geographic growth.

4.4 Expanding Wellness Experiences aims to develop spa and wellness offerings in *Valleys & Vineyards*. Identified as one of the fastest growing sectors in the tourism industry because of rising global awareness about health and well-being, further developing the wellness tourism industry is a natural fit for the destination.

By incorporating Indigenous spiritual wellness and nature-based elements, initiatives will attract new visitors and grow international appeal. This initiative involves collaboration with local wellness experts, cultural leaders, and First Nations communities to create market-ready wellness products, with a focus on sustainability and the integration of local traditions. A pilot project will test new wellness experiences, followed by workshops and resource development to support operators.

4.5 Supporting New Geotourism Activities will highlight the unique geology, geography, and ecology of *Valleys & Vineyards*. By developing interpretive tours and experiences, the initiative aims to increase tourism revenues while helping visitors develop a deeper understanding of the area's natural heritage. The integration of Indigenous perspectives with scientific interpretations will create immersive experiences for visitors. A working group will be formed to expand the local geotourism inventory, identify gaps, and develop new offerings, including educational activities that emphasize *Valleys & Vineyards'* distinctive landscapes.

4.6 Expanding Shoulder-Season Experiences for international visitors will support economic growth for communities by encouraging additional exploration and experience opportunities outside of the peak summer season and the peak winter season at mountain resorts.

Urban centres throughout *Valleys & Vineyards* suffer from high levels of shoulder season vacancy. This initiative is focused on innovating new experiences that fit the Super, Natural British Columbia® brand image as a travel destination that will be of high interest to these international visitors. The goal is to extend stays and increase expenditures from this existing international visitor base.

6.2 SUMMARY OF PRIORITIES FOR VALLEYS & VINEYARDS

This Strategy outlines the highest priority initiatives for *Valleys & Vineyards*, selected from a wide range of options. Each initiative was assessed in terms of **relative priority** against each other by their potential to drive growth. The proposed timing reflects this prioritization, along with logical sequencing and considerations such as securing partners and financing.

Development Concept: Mindful Connection

THEME 1 – Iconic Journeys

Connecting the Rail Trail System
Building a Master Plan for Trails



THEME 2 – Iconic Stories

Enriching Visitor Experiences
through Storytelling
Developing Interpretive Signage
Creating Digital Tours



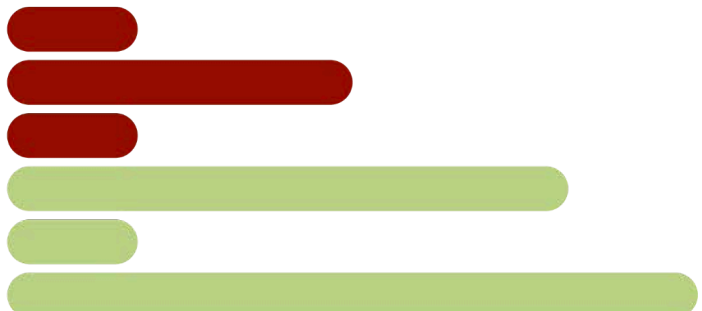
THEME 3 – Iconic Linkages

Welcoming Visitors to *Valleys & Vineyards*
Training the Frontline
Enhancing Provincial Signage, Wayfinding, and
Rest Stops



THEME 4 – Iconic Experiences

Developing Culinary and Agri-tourism
Championing Indigenous Experience Ecosystem
Developing Export-Ready Packages
Expanding Wellness Experiences
Supporting New Geotourism Activities
Expanding Shoulder Season Experiences



PRIORITY



HIGH



MEDIUM

TIMELINE

SHORT

→ LONG TERM →



SILVERSTAR MOUNTAIN RESORT
Photo: Abby Cooper

7. GEARING UP FOR DELIVERY

7.1 INTRODUCTION

A key challenge for the *Valleys & Vineyards* Destination Development Strategy is finding the right mechanisms for supporting its delivery and implementation. Key themes relating to delivery were identified in the *Iconics* Destination Development Framework and remain relevant for this strategy. These include the importance of adopting an integrated approach, building on the partnerships already established, creating new alliances, and finding ways to secure the investment that will be needed to support and advance the vision, objectives, and experience development priorities identified in the *Valleys & Vineyards* Destination Development Strategy.

7.2 INTEGRATION

The Invest in *Iconics* Strategy marks a key shift towards a new approach to marketing BC. This reimagined approach emphasizes a dual focus, which integrates destination branding and destination development and endeavours to harmonize marketing efforts with the creation of immersive, memorable experiences for visitors. There are four levels of integration to consider:

1. Integration between destination branding and experience development with the focus of integration being 'story'.

Harmonization will be achieved through more focused storytelling, shining a light on what makes the places and communities within *Valleys & Vineyards* distinctive and special, and, through experience development, globally compelling destinations to visit.

2. Integration between the destination development plans being taken forward and the opportunities presented by the destination brand to elevate experience development opportunities identified therein.

In terms of destination development planning, this integrated approach will continue to elevate, support and, where necessary, accelerate those experience development and enhancement activities already being taken forward by partners through their destination development plans, enabling communities within the area to reap the benefits of aligning with the *Valleys & Vineyards* brand.

3. Integration across Destination BC where the focus of integration is at the program level.

Within Destination BC, steps towards integration are already being taken at the program level. Through the Invest in Iconics Strategy, Destination BC has started realigning its existing programs and resources to advance the vision of the [Invest in Iconics Strategy](#). For example, a small grant program was piloted in fall 2023 to help visitor centres enhance the visitor experience both within the centres and throughout their communities, focusing on experiences, encounters, and touchpoints. Although no further intake for this pilot program has been identified at this time, other programs that could enhance integration and alignment—and generate support for Iconics—may include future experience development initiatives and the Co-operative Marketing Partnerships Program. Funding opportunities will need to be identified if there is a desire to advance these initiatives.

4. Integration across and between the core partners in supporting the implementation of the *Valleys & Vineyards* Destination Development and Iconics Strategy within their respective mandates.

TACS is focused on creating healthy, inclusive, and resilient communities in BC through tourism-related programs, policies, and investments that support the sustainable growth of the tourism sector. To support the creation of iconic, inspirational routes and areas that will strengthen travel appeal in all corners of BC, TACS is committed to raising awareness of the needs of the visitor economy across government, as well as working to ensure policy enables destination development efforts throughout BC. TACS will mobilize support for provincial destination development priorities that emerge through the Iconics Destination Development Strategies through cross-government engagement and collaboration.

ITBC prioritizes First Nations decision-making and Indigenous inclusion within the Invest in Iconics Strategy. It ensures that there is no prejudice against First Nations

interests, safeguarding Title and Rights, and respecting self-government agreements. The team provides support through community engagement with Indigenous communities and organizations. Additionally, it focuses on developing human and economic capacity. The Indigenous Tourism Training Initiative, comprising three programs, offers training and educational opportunities for ITBC partners. ITBC extends further assistance through the Capacity Building and Resiliency Program, including mentorship and funding opportunities.

TOTA works to develop, support, and sustain the tourism sector in the Thompson Okanagan region. TOTA will continue to champion the strategy and work collaboratively with the provincial government, Destination BC, ITBC, and regional and local partners to carefully and respectfully steward the development of tourism in ways that will benefit communities throughout the Thompson Okanagan.

7.3 PARTNERSHIPS

As the project moves into the delivery and implementation phase, it will be essential to nurture new relationships, engage the right partners with the necessary expertise or authority at the right time, and emphasize the need for flexibility.

Key partnerships will include:

- Working closer with Parks Canada, BC Parks, and RSTBC to progress experience development priorities, visitor management initiatives, signage, and other touchpoint enhancements.
- Working with the Ministry of Transportation and Transit (MoTT) to advance the provincial signage opportunity strategy. This initiative aims to bring the Iconic brands to life within destinations through a refreshed and cohesive branded roadside signage system, as well as improvements at key rest stops.
- Working with the Ministry of Jobs and Economic Growth (JEG) and their Regional Economic Operations branch to champion innovation and support economic development and tourism investment attraction within the context of the *Valleys & Vineyards* area.
- Leveraging Destination BC's partnership with the British Columbia Economic Development Association (BCEDA) to reach and engage more of the economic development community and increase awareness of experience development investment opportunities.
- Leveraging Destination BC's partnership with the Local Government Leadership Academy (LGLA) to continue raising awareness about the value of tourism and the opportunities for municipalities to participate in tourism and align their investments with larger provincial efforts.
- Collaborating with TOTF to support the development of the recreational trail systems and rail trail corridors throughout the area.

Each core partner is expected to take responsibility for building and maintaining specific partnerships at the appropriate level and time. For example, TOTA might partner at a district level with BC Parks, MoTT, JEG, and municipalities to advance locally significant aspects of the experience development and touchpoint enhancement priorities identified in this strategy.

Local tourism partners, including CDMOs, local governments, tourism businesses, business associations, Visitor Centres, and not-for-profit groups, play a crucial role in the success of the provincial tourism economy. These partners can leverage this strategy to guide their own planning efforts and align with the broader vision. Additionally, they can use this strategy to raise the profile of local projects positioned as key priorities within the provincial context, while also delivering local benefits and supporting community aspirations.

TOTA and ITBC serve as key points of contact for local tourism partners, offering guidance on aligning with strategic priorities for Iconics. They also support connecting with potential project partners, provide access to information on best practices and case studies from BC and beyond, assist with project planning, and identify funding opportunities. In addition, TOTA and ITBC deliver a wide range of programs and resources that local tourism organizations and businesses can access.

7.4 INVESTMENT

Destination development-oriented programming in BC has achieved significant success by supporting new public investments, such as PacifiCan's Tourism Relief Program and Tourism Growth Program. Despite these efforts, substantial opportunity exists to further position tourism as a priority sector for attracting private investment in BC.

Through partnerships, Destination BC will work to support both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities within the *Valleys & Vineyards* area in building their awareness of tourism investment readiness factors. This includes understanding the steps needed to enhance the attractiveness of communities to tourism investors and promoting tourism investment opportunities to regional, provincial, national, and international audiences. It will be important to continue collaborating with community groups to identify suitable funding sources for specific projects and explore opportunities to access angel investors and non-collateral-driven business start-up funds.



ELLISON PROVINCIAL PARK, VERNON
Photo: Abby Cooper

7.5 DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

THEME 1: Iconic Journeys

SUBTHEME: CONNECTING THE RAIL TRAIL SYSTEM

Strategic Initiative: Improve the continuity of the trail network and opportunities for multi-day rides and shorter excursions by closing strategic gaps in access and pursuing a fully connected trail system.

Objectives:

- market-ready experiences that will generate new demand
- seasonal and geographic growth of tourism through new product development

Rationale: The area's three rail trails are in varying states of completeness and useability, and they remain physically unconnected, though users can find ways to get from one to the other with adequate time and transportation. Multi-day tours have long operated on the KVR between Midway/Rock Creek and Penticton, making this section ideal for future development due to its scenic views, infrastructure investments, and proximity to wineries on the Naramata Bench and terminus in Penticton.

Expanding similar experiences in other areas requires key connections and improvements. Priority targets include linking SNORT and ORT via Swan Lake, ensuring ORT continuity at Wood Lake, a crossing at Vaseux Lake to reconnect the KVR Osoyoos subdivision, and reconnecting the KVR link between Penticton and Summerland. The Trail of the Okanagan initiative aims to create a continuous trail along the west side of Okanagan Lake. Although it is not a rail trail, this development would greatly enhance the regional trail system and expand tour options.

These improvements will take years and depend on landowner and partner support, but some segments could be completed within five years, expanding rail trail experiences and accessibility.

How to Get Going:

- To support long-term trail planning, identify and prioritize connecting segments within the Rail Trails Master Plan, as recommended in the previous initiative.
- Work with local trail societies and foundations on existing trail initiatives.
- Support efforts by the Ribbons of Green Trail Society to build a trail from Armstrong to Vernon via Swan Lake and connection to the ORT at Coldstream. This will require a combination of roads for the Swan Lake link and innovative approaches to infrastructure placement and funding (e.g., funding for sewer and waterline improvements to integrate with the trail system).
- Support the Trail of the Okanagans' efforts to develop a west-side trail connecting Bennet Bridge and Osoyoos. This initiative includes addressing the section of the KVR between Trout Creek and Penticton, which crosses Penticton Indian Band land and currently presents a major barrier to creating a continuous trail.
- Support the Okanagan Indian Band and District of Lakeland complete a through connection on the ORT and a trail loop around Wood Lake to be connected to the planned Indigenous Interpretive Centre.

Partners: TOTA, RSTBC and BC Parks (KVR), Trail of the Okanagans, Ribbons of Green Trail Society, KVRTPA (KVR Trail Preservation Alliance), TOTF, local government, and members of Syilx Okanagan and Secwépemc nations.

Activity and Resource Requirements: This will require multi-year investment and funding and considerable coordination among multiple partners.

Timing: 2025-ongoing | **Relative Priority:** High

SUBTHEME: BUILDING A MASTER PLAN FOR TRAILS

Strategic Initiative: Prepare a master plan for improving and upgrading the rail trail network to best practice standards on priority sections best suited for marketable tour products.

Objectives:

- market-ready experiences that will generate new demand
- seasonal and geographic growth of tourism through new product development

Rationale: The rail trail system in *Valleys & Vineyards* has three major components that connect the valley north to south: the KVR, ORT, and SNORT. Collectively, the rail trails represent a special tourism asset unique in Canada, with known demand among international markets and significant potential for linking together multiple visitor experiences, from wine and agri-tourism to outdoor recreation, lake-based activities, and Indigenous tourism.

Today, the system is best described as a patchwork, with physical gaps between the three trails, varying states of surface quality, signage and access, and a multitude of ownership structures involving the province, local government, First Nations, and stewardship groups. TOTA's regional tourism strategy and the Thompson Okanagan Rail Trails Tourism Strategy have called for action on iconic trail development, of which the three trails are primary targets. While master planning has occurred for the KVR's key Midway to Glenfir segment, a broader plan framework linking all rail trails would enhance coordinated development and marketing potential. There is exceptional potential for elevating the network to a coordinated, coherent rail trail brand, one that will encourage more private sector interest and investment in trail-related services, amenities and experiences.

How to Get Going:

- The VVRT Working Group or successor organization should consult with communities, tourism operators, and the travel trade to identify those trail segments with the best marketability potential for guided and self-guided tours. To date, development has been based mostly on potential for local use.
- Prepare a 10-year Rail Trail Master Plan that will set out a strategic approach and work plan for coordinating improvements, signage, and amenities. The master plan would prioritize segments for surface improvements, identify amenities for placement (e.g., charging stations, washrooms, Wi-Fi, signage, picnic areas), and provide a multi-partner capital plan. It should be noted that

amenity and signage installation will likely require Trail Design Drawings to determine placement for the amenities and signage.

- Prepare a VVRT brand and signage strategy that would promote a unified rail trail while reflecting local character and aligning with provincial signage practices. The strategy must be practical, affordable, and capable of accommodating existing signage.

Partners: Destination BC, TOTA, RSTBC and BC Parks [KVR], KVRTPA, TOTF, Columbia-Shuswap Regional District (CSRD), Regional District of North Okanagan (RDNO), and Regional District of Central Okanagan (RDCO) [SNORT and ORT], City of Kelowna, City of Vernon, City of Penticton, members of Syilx Okanagan and Secwépemc nations and stewardship groups.

Activity and Resource Requirements: Funding for developing Master Plan and Signage Strategy.

Timing: 2026-2027 | **Relative Priority:** Medium



NARAMATA
Photo: @vancouverfoodie

THEME 2: Iconic Stories

SUBTHEME: ENRICHING VISITOR EXPERIENCES THROUGH STORYTELLING

Strategic Initiative: Community and Indigenous-led story curation and storytelling

Objectives:

- Enhance visitor experiences and drive seasonal and geographic growth through storytelling.
- Establish a repository system for shared stories.

Rationale: Integrating storytelling into tourism offerings is crucial for creating meaningful and memorable visitor experiences. The *Valleys & Vineyards* rich history, including the Interior Salish peoples' culture, unique geography, and agricultural heritage, offers compelling narratives that resonate with visitors, especially international learners. Indigenous-led storytelling ensures authenticity and encourages connections to the land, while local stories of agriculture, immigration, and ecology enhance the destination's appeal. Aligning with the Creating Digital Tours subtheme, these stories can be shared through QR codes, interactive maps, and multimedia content, making them more immersive and accessible. Successes like the [Nk'Mip Desert Cultural Centre](#) and [TOTA's 7 Celebrations](#) showcase storytelling's impact, while digital tools expand reach.

How to Get Going:

- Partner with ITBC to develop a framework for Indigenous storytelling, leveraging Indigenous storytelling program being developed, mentorship programs and financial support to empower local First Nations. Initiatives like the [Okanagan Indian Band Komasket Powwow](#) and [TOTA's 7 Celebrations](#) can serve as templates for engaging visitors with Indigenous culture.
- Establish a central repository for local stories, collaborating with museums, local historians, and educational institutions. Pilot programs, such as Indigenous storytelling at SilverStar, can help refine approaches.
- Develop standards for Indigenous representation on signage and incorporate storytelling into itineraries, wayfinding, and QR code applications.
- Facilitate a potential *Valleys & Vineyards* storyteller program, recruiting and training local storytellers to share narratives across experiences and seasons.

Partners: ITBC will lead Indigenous storytelling efforts, with support from TOTA, Destination BC, First Nations, local communities, museums, and educational institutions.

Activity and Resource Requirements: Financial and human resources are needed for story curation, pilot programs, digital integration, and storyteller training. A detailed assessment is required to outline specific funding needs.

Timing: 2025–2027, with initial pilot programs launched by 2025.

Relative Priority: High



WEST KELOWNA
Photo: Destination British Columbia

SUBTHEME: DEVELOPING INTERPRETIVE SIGNAGE

Strategic Initiative: Develop and install branded interpretive signage that enriches a visitor's experience, understanding, and engagement in *Valleys & Vineyards* through media-rich storytelling.

Objectives:

- Serve as important touchpoints that connect visitors to a place and support their journey through the destination.
- Engages key facilities such as museums and interpretive centres and sites in the sharing of the most important stories of the valley.
- Become a consumer-facing presence for the brand.
- Contribute to social and environmental stewardship and sustainability through sharing best practices and protocols with all visitors.

Rationale: Sophisticated interpretive signage will be a cornerstone of consistently sharing the most important stories of the *Valleys & Vineyards* area to international visitors. This signage will be positioned in museums, interpretive centres, Visitor Centres, and on external trail nodes. These signs will feature visually engaging designs that appeal to diverse international visitors. They will also include QR code links to online content, providing additional opportunities for inclusion and engagement.

Photographic and graphic elements will help to explain cultural and natural phenomena, helping to overcome linguistic barriers for international visitors. All *Valleys & Vineyards* interpretive signage will incorporate a consistent design approach, highlighting Indigenous presence and knowledge to establish a strong leadership presence. Ongoing consultation with First Nations knowledge keepers will ensure that the stories shared remain current and meaningful. The brand will guide the content and writing style, focusing on the primary stories identified elsewhere in this strategy.

While initial development costs are an important factor, this initiative is a very cost-effective way of sharing the *Valleys & Vineyards* Iconic without the challenges and costs of on-site interpretive staff. Appropriate messaging will reinforce cultural protocols, environmental sensitivity, and potentially engage visitors in destination stewardship actions.

How to Get Going:

- Establish an Iconics working group to facilitate discussion, build consensus, and coordinate efforts in prioritizing and developing interpretive signage installations. The working group should primarily consist of existing facility leaders, complemented by interpretive leaders from BC Parks.
- Work with Destination BC's Brand team to develop a brand strategy and associated graphics for signage applications across all installations supported through this initiative. Embedded QR codes will be featured on signs.
- Inventory and align opportunities for new or upgraded installations at all potential sites.
- Develop an initial set of signs focused on priority stories.
- Consult with Indigenous knowledge keepers to ensure protocols are observed, and to gain new and factual interpretations.
- Initiate the creative process and plan the production and installation of signs.
- Develop rich media content and establish a delivery mechanism where internet service is available. This initiative can align with the Audio Tours project to maximize impact. Media content should include Indigenous welcomes, songs, music, videos, and imagery. Offering multiple language options through AI translations is recommended to enhance accessibility.

Partners: This initiative is best accomplished through active engagement of the public, private sector entities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and special interest groups. Destination BC/TOTA/ITBC to establish a working group, with long-term leadership from participants, likely museum and interpretive specialists. Unique content and cultural specialists will be engaged for each installation.

Activity and Resource Requirements: Resource development opportunities include grants, special interest groups, fundraising, and support from the private sector and government. Many sites also have external “friends” associations that should be approached for assistance. Destination BC's Brand team can support the development of the Design and Brand Book. The costs for each installation will vary based on design elements and related infrastructure, and funding will need to be secured to carry out the development and installation.

Timing:

- Design, brand book, story ideation – 2025
- Research, story and development – 2026 and beyond

Relative Priority: Medium

SUBTHEME: CREATING DIGITAL TOURS

Strategic Initiative: Develop GPS-based digital tours with multimedia content, multilingual capabilities, and interactive features to enhance visitor engagement and accessibility.

Objectives:

- Generate new demand through market-ready inclusive experiences.
- Drive seasonal and geographic growth of tourism through new product development.
- Strengthen brand presence and storytelling to deepen visitor connections.
- Enhance visitor experience with engaging, self-guided exploration tools.

Rationale:

Digital tours provide an opportunity to share the stories of *Valleys & Vineyards* in a culturally appropriate and immersive way. These experiences should be available through various transportation modes, including driving, hiking, biking, and paddling, with GPS-triggered delivery.

Expanding beyond audio, the tours will integrate photos, videos, and interactive elements, enriching engagement and catering to diverse learning styles. Gamification features, such as scavenger hunts or achievement badges, can further enhance visitor participation, especially for families.

Digital tours enhance accessibility by providing inclusive experiences for travellers with visual impairments and older adults. Promoting inclusiveness is seen as a potential strategic advantage for the area, and this initiative fully supports that vision. These tours enable authentic storytelling, allowing Indigenous and local voices to share their own histories. Additionally, AI-powered translation and content curation can support multilingual capabilities, making the tours accessible to a diverse audience.

How to Get Going:

- Leverage existing audio tours already developed (i.e., Naramata) and incorporate best practices for expansion.
- Establish a project committee to identify the most suitable initial or pilot tour segments, select effective delivery formats, and explore funding opportunities. Priority should be given to areas that support both seasonal and geographic tourism growth.
- Identify and partner with a developer to ensure mobile and web compatibility, ease of updates, and long-term scalability.

- Develop themes and storylines for priority segments and establish a dedicated development team for each pilot segment to focus on research, content creation, and talent acquisition. Pay specific attention to protocol adherence for story acquisition.
- Develop a mobile application that integrates gamification and accessibility features, and upload content for each segment.
- Test the app with diverse users, gather feedback, and refine functionality.
- Implement a strategic marketing campaign, including partnerships with tourism operators, signage at key locations, and digital promotions.
- Explore funding models such as app purchases, donation options, business sponsorships, or partnerships with BC Parks and other organizations
- Use analytics to refine the experience and plan future tour expansions.

Partners: Destination BC, TOTA, ITBC, BC Parks, inclusivity groups, First Nations

Activity and Resource Requirements: This initiative can be phased over multiple years to gradually develop a consistently formatted series, adaptable to various travel modes, and engaging a wide range of interest groups. Emphasizing inclusivity as a core value opens opportunities to access existing funding programs. Some key activities required for this initiative, which will need appropriate resources, include:

- App development, including platform research and integration of multimedia, gamification, and accessibility features.
- Content creation, including high-quality audio, video, photography, AI-powered translation, and voice synthesis.
- Beta testing, user experience optimization, and accessibility enhancements.
- Marketing, distribution, and ongoing maintenance to ensure engagement and sustainability.

Timing:

- Pilot development phase 2025
- Pilot roll-out 2026
- Expansion and Promotion 2027 and beyond

Relative Priority: Medium

THEME 3: Iconic Linkages

SUBTHEME: WELCOMING VISITORS TO VALLEYS & VINEYARDS

Strategic Initiative: Expand access and enhance welcoming experiences for visitors

Objectives:

- Enhance impact by creating an immersive sense of arrival for visitors, with enhanced visitor services training on the Iconics for consistent, high-quality experiences.
- Strengthen partnerships with Indigenous communities to showcase the area's deep history and cultural richness.
- Support land access to drive year-round tourism and economic growth.

Rationale: As international and domestic connectivity to *Valleys & Vineyards* grows, the destination has a unique opportunity to enhance both transportation access and the visitor experience. Although airline route development falls outside the scope of Iconics destination development efforts, it is still important to encourage the region's airports to expand air routes. Kelowna International Airport (YLW) serves as the primary gateway for international travellers, supported by Penticton Regional Airport (YYF). Both airports have opportunities to establish connections to additional destinations.

YLW plays a vital role, and creating a strong "sense of arrival" can positively influence perceptions, extend stays, and boost spending. Achieving this requires balancing the expansion of air and land transportation with immersive, personalized welcome experiences upon arrival. In collaboration with Indigenous communities, such as the Okanagan Indian Band and Westbank First Nation, the initiative will bring cultural authenticity to life through welcoming displays, icons, and interactive storytelling.

Seamless ground transportation throughout the area is essential for international visitors arriving by air. Key focus areas include guided transportation services such as shuttles, self-drive options through car rentals, and on-airport hotel accommodations. These initiatives will ensure that *Valleys & Vineyards* not only offers convenient access but also provides a meaningful, culturally rich experience, positioning the area as a must-visit destination with a strong sense of identity and purpose.

How to Get Going:

- **Welcoming Touchpoints:** Welcoming touchpoints at YLW should feature branded displays reflecting the *Valleys & Vineyards* brand identity, with signage, storytelling, interactive elements, and in-person visitor services. A structured program can systematize customization for events, seasons, and experiences through collaboration with the airport and partners, ensuring a cohesive and personalized experience for all visitors.
- **Cultural Welcome Programs:** Cultural welcome programs should partner with First Nations communities to develop a group of cultural ambassadors under the existing YLW Ambassador Program, which already includes a youth focus and aligns with DEIA priorities. This initiative will support cultural greetings for international visitors, enhance their arrival experience with interactive storytelling and displays, and champion inclusiveness.
- **Indigenous Displays:** Work with ITBC and local artisans to enhance displays in airports, creating immersive environments that reflect the cultural richness of the destination.
- **Feedback and Iteration:** Gather visitor insights at all touchpoints, including flights and airport experiences, to continually refine and improve the program. This involves conducting surveys, such as the Airport Next survey and the Airport Service Quality exit survey, to collect valuable feedback from visitors.

Partners: YLW, YYF, First Nations, ITBC, TOTA, Okanagan Bucket List, and other operators

Activity and Resource Requirements: Funding is required for the initial program development, including training materials, branding, and setup. Subsequently, an annual programming fee will cover honorariums for cultural ambassadors, maintenance of welcoming spaces, and ongoing program enhancements.

Timing: 2025-2029 | **Relative Priority:** High

SUBTHEME: TRAINING THE FRONTLINE

Strategic Initiative: Develop and deliver training programs for front-line staff.

Objectives:

- Align front-line services with Iconics themes and destination differentiators.
- Empower staff as ambassadors to strengthen visitor connections.
- Drive seasonal and geographic tourism growth through front-line promotion.

Rationale: Visitors often rely on front-line staff at hotels, restaurants, attractions, visitor centres, and retail outlets as their primary source of information. However, there is currently a lack of standardized training to equip staff with the knowledge and skills needed to effectively promote the unique offerings of *Valleys & Vineyards*.

To ensure widespread participation and relevant design, the Visitor Services Training will be developed with significant local engagement from the outset, incorporating input from front-line staff, businesses, and community partners. This bottom-up approach will enhance the quality of visitor interactions, create a unified area-wide message, and help visitors discover lesser-known attractions, supporting seasonal and geographic tourism growth.

How to Get Going:

- Conduct consultations with front-line staff, businesses, and tourism operators to shape the curriculum and ensure relevance.
- Create interactive, locally informed training modules focused on Iconics themes, visitor engagement strategies, and other area highlights.
- Build capacity by training a network of local trainers to deliver the program, ensuring consistency and reach.
- Introduce the program through targeted outreach, launch events, and promotional campaigns to encourage participation.
- Collect ongoing feedback and refine the program to maintain its effectiveness and responsiveness to local needs.

Partners: Go2HR, Destination BC, TOTA, ITBC, local tourism operators, chambers of commerce, Indigenous tourism organizations, naturalist and conservation organizations (for local ecological knowledge), and municipal governments.

Activity and Resource Requirements: Funding for initial program development and implementation. Additional funding or in-kind support for program updates and ongoing delivery.

Timing: 2025-2027 | **Relative Priority:** High



KELOWNA
Photo: Tanya Goehring

SUBTHEME: ENHANCING PROVINCIAL SIGNAGE, WAYFINDING AND REST STOPS

Strategic Initiative: Identify and action priority projects relating to wayfinding, signage, rest stops, and associated visitor infrastructure.

Objectives:

- Support brand, while driving seasonal and geographic growth of visitors.
- Create arrival and welcoming experiences and provide visitor assurance, and safe access to visitor services.
- Increase awareness of destination offerings, support trip planning and exploration, and enhance local understanding.

Rationale: Guiding visitors to, and through, the *Valleys & Vineyards* area is essential. Understanding this, Destination BC commissioned an Invest in Iconics Signage Opportunities Strategy, which was completed in April 2024. This document defines a cascading “Family of Signs” in two clusters, those that provide visitor reassurance, and those that provide Interpretation. It further articulates the opportunity to compliment physical signs with digital services.

Signage provides the highest brand expression and messaging opportunities for *Valleys & Vineyards*. DEIA principles should be integrated into the *Valleys & Vineyards* signage and wayfinding plan. This approach also presents an opportunity to prioritize the four Rs of Indigenous cultural teaching: respect, responsibility, reciprocity, and relevance.

Rest stops and heritage points of interest have been identified as natural locations for signage and itinerant messaging. Throughout the engagement process leading to this Destination Development Strategy, there was a consistent emphasis on the need for enhanced, safe, and connected highway rest stops. This is particularly important for international visitors, as well as for travelling residents.

The engagement process also revealed significant concerns regarding washroom availability and maintenance, personal safety, and lighting. Addressing these issues is essential to attracting more international visitors to *Valleys & Vineyards* and ensuring that these facilities support their travel experience.

How to Get Going:

- With a plan in place, and signage design imminent, what is needed is a determination of priority and opportunistic implementation of the strategy within the area.
- Engage provincial entities, municipalities, and tourism organizations to identify signage priorities.
- Identify an initial list of signage projects and collaborate with partners who have short-term plans for related signage opportunities.
- Establish leadership structure and working team that will drive the planning, development, and installation process.
- Create funding strategies applicable to priority installations
- Evaluate existing Wi-Fi service and assess the feasibility of extending connectivity to rest stops and heritage points of interest. Enhancing Wi-Fi at these sites will enable incremental online storytelling and support digital wayfinding.
- Create a baseline for service standards for visitor rest stops, and an implementation plan to meet or exceed baselines.

Partners: Potential partners could include Destination BC, Municipalities, CDMOs, provincial government, TOTA, ITBC, community, Indigenous, and other user groups.

Activity and Resource Requirements: Funding will need to be identified for signage design, fabrication, and installation, as well as for any rest stop upgrades, which will be the biggest barrier to implementing this initiative.

Timing:

- Design – 2026 (or once funding is identified)
- Meetings and consultations – 2026 to 2028
- Fabrication and installations – 2028 and beyond.

Relative Priority: High priority for Brand presence opportunities, and for wayfinding to existing Iconics-aligned experiences. Medium priority for other tiers of signage, and as new experiences and operations are developed.

THEME 4: Iconic Experiences

SUBTHEME: DEVELOPING CULINARY AND AGRI-TOURISM EXPERIENCES

Strategic Initiative: Adapt existing products into compelling experiences that combine culinary and food themes with *Valleys & Vineyards*' other core offers, such as trail activities and outdoor recreation.

Objectives:

- Increase industry and community collaboration and innovation.
- Increase bookable tours and itineraries that will appeal to the travel trade.
- Grow existing culinary and agri-tourism offerings that appeal to international markets.

Rationale: *Valleys & Vineyards* boasts abundant farmland and orchards, providing fresh, seasonal ingredients to local restaurants. Many establishments embrace a farm-to-table philosophy, crafting dishes with locally sourced products. The thriving wine industry and growing brewery, distillery, and cidery sectors have enriched the beverage landscape. Despite challenges like wildfires and the 2024 winter freeze that devastated many crops, investment in facilities and hospitality services continues to grow.

Visitors can enjoy wine tastings, vineyard tours, grape harvesting experiences, and winemaking workshops. Many orchards offer U-pick experiences, where visitors can harvest fresh fruit. Many local farms partner with restaurants to create farm-to-table culinary experiences. Many also engage in organic farming, permaculture, and regenerative agriculture, with eco-friendly farm stays, workshops, and guided farm tours. An increasing number of events and festivals take place between April and October, helping to boost demand during the shoulder season following the peak summer period.

This initiative is not about building a product from the ground up, but instead creating more marketable experiences using the assets, experiences, and expertise of the businesses and community destination marketing organizations (DMOs) that are already involved in diversification and growth.

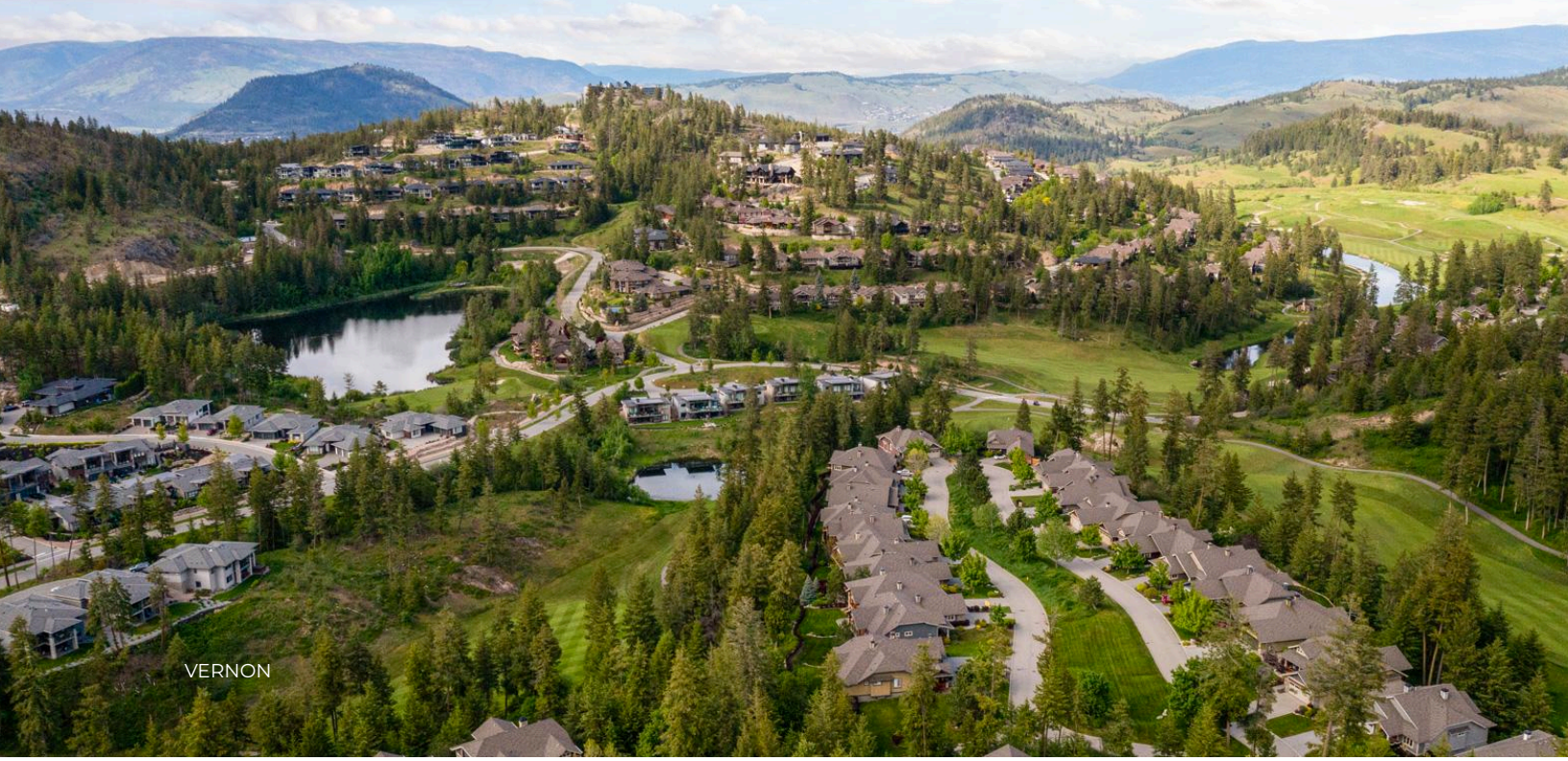
How to Get Going:

- Develop storylines and interpretive content that strengthen the connection between existing agri-tourism experiences and the unique attributes of *Valleys & Vineyards*. This should include highlighting the region's special relationship with water, semi-arid ecosystems, and the Indigenous connection to the land and fisheries resources.
- Establish a cooperative or committee of local DMOs to share experiences, best practices, and opportunities for sub-area partnerships aimed at advancing agri-tourism activities.
- Promote and increase uptake of the [Tourism Industry Association of Canada's Culinary and Agritourism READI program](#), which is a high-level course to build capacity and to empower businesses to innovate and grow sustainably, focusing on market-readiness and best practices. The program is designed for destinations or economic development offices to purchase the program for cohorts of 8 to 12 operators who are looking to develop or enhance market-ready culinary or agri-tourism experiences.
- Work with local DMOs to expand self-directed itineraries, bookable tours, or education experiences like cooking classes that combine agri-tourism with other popular activities including outdoor recreation, wellness, cultural heritage, and rail trail experiences.
- Strengthen collaboration among agri-tourism operators by providing access to planning resources dedicated to agri-tourism development offered by provincial and industry organizations, connecting them to like-minded operators interested in innovative packaged experiences, and sharing experiences and best practices for increasing sales through travel intermediaries.

Partners: TOTA, community DMOs, farms, orchards and agri-businesses, wineries and other beverage companies, festival organizers, BC Association of Farmers' Markets, Buy BC, Feast BC, BC Agri-Tourism Farming Association, Culinary Tourism Alliance, Tourism Industry Association of Canada, Investment Agriculture Foundation.

Activity and Resource Requirements: Minimal resources are needed for researching storylines, as well as modest funding (including stipends and travel expenses) to support committee activities.

Timing: 2026 - ongoing | **Relative Priority:** High



SUBTHEME: CHAMPIONING AN INDIGENOUS EXPERIENCE ECOSYSTEM

Strategic Initiative: Cultivate an environment where First Nations communities have the tools and partnerships needed to develop Indigenous products and experiences, if desired, that align with interests of *Valleys & Vineyards'* key international markets.

Objectives:

- Establish market-ready experiences that will generate new demand.
- Achieve seasonal and geographic growth of tourism through new product development.

Rationale: Indigenous tourism holds significant potential in *Valleys & Vineyards*, but it should be led and guided by First Nations to ensure alignment with cultural traditions, practices, and values that they choose to share. Market research tells us that most international visitors are learners that are seeking authentic encounters based on cultural exchange, respect, and sustainability. Indigenous tourism can be integrated into other key experiences such as trails, outdoor recreation, geotourism, wellness, and food or culinary offerings to enhance brand authenticity and appeal. The authenticity factor is connected to showcasing First Nations heritage, lands, and communities, led by Indigenous people themselves. This approach can benefit First Nations by supporting economic development through the creation of tourism offerings, while also providing opportunities for each community to share their cultural traditions and stories. It also enhances the overall tourism experience in *Valleys & Vineyards*. The New Zealand Maori tourism model offers valuable insights and could serve as an example to follow. Similarly, the Osoyoos Indian Band's

successful tourism businesses provide a local model that can be replicated throughout the *Valleys & Vineyards* area.

How to Get Going:

- Through ITBC leadership, engage First Nations to encourage their further involvement in tourism planning across all levels.
- ITBC will collaborate with First Nations communities in the planning area to identify short-term initiatives aimed at developing market-ready tourism experiences for those communities that have expressed an interest in tourism.
- Collaborate with ITBC to explore, design, and implement an Indigenous tourism incubator or accelerator. This initiative would support First Nations communities and Indigenous entrepreneurs in transforming business ideas into viable operations. The incubator would provide startups with essential resources, including research, business planning, financing, and marketing support, while also connecting them with potential partners, investors, and customers. The program could focus on developing various tourism offerings, such as Syilx Okanagan and Secwépemc culture camps, wellness activities, immersive storytelling experiences, festivals, events, and glamping facilities.
- Promote [ITBC's training resources](#), including Indigenous Tourism Training Initiative (ITTI) programs, and encourage mentorships with successful Indigenous tourism operators.
- Encourage First Nations communities to adopt tourism vision and objectives in their Comprehensive Community Plan (CCP).
- Showcase collaborations between First Nations and key partners, such as airports and MoTT, that will raise awareness of local Indigenous tourism opportunities using language, place names, and other cultural expressions at touchpoints.
- Consider inviting and hosting a Maori Tourism Delegation to *Valleys & Vineyards* to learn first-hand how to incorporate Indigenous experiences and perspectives into the *Valleys & Vineyards* brand.

Partners: ITBC, First Nations, Destination BC, TOTA, DMOs.

Activity and Resource Requirements: Developing the incubator or accelerator will require moderate to significant financial investment, including costs for program development, mission hosting, and honorariums. Additionally, the initiative will require a substantial time commitment from multiple partners.

Timing: 2025-ongoing | **Relative Priority:** High

SUBTHEME: DEVELOPING EXPORT-READY PACKAGES

Strategic Initiative: Build more market-ready and export-ready experiences that will serve as demand generators and support growth.

Objectives:

- Establish market-ready experiences that will generate new demand.
- Achieve seasonal and geographic growth of tourism through new product development.

Rationale: Developing diverse, inclusive, and monetized tourism experiences is crucial for future development and achievement of growth objectives. Operators and communities that adopt professional standards and seek to effectively compete for international and long-haul visitors will not only be more successful themselves but make a material contribution to strengthening the *Valleys & Vineyards* Iconic. Geographic growth of tourism requires smaller, outlying communities away from Highway 97 to promote market and export-ready operators. It is recognized that these areas often lack the hospitality services, operator expertise, and community capacity that would organically expand the visitor economy by drawing in more targeted investment in products that generate new demand. To establish *Valleys & Vineyards* as a brand worth supporting at the local level, it will be essential to provide dedicated services that enhance business professionalism and competitiveness.

How to Get Going:

- Advocate for the creation of new programming and one-on-one business support to develop experiences that align with the *Valleys & Vineyards* brand. Emphasis should be placed on the area's priority experiences, including trails, agri-tourism, food and wine, outdoor recreation, and Indigenous tourism.
- Promote sustainability practices that improve the capacity and competitiveness of the tourism industry while leveraging TOTA's Biosphere destination accreditation.
- Collaborate with Destination BC, Rove Marketing, Destination Canada, and other data providers to create and promote customized user profiles that help operators target key markets. These markets include rail trails (hiking/cycling), agri-tourism, culinary and wine tourism, outdoor recreation, and Indigenous experiences. The profiles will leverage Destination Canada's new traveller segmentation program, which replaces the Explorer Quotient model, as well as Destination BC's partnership with Rove Marketing for access to its business intelligence platform. This research will support operators in developing strategic directions and enhancing market planning and execution. To ensure

inclusivity, an affordable customization option for smaller communities, such as those in the Similkameen, along Highway #6, and in the North Okanagan, will help CDMOs engage with local operators effectively.

- Develop themed itineraries that align with the *Valleys & Vineyards* brand, allowing CDMOs to customize and market them effectively. Rather than placing a Call to Action on the main landing pages, include it within the itinerary pages. Ideally, these pages should feature a booking engine for guided tours or provide links to individual service providers for visitors seeking guided or self-guided experiences.
- Offer guidance to CDMOs on building partnerships among local businesses to encourage collaborative packaging. Promote market and export readiness criteria to operators and encourage the development of products and experiences during the shoulder seasons to reduce seasonality.
- Explore how Smart Destination Tourism practices can be used to drive growth through CDMOs with limited capacity for experience development. This could involve identifying and promoting local examples of innovative technology use in tourism, which can then be showcased to operators and communities. Additionally, consider organizing a tourism technology forum for industry champions, featuring affordable and practical opportunities for technology transfer and adoption.

Partners: Destination BC, Destination Canada, TOTA, DMOs, tourism operators, communities.

Activity and Resource Requirements: Moderate costs for market profiles, major time commitment among multiple partners.

Timing: 2025-ongoing | **Relative Priority:** High

SUBTHEME: EXPANDING WELLNESS EXPERIENCES

Strategic Initiative: Develop spa and wellness experiences, incorporating elements such as Indigenous spiritual wellness and nature-based offerings unique to the *Valleys & Vineyards* area.

Objectives:

- Grow tourism revenues by promoting seasonal and geographic growth.
- Attract new visitors through the development of market-ready experiences centered on authentic Canadian, nature-based wellness.
- Grow existing wellness offerings that appeal to international markets.

Rationale: The Global Wellness Institute (GWI) defines wellness tourism as travel focused on enhancing personal well-being, linking two growing industries: tourism and wellness. Research highlights the mental and physical health benefits of nature-based experiences. According to the GWI, Canada's wellness tourism economy was valued at \$13.3 billion, and ranked #14 out of over 200 countries, with 16.5 million wellness trips both from domestic and international markets. The spa sector itself is valued at \$2.4 billion in 2023 and again ranks #14. There are two types of wellness travellers. Primary wellness travellers are motivated specifically by wellness experiences, while secondary wellness travellers are open to participating in wellness activities as part of a broader trip. The *Valleys & Vineyards* area has the opportunity to appeal to both groups.

According to [Destination Canada's 'Traveller Segmentation Program'](#), two out of the five most engaged guests are interested in wellness tourism. These segments include 'Refined Globetrotters' and 'Outdoor Explorers'. The 'Refined Globetrotters' segment representing 11.4% of global markets, and 9.7% of US markets, specifically desires to engage in wellness experiences.

The wellness tourism industry in Canada has a long history with Indigenous cultures providing healing traditions like sweat lodges, medicinal plant usage, and more. Combining rich nature-based experiences that draw on the destination's temperate climate, beautiful natural landscapes, culinary and farm to table experiences, and the rich Indigenous culture and practices, *Valleys & Vineyards* provides abundant opportunities to attract wellness travellers.

Successful examples like Sparkling Hill Resort and Spirit Ridge showcase the strong international appeal and future potential of the region. With a second high-end Nordic-style spa currently in development in Vernon, *Valleys & Vineyards* has the

opportunity to position itself as a premier destination for international markets seeking luxury spa and wellness experiences. Alongside these premier experiences are simpler activities, such as forest bathing—a growing trend among Japanese travellers, according to Destination Canada.

Developing unique, nature-based wellness experiences aligned with Destination BC's Super, Natural British Columbia® brand can create off-season demand and geographic growth of tourism. Indigenous communities have a unique opportunity to lead the creation of cultural and spiritual wellness experiences. Existing lodges, tour operators, and tourism businesses can layer wellness components expanding their capacity and their appeal to this market segment. Developing new curated multi-day experiences should also be a priority. With the right support, *Valleys & Vineyards* can become an iconic wellness destination.

How to Get Going:

- Develop resources to guide operators in creating authentic, market-ready wellness offerings, identifying niche markets.
- Engage local wellness experts, cultural leaders, and First Nations communities.
- Provide workshops and showcase successful examples.
- Facilitate investment in destination spas and wellness resorts.
- Launch a pilot project with five new nature-based wellness experiences.
- Provide funding support for experience development and create a wellness tourism working group.

Partners: Destination BC, TOTA, ITBC, private wellness operators.

Activity and Resource Requirements:

- Guiding document for partners and operators
- Workshops
- Working group
- Niche market research and marketing
- Experience development funding
- Pilot Project

Timing:

- Wellness tourism resources for operators: Q3 2025
- Workshops in the area: Q4 2025
- Industry working group: Q1 2026
- Pilot project: Q1-Q4 2026
- Market-ready experiences and niche marketing: 2026/27
- Indigenous wellness development with ITBC: 2026

Relative Priority: Medium



Strategic Initiative: Develop a suite of new experiences to create awareness and appreciation of the unique geology, geography, and ecology of *Valleys & Vineyards* through best practices in natural and cultural interpretive science.

Objectives:

- Drive tourism revenue and expand seasonal and geographic growth.
- Build capacity for tour leaders and Indigenous guides.
- Enrich visitor experiences by deepening their understanding of the *Valleys & Vineyards* area.

Rationale: Geotourism preserves a destination's unique character by showcasing its geology, ecology, and cultural heritage. *Valleys & Vineyards* offers diverse geotourism sites, where expertly curated experiences can deepen visitor understanding and elevate sustainable tourism. Exceptional features such as the Eocene fossil beds near Enderby, Kalamalka Lake, Myra Canyon, and the Skaha Bluffs in the south are just a few of the many geotourism features found throughout the area. *Valleys & Vineyards* will lead by integrating scientific and Indigenous perspectives, with trained interpreters, tour leaders, and local knowledge keepers providing immersive, authentic experiences. Modern tools like interpretive signage and digital tours will further enhance engagement.

How to Get Going:

- Form and resource a geotourism working group with area-wide representation.
- Expand and inventory existing geotourism activities.
- Consult Indigenous communities, partners, and the Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship (WLRS) before development.
- Identify gaps and opportunities for innovating existing or developing new experiences, focusing on primary locations and geotourism themes.
- Engage Indigenous economic development organizations, operators, and BC Parks to lead site-specific experiences.
- Support development and align interpretive training for future leaders.

Partners: TOTA and ITBC should initiate the project and provide oversight through the inventory, opportunity identification, and consultation phases. Indigenous organizations, DMOs, local governments, and private operators will oversee implementation.

Activity and Resource Requirements: While financial investment is minimal, significant human resources are required. Engaged local leaders will drive content development, experience validation, and piloting, with potential support from development entities.

Timing:

- Inventory development and gap/opportunity analysis: 2025
- Consultations and booking capabilities: 2026
- Experience creation, piloting, and refinement: 2027

Relative Priority: Medium



Strategic Initiative: Create new or expanded shoulder season experiences of highest interest to international visitors interested in visiting BC.

Objectives:

- Grow tourism revenues in *Valleys & Vineyards* through both seasonal and geographic growth of visitor activities.
- Engage visitors in new or innovative experiences that fit the Super, Natural British Columbia® brand image as a travel destination.
- Provide memorable connections between visitors and locals, connecting visitors to *Valleys & Vineyards*.

Rationale: With the Invest in Iconics Strategy having a distinct focus on inspiring seasonal and geographic growth of international tourism to BC, there is a need to develop or expand experiences beyond the core summer high season. International visitors typically have longer stays than domestic visitors and multi-generational travel groups are becoming more common.

Primary considerations for experience development are those events and activities that fit the brand image of Super, Natural British Columbia® and should include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Indigenous tourism holds significant potential as a key interest of international visitors. Exploring shoulder season Indigenous events and tours provides opportunities for further visitation in non-peak travel months. Developing packaged offerings that include transportation and access to these events would likely attract high interest, especially when organized through Indigenous tour operators or experience providers.
- Wine and culinary packages at urban-based wineries that are open outside of peak season. Transportation and accommodation offers will help to extend visits and utilize existing hotel capacity.
- Guided trail experiences, such as multi-day bike tours of the KVR, could be developed or enhanced.
- Connecting travellers to experiences in close proximity to the *Valleys & Vineyards* rail trails can support this strategy's development concept of **mindful connection** and encourage slow travel along key parts of these trails.
- Developing export-ready experience packages and local itineraries, linked to any of the pursuits above, will provide incremental revenue opportunities.
- Cave tours should be investigated as a potential year-round experience offering. The only business offering these tours currently is primarily focused on the peak summer season.

Resort-based ski and snowboard experiences currently draw the largest proportion of international visitors to *Valleys & Vineyards*, but visitation to the area's mountain resorts outside of the peak winter season is inconsistent. Increasing opportunities for shoulder season and summer visitation to mountain resorts (including Big White, SilverStar, Apex, and Baldy) should be considered in this initiative. Outdoor recreation opportunities, such as hiking and mountain biking, along with wellness offerings and events are some potential avenues to reduce seasonality in these resort communities.

While winter season experience development is not a core focus of the Iconics, outside of the Destination Ski product, long-term there would be benefits to exploring the establishment of non-ski events and experiences that can attract the established international visitor base to mountain resorts in winter, presenting an opportunity to introduce new or innovative experiences and increasing participation in both on-resort and off-resort activities during a slow travel period for non-resort communities.

How to Get Going:

- This initiative will require an interdisciplinary team to take leadership for strategic development.
- Plan and execute a *Valleys & Vineyards* Shoulder Season Experience Summit to bring together private and public entities, NGOs, and interest groups to develop a tactical plan directed by this Destination Development Strategy. Developing B2B relationships is also an important goal to work towards.
- Establish working sub-groups assigned to deliver initial primary projects.
- Develop funding applications and agreements to support development and implementation

Partners: Destination BC, CDMOs, local mountain resorts, and related associations, operators, and interest groups.

Activity and Resource Requirements: Most of the resources for this will be through investment in human resources (both volunteers and staff) to drive development. Focusing initially on leveraging existing facilities to drive growth will reduce the need for significant capital investment. However, some potential implementation expenses may include:

- Summit development and delivery
- Business plan support for priority initiatives

Timing: Proposed timelines for the initiative, and its chronological order as it relates to other initiatives.

- Establish interdisciplinary team – 2025
- Plan and execute Summit – 2026
- Fund Development – 2027
- Project development and Implementation – 2027 to 2030

Relative Priority: Medium



KELOWNA
Photo: @vancouverfoodie

APPENDIX

LIST OF ACRONYMS

BC - British Columbia
BCEDA - British Columbia Economic Development Association
CCP - Comprehensive Community Plan
CDMO - Community Destination Management Organization
CSRD - Columbia-Shuswap Regional District
DBC - Destination British Columbia
DEIA - Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility
DMO - Destination Management Organization
GWI - Global Wellness Institute
ITBC - Indigenous Tourism British Columbia
ITTI - Indigenous Tourism Training Initiative
JEG - Ministry of Jobs and Economic Growth
KVR - Kettle Valley Rail Trail
KVRTPA - Kettle Valley Rail Trail Preservation Alliance
LGLA - Local Government Leadership Academy
MoTT- Ministry of Transportation and Transit
NGO - Non-Governmental Organization
ORT - Okanagan Rail Trail
R2R - Rainforest to Rockies
RDCO - Regional District of Central Okanagan
RDNO - Regional District of North Okanagan
RDOS - Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen
RSTBC - Recreation Sites and Trails BC
SNORT - Shuswap-North Okanagan Rail Trail
TACS - Ministry of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport
TOTA - Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association
TOTF - Thompson Okanagan Tourism Foundation
V&V - *Valleys & Vineyards*
VVRT - *Valleys & Vineyards* Rail Trail
WLRS - Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship
YLW - Kelowna International Airport
YYF - Penticton Regional Airport



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