



Strathcona County Tourism Product Development Plan

Final Report: April 14, 2022

expedition

MANAGEMENT CONSULTING

April 14, 2022

Eiblis Doherty
Economic Development Officer – Tourism
Strathcona County
160 Festival Way
Sherwood Park, AB T8H 3W7

Dear Ms. Doherty,

Please find enclosed the final Strathcona County Tourism Product Development Plan. It was a pleasure working with you and tourism stakeholders to develop this report. We look forward to seeing your successes in implementation.

If you have any questions or require clarification on the attached report, please feel free to contact me at 780-266-7888.

Sincerely,



Justin Rousseau, Managing Director
Expedition Management Consulting Ltd.





Table of Contents

Executive Summary	4
1 Project Overview	9
2 Industry Engagement.....	12
3 Tourism Opportunity Assessment	16
4 Action Plan.....	28
5 Outcomes and Performance Measures	38
6 Conclusion	41
Appendices	43
Appendix A: Package Development Best Practices.....	44
Appendix B: Package Development Logistical Planning Template.....	47
Appendix C: Itinerary Development Process.....	51
Appendix D: References	52

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Introduction

The Strathcona County Tourism Strategy and Implementation Plan (2020) identified that Strathcona County has significant assets and product strengths related to tourism, including natural attractions, agritourism assets, cultural attractions, sport tourism, festivals and events, community and sport facilities, and accommodations. However, many of these assets are not developed or offered in a way that is easily consumable for visitors. There is a lack of market-ready experiences and a need for additional product development to achieve a critical mass of tourism product that will sustainably attract visitors.

To begin bridging the gap in terms of the availability of market ready tourism product, Strathcona County has undertaken a Tourism Product Development Plan. The purpose of this project was to produce a tactical plan that will set the local tourism industry on a path toward developing high potential tourism experience clusters in Strathcona County. The focus of this plan is on the following tourism product categories.



**NATURE-BASED
TOURISM**



**CULINARY/
AGRITOURISM**



**CULTURAL
TOURISM**

OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Attractive opportunities for product development also exists in other product categories, such as sport tourism and festivals and events. These product categories will be addressed in future development plans.

Industry Engagement

Input was gathered from local, regional, and provincial tourism stakeholders and Strathcona County staff to help inform the tourism product development plan. A good mix of representatives from the private, public, and non-profit sectors provided input. In total, 117 people participated in the engagement process. A summary of the engagement activities completed is provided next.

Participation in Engagement Activities

Engagement Activity	Number of Participants
Tourism Industry Input Workshop #1 (Nature-based)	24
Tourism Industry Input Workshop #2 (Cultural)	25
Tourism Industry Input Workshop #3 (Culinary/Agritourism)	23
Stakeholder Interviews	8
Information Presentation to Strathcona County Staff	10
Information Presentation to the Economic Development and Tourism Advisory Committee	6
Industry Feedback Opportunity – Workshop #4 (written feedback was also accepted)	21
Total Number of Participants	117

Tourism Opportunity Assessment

The consultant team utilized Expedition Management Consulting Ltd.'s Tourism Opportunity Evaluation Tool (see Section 3) to determine which existing and potential new tourism products and clusters have the greatest potential for development. Input from industry was considered, along with other primary and secondary research, and observations from the consultant team. The evaluation process placed high value on the current availability of assets and their level of market readiness. The assessment also carefully considered the product/market match of each opportunity.

New Launch Events

Events can excite, invigorate, and celebrate a destination. They can highlight tourism experiences, engage visitors, and help promote a destination year-round. For these reasons, it is recommended that the tourism sector collaborates to host new highly engaging launch events focused on Nature-based, Agritourism/Culinary, and Culture experiences. The goal of these new events is to expand the visitor experience and to engage private sector operators in developing new tourism product.

This will be done by positioning the launch events as destination-wide events through a website platform that will allow visitors to view and book experiences directly with providers. This will serve to drive traffic to businesses and increase sales, while avoiding the challenges of executing traditional facility-based events.

The new website platform will have additional benefits as the digital infrastructure can be leveraged by existing and new operators to advertise and sell their experiences throughout the year. Visitors will appreciate the opportunity to view and book the best experiences that Strathcona County has to offer all in one place.

PRECEDENTS FOR DESTINATION-WIDE EVENTS

There are many examples of destination-wide events achieving great success and they are a growing trend in resort communities. Some examples include Canmore Uncorked, Jasper Dark Sky Festival, and Alberta Open Farm Days.

Additional Tourism Product Development Opportunities

Six additional tourism product development opportunities were identified through the assessment process (see Section 3 for expanded descriptions). The opportunities included:



1. Stargazer Tour



2. Strathcona County Wildlife Viewing Excursion



3. Taste of Strathcona County Packages



4. Farm Tours



5. Arts and Culture Animation



6. Our History and Heritage Tour Itinerary

Proposed Action Plan

A detailed action plan has been developed to help guide implementation of the plan over the next five years (see Section 4). Each action item has been assigned a lead organization and timeline for completion. Additionally, several product development tools have been included in the appendix to help support future tourism product development, including:



**PACKAGE DEVELOPMENT
BEST PRACTICES**



**PACKAGE DEVELOPMENT
LOGISTICAL PLANNING
TEMPLATE**



**ITINERARY DEVELOPMENT
PROCESS**

Top 5 Proposed Action Items

The following action items have been identified as the top priorities of the tourism product development plan.

- 1 Strike the Product Development Action Team and Experience Development Teams.
- 2 Choose one launch event idea to pilot. Allocate resources and develop marketing and operational plans with a goal to launch the event in year 3 of implementation.
- 3 Develop the new tourism website and populate it with bookable experience offerings.
- 4 Attract operators who will offer experiences in Strathcona County and support their efforts to develop new tourism product.
- 5 Develop and implement new tourism support programs, including a Tourism Spark Program and an Arts and Culture Animation Program.





Outcomes

As the product development plan is implemented, the following outcomes are anticipated.

1. *New highly engaging tourism experiences and packages become available in Strathcona County.*

2. *Visitation and visitor spending in Strathcona County increases year over year.*

3. *Awareness of Strathcona County as a tourism destination increases among target markets.*

4. *The capacity of operators to develop new experiences and sustain existing ones is enhanced.*

5. *Residents express a high degree of satisfaction with new experiences and are participating in them enthusiastically.*

NEW EXPERIENCES WILL BENEFIT RESIDENTS TOO!

As new tourism products are developed, residents will have the opportunity to participate in them and be enriched by the experience.

Conclusion

This plan puts forward a vision for new tourism product development and tactical actions that will lead to new and enhanced tourism product offerings in Strathcona County. Collaborative efforts and investment from the public, private, and non-profit sectors will be needed to fully realize the objectives of the plan. The investment will be well worth it to support the growth of Strathcona County's visitor economy and the sustainable economic, community, and environmental benefits tourism can generate.

1

PROJECT OVERVIEW



The Strathcona County Tourism Strategy and Implementation Plan (2020) identified that Strathcona County has significant assets and product strengths related to tourism, including natural attractions, agritourism assets, cultural attractions, sport tourism, festivals and events, community and sports facilities, and accommodations.¹ However, many of these assets are not developed or offered in a way that is easily consumable for visitors. There is a lack of market-ready experiences and a need for additional product development to achieve a critical mass of tourism product that will sustainably attract visitors.

Project Purpose

To begin bridging the gap in terms of the availability of market ready tourism product, Strathcona County has undertaken a Tourism Product Development Plan. The purpose of this project was to produce a tactical plan that will set the local tourism industry on a path toward developing high potential tourism experience clusters in Strathcona County. The focus of this plan is on the following tourism product categories.



**NATURE-BASED
TOURISM**



**CULINARY/
AGRITOURISM**



**CULTURAL
TOURISM**

Attractive opportunities for product development also exists in other product categories, such as sport tourism and festivals and events. These product categories will be addressed in future development plans.²



Process

The project had five, interconnected phases as described below.



Project Team

The Project Steering Committee was established to oversee the project, provide input, and give feedback on the overall direction of the report. The report was developed by Expedition Management Consulting Ltd.

Project Steering Committee	
Organization	Representatives
Strathcona County	Shane Olson (Project Manager) Tara de Munnik Eiblis Doherty
Expedition Management Consulting Ltd.	Justin Rousseau (Consulting Team Lead) Maxwell Harrison Breanna Hives

Overview of Research

A variety of primary and secondary research activities were conducted to develop this plan. Primary research was gathered through a series of input workshops with tourism industry stakeholders, meetings with Strathcona County staff and the Economic Development and Tourism Advisory Committee, interviews with stakeholders and regional and provincial partners, and observations from the consultant team. Secondary research was gathered from municipal, provincial, national, and international data sources, information requests of the Client, a review of relevant literature, and an online review.





Engagement Summary

Input was gathered from local, regional, and provincial tourism stakeholders and Strathcona County staff to help inform the tourism product development plan. A good mix of representatives from the private, public, and non-profit sectors provided input. In total, 117 people participated in the engagement process. A summary of the engagement activities completed is provided next in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Participation in Engagement Activities

Engagement Activity	Number of Participants
Tourism Industry Input Workshop #1 (Nature-based)	24
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The following key themes and observations were synthesized by the consulting team from the inputs received during the engagement process.

KEY THEMES

1

STRONG ENTHUSIASM FOR TOURISM

Participants in the engagement process expressed strong enthusiasm to contribute to tourism development in Strathcona County. Across all three tourism categories (i.e. nature-based, cultural, culinary/agritourism), we heard that there are new tourism and tourism-related businesses being launched, existing tourism businesses are expanding, and new and enhanced tourism-related programs and events are being developed at existing facilities. Participants viewed tourism as a significant area of opportunity for their businesses/organizations and for Strathcona County as a whole.

CONSULTANT OBSERVATION: There appears to be significantly more interest and activity related to tourism development than was seen prior to the creation of Strathcona County's Tourism Strategy and Implementation Plan in 2019/20. It is clear that positive momentum has been generated in regard to tourism. There is a powerful opportunity to leverage this enthusiasm in the short to medium term to develop new tourism product.

2

IDEAS FOR NEW TOURISM PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Ideas for new tourism products, packages, and clusters were shared eagerly by participants. Interesting ideas were put forward in all three tourism categories and across all four seasons. Participants saw opportunity to build upon tourism-related programs that already exist (e.g. Open Farm Days), but also to create new, unique programs that more strongly connect with what makes Strathcona County different and special.

Participants also recognized that there is a need to formalize existing offerings and develop new offerings to fully engage visitors. To help achieve this, participants would like to see more supports offered for product development, including coordination, communication, and resources.

3

ORGANIZATION AND COLLABORATION

Many participants viewed organizing for tourism as a key growth area to support tourism product development in Strathcona County. Participants wanted to know how they can get involved in product development and stay connected to the industry and each other moving forward. In particular, there was expressed demand to develop a formal mechanism to promote collaboration and communication among tourism stakeholders.

CONSULTANT OBSERVATION: There appeared to be significant value created during the workshops by giving participants the opportunity to learn about each other's offerings and ideas. New connections were formed that could be the start of new product development. Providing opportunities to grow these relationships and cultivate new ones will be important moving forward. It will also be important to identify how Strathcona County can help support the efforts of the private and non-profit sectors.

4

MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

Participants felt that marketing and communications related to tourism is a growth area in Strathcona County. This included gaps in marketing efforts focused on attracting visitors, as well as communication between stakeholders within Strathcona County. Participants felt there was a lack of knowledge among stakeholders about what is currently available. Therefore, they saw a need to enhance communications. Increased cross-promotions between stakeholders was viewed by participants as an opportunity to help meet that need.

5

GAPS IN INFRASTRUCTURE TO SUPPORT TOURISM ACTIVITY

Some participants believed that there are gaps in infrastructure that is limiting tourism growth. Examples that were provided included access to natural areas, dedicated walking and biking trails along main transportation routes, pull outs with visitor amenities (e.g. washrooms, tables, information kiosks), rental equipment for activities, sightseeing areas/viewing platforms, and tourism-related signage.



6

MUNICIPAL SUPPORT FOR TOURISM

We heard from some participants that they would like to see more support for tourism development from the municipality. Some of these participants felt that agritourism could be encouraged to a greater degree in land use planning. Others said they would like to see a more consistent message and approach coming from all Strathcona County departments, particularly in regard to the protection/conservation of lands and also the development of lands.



7

BARRIERS TO PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Participants consistently identified a lack of understanding of regulatory requirements as a barrier to product development. Operators may not know what rules they must follow, what permits or certifications they need, or how long and how much investment it will take to get their operations and/or programs up and running. A second barrier that was mentioned was the high cost of insurance and the inability of operators, particularly smaller ones, to afford it.



8

INDIGENOUS TOURISM PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

There was considerable discussion related to developing tourism product that celebrates Indigenous history and culture. Participants shared interesting knowledge about heritage sites that are not widely known in the community.



3

TOURISM OPPORTUNITY ASSESSMENT



A tourism opportunity assessment was conducted using Expedition Management Consulting Ltd.'s Tourism Opportunity Evaluation Tool. Several high potential product development opportunities were identified. These are explained in further detail in this section.

Tourism Opportunity Evaluation Tool

The following set of criteria was used to assist in determining which tourism products and clusters have the greatest potential for development. The evaluation process placed high value on the current availability of assets and their level of market readiness. The assessment also carefully considered the product/market match of each opportunity.

Figure 2. Opportunity Assessment Criteria

Criteria	Description
1. Availability and Market Readiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The opportunity is currently available in Strathcona County or could be developed with limited investment. The market readiness of the opportunity.
2. Unique and Authentic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotes an authentic experience that highlights what is unique and valuable about Strathcona County. Product differentiates itself from the competition. The opportunity provides experiential product.
3. Market Demand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The opportunity reaches identified target markets. Limited competition exists relative to market demand.
4. Market Reach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The opportunity has the potential to be promoted year-round to leverage the brand of the community. The opportunity has the potential to attract the attention of the media.
5. Growth Potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The opportunity has potential to achieve year over year growth in revenue, product, and visitation.

Criteria	Description
6. Return on Investment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The opportunity will produce a high return on investment.
7. Human Resource Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of the opportunity will not put un-due stress on existing human resources.
8. Partner and Community Buy-In	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The opportunity demonstrates commitment from partners. The community is open to sharing the opportunity with visitors.
9. Strategic Alignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of the opportunity aligns with the strategic intent and organizational strategy of stakeholders.
10. Community Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The opportunity fosters the culture, health, and development of the community by enhancing community spirit.
11. Environmental Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The opportunity has minimal negative environmental impacts.
12. Physical Infrastructure Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The community has the physical infrastructure in place to support development (e.g. roads, public facilities, accommodations, etc.).
13. Logistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The opportunity has a sound logistical plan that will help ensure the execution of high-quality experiences for visitors.
14. Evaluation and Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The opportunity can be clearly evaluated and have its performance measured.



Tourism Product Development Opportunities

Several high potential opportunities for tourism product development were identified through the opportunity assessment process. Descriptions of the opportunities are provided next.

Important Notes:

- a. The following product development opportunities are intended to be used as a guide to demonstrate high potential tourism offerings that can be offered in Strathcona County in the near term. It is anticipated that experience providers will use these examples to spark their own unique ideas, generate enthusiasm, and encourage collaboration in the development of new tourism product.
- b. The product development opportunities described in this report fall under the three focus areas of nature-based, culinary/agritourism, and culture. However, it is recognized that there are opportunities to develop a wide variety of experiences in Strathcona County, and that future product development need not be limited to the focus areas of this plan.
- c. A growing trend in the tourism industry is the concept of regenerative travel. Through regenerative travel, tourism occurs in such a way that it contributes net benefits to host communities, including economically, socioculturally, and environmentally.³ Product development can support regenerative travel by offering experiences that are authentic to local cultures, consider the full range of impacts (both positive and negative), and align with the overall goals of the community.

ATTRACTING VFR TOURISM BY ENGAGING RESIDENTS

Research shows that visiting friends and relatives (VFR) rely on the personal experiences of their resident hosts when planning their trips. Therefore, experience providers in Strathcona County have the potential to attract VFR travellers by engaging local residents.

REGENERATIVE TRAVEL

Product development can support regenerative travel by offering experiences that are authentic to local cultures, consider the full range of impacts (both positive and negative), and align with the overall goals of the community.

New Events Celebrating Strathcona County

Events can excite, invigorate, and celebrate a destination. They can highlight tourism experiences, engage visitors, and help promote a destination year-round. For these reasons, it is recommended that the tourism sector collaborates to host new highly engaging launch events focused on Nature-based, Agritourism/Culinary, and Culture experiences.

The Challenge of Executing Traditional Facility-Based Events

Event planners know that executing a large event is resource intensive. In addition, events that are based out of one facility often find it challenging to get buy-in from businesses and organizations that are not in close proximity to the event epicenter. This puts the responsibility for program development on the core event organizers which can increase risk, stress infrastructure, and burn out volunteers.

The Concept of Destination-Wide Events

The goal of these new events is to expand the visitor experience and to engage private sector operators in developing new tourism product. This will be done by positioning the launch events as destination-wide events. Instead of having thousands of event goers descend upon a park or a facility to take in the event, visitors will go directly to the experience provider. This will drive traffic to businesses and increase sales.

The concept is a simple one. Each event will occur on a single weekend to start (i.e. Friday to Sunday). In future years, programming for each event could be expanded over multiple weekends. Businesses will promote their experience(s) on a central website, so visitors have a menu of options to choose from throughout the weekend. The event would be promoted similarly to a facility-based event, but experiences would occur in many locations throughout the County. This format leverages the experiences already available in Strathcona County without the need to develop a large number of new activities. It also incentivizes individual businesses to contribute and reduces the burden on the organizing body as programming is provided by individual businesses, primarily at their existing location(s).

Year-Round Promotional Opportunities

Strathcona County can utilize these new events as a way to promote the County year-round to visitors, residents, and investors. Businesses can benefit by driving traffic to their location and promoting their ongoing programming through these showcase events. In addition, the website created for the events can be maintained year-round and experiences can be made available for purchase by visitors throughout the year.

Precedents

There are many examples of destination-wide events working very well and it is a growing trend in resort communities. For example, [Canmore Uncorked](#) is a culinary event in Canmore, Alberta that sees many restaurants participate. Throughout the event there are some centralized activities (such as a long table lunch on main street), but the majority of the culinary experiences occur at individual restaurants. The [Jasper Dark Sky Festival](#) is another example of a successful event that offers much of its programming at individual businesses in the community. [Alberta Open Farm Days](#) is very closely aligned with the concept proposed for Strathcona County in that experiences occur at farms across a wide geographical area but are promoted and sold through a central website.

Precedent Example - Jasper Dark Sky Festival





Our Rural Life Event

There are many opportunities for rural tourism experiences in Strathcona County, including farm tours, u-picks, wineries, rural fairs, and many other activities. An opportunity exists to showcase these assets through the “Our Rural Life Event.”

Programming could celebrate rural life in Strathcona County, the food, the people, stories, and industry. Examples of immersive experiences could include long table lunches, barn dances, farm tours, hands on learning, unique stays, and interpretive tours. If operators wish to collaborate to offer experiences, packages could be developed focusing on culture, culinary, agriculture, and history. For example, “A Taste of Strathcona County” package could incorporate a long table lunch at a farm or community hall, followed by a tour of a local winery, and capped off with a spirit tasting. The opportunities are endless!



Our Culture Event

The “Our Culture Event” will offer engaging and immersive programming that helps tell the story of Strathcona County’s lifestyle, culture, and history.

Strathcona County has a variety of excellent cultural experiences, such as an emerging restaurant scene, distilleries, Festival Place, art galleries, shopping, an excellent museum, and many other assets. The community also has a distinct cultural history that can be celebrated.

Programming should celebrate the history of Strathcona County and highlight the progressive community it has grown to be. Examples of immersive experiences could include interpretive tours of cultural sites, theatrical performances in interesting rural and urban venues, and art installations in unexpected rural and urban locations.

Indigenous cultural experiences can play an important role in the event as well. There are already examples of excellent Indigenous cultural programming currently offered in the County, including “Cree Star Stories” at the Strathcona Wilderness Centre. Building off this success could be an exciting opportunity for the event.



Our Natural World Event

Strathcona County is rich with natural assets, including excellent opportunities for wildlife viewing and outstanding nature-based facilities such as parks, trails, Strathcona Wilderness Centre, Beaver Hills Biosphere, and proximity to Elk Island National Park and several provincial parks. One of the unique attributes of the County is that all these natural assets are within a one-hour drive for over 1 million people.

The “Our Natural World Event” will celebrate the biodiversity of the region and introduce visitors to the beautiful landscapes of Strathcona County. It is important to provide immersive experiences that provide educational value, fun, and enrichment. Examples of immersive experiences could include interpretive hikes, foraging classes, snowshoe tours, cross country ski demonstrations, wildlife tours, and unique nature-based stays. The programming could celebrate the night sky and weave in Indigenous programming that demonstrates how people lived on these lands for centuries. It is possible to have a summer or winter event (or both at some point in the future).

Opportunity for Blending Experiences

Having a distinct theme for each destination-wide event will be important. However, it is recognized that attractive opportunities exist to blend certain experiences together to produce especially compelling offerings for certain visitor markets. Operators who wish to showcase the intersections between rural life, culture, and/or nature to visitors are encouraged to do so.

Utilizing the New Website to Promote Year-Round Experiences

The development of the website infrastructure and organizational structure for the events can be the framework for promoting and selling new tourism experiences year-round. The remainder of this section describes other product development concepts that can leverage this infrastructure to promote the experiences and access visitor markets.





NATURE-BASED TOURISM PRODUCTS

1. Stargazer Tour

The Stargazer Tour would offer visitors a compelling dark sky experience in Strathcona County. It is envisioned the tour would begin in the evening as the sun recedes beyond the horizon and the stars begin to twinkle into existence. Participants would arrive at a well-known and easily accessible facility, such as the Strathcona Wilderness Centre, to begin their tour. They would then be introduced to their tour guide and be invited to enjoy a short activity, animation, or interpretive element related to dark skies in order to build their anticipation for the main experience. Once the group is ready to get underway, the tour guide would transport participants by van or bus to a location within the internationally recognized Beaver Hills Dark Sky Preserve to experience the majesty of the dark sky through stargazing equipment, educational storytelling, and other forms of dark sky related activities. Indigenous interpretation of the night sky could be considered as a component of a broader experience or as its own stand-alone activity. Possible locations to conduct the stargazing activity would include developed areas of Elk Island National Park, the Cooking Lake-Blackfoot Provincial Recreation Area, or at the Strathcona Wilderness Centre. It will be important that the chosen location has low light pollution and includes visitor amenities, such as washrooms, tables, fire pits, etc. After the dark sky viewing experience has concluded, participants would be transported back to the tour's starting point and the experience would be brought to a close in a memorable way.

The Stargazer Tour could be delivered in 1 to 4 hour time increments and would be highly replicable. There would also be strong opportunities to package the Stargazer Tour with food/beverage offerings, accommodations, and other complementary dark sky experiences (e.g. Hesje Observatory Tours at Miquelon Lake). It is also recommended that a cultural element is built into the tour that links to the natural history of the region.

Market Insights:

1. Dark sky tourism is a growing trend globally, and particularly among U.S. visitor markets.⁴
2. Northern lights viewing is one of the top experiences Canada's primary international target markets seek while on vacation.⁵
3. According to a study on potential demand for rural vacation experiences in Alberta by residents of Alberta, participants indicated that northern lights viewing or stargazing would be an ideal activity on a same-day trip (21%) or an overnight trip (31%).⁶
4. Aurora viewing was responsible for 41% of all leisure travel to the NWT in 2017, making it the number one travel motivation for their visitors.⁷ Between 2012 and 2017, visitation for aurora viewing grew by nearly 100% (from 15,700 visits in 2012/13 to 29,800 visits in 2016/17). During this same time period, visitor spending related to aurora viewing increased by more than 300% (from \$15.2M in 2012/13 to \$48.7M in 2016/17). The NWT's primary tourism markets include Canada, United States, Japan, Germany, and China.⁸ Their secondary markets include South Korea, Australia, and Switzerland.

CASE STUDY: DARK SKY GUIDES

Dark Sky Guides is a successful tourism business that offers guided interpretive stargazing tours throughout the year in Waterton Lakes National Park. The business was started in 2017 by four brothers who had a passion for dark skies and their local area. Dark Sky Guides has grown their tour offerings over the years and in 2021 the company opened a new Planetarium attraction in Waterton. In 2019, Dark Sky Guides was named the winner of the "New Tourism Experience" ALTO Award.⁹



2. Strathcona County Wildlife Viewing Excursion

The Strathcona County Wildlife Viewing Excursion would offer visitors a chance to view wild animals in their natural habitats, including bison, moose, elk, white-tailed deer, foxes, black bears, and many varieties of birds. It is worth noting that Strathcona County’s diverse habitats attract over 250 species of birds. There is opportunity to leverage this asset to offer birding-specific tours.

The tour would begin at a readily accessible facility that has strong connections to the outdoors and wildlife (e.g. Strathcona Wilderness Centre). Alternatively, the tour could begin with an interpretive talk at a local hotel and an overnight package could be built in to drive overnight stays. After a brief activity to build anticipation, participants would be transported by van or bus throughout the County’s parks and natural areas, and neighbouring outdoor assets like Elk Island National Park, with frequent stops at wildlife hotspots. A knowledgeable and sharp-eyed guide would keep a lookout for wildlife and share interesting stories about the animals and the conservation efforts that are underway to protect them and their habitat. Ideally, this tour would take place in the early morning or late afternoon/early evening to take advantage of when animals are most active, as well as to avoid other people during peak visitation hours.

The Strathcona County Wildlife Viewing Excursion could be delivered in 2 to 4 hour time increments and would be highly replicable. The tour could also be readily packaged with food/beverage offerings and accommodations that tie into the nature-based theme of the experience.



Market Insights:

1. Alberta is the one of the top three most popular locations to visit in Canada by domestic travellers, with wildlife viewing stated as one of the top three most popular activities.¹⁰
2. The United States is Canada’s largest source of international visitors with 14.4 million Americans visiting in 2018. Four of the top five activities that American leisure travellers wanted to experience were nature-based, including viewing wildlife, visiting nature parks, seeing natural attractions, and hiking or walking in nature.¹¹
3. Viewing wildlife is one of the top experiences Canada’s primary international target markets seek while on vacation.¹²



CULINARY/AGRITOURISM PRODUCTS

3. Taste of Strathcona County Packages

Taste of Strathcona County Packages would leverage Strathcona County’s existing and emerging culinary assets to offer attractive culinary experiences to visitors that will generate a distinct sense of place and sense of taste. Separate packages could be developed for the “urban” and “rural” tastes of Strathcona County. For example, the urban package might include a meal at an upscale and/or unique restaurant in Sherwood Park, followed by a spirit tasting or brewery tour at one or more of the distilleries and breweries located in the County. The rural package might include a long-table lunch or dinner at a local farm or community hall, followed by a wine tasting and/or tour of a rural winery. A third package idea would be to develop a Sweet Tooth Tour. This tour would bring visitors to delectable destinations in the County to learn about what goes in to making fantastically sweet treats. Of course, there would also be plenty of samples to enjoy along the way!

The Taste of Strathcona County Packages could be delivered in a variety of time increments to suit the needs of visitors and the businesses involved. Packages could specifically be offered during need periods for businesses to boost sales. There would be strong opportunities to customize these offerings to satisfy the particular tastes of visitors, in addition to incorporating accommodations into the packages to offer enhanced value.

Market Insights:

1. Culinary offerings are a top driver of domestic travel for 18 – 34 year-olds. Eating and drinking local food is among the most popular activities for this travel segment when visiting a destination.¹³
2. Domestic visitors spent approximately \$503 million on food and beverage in the Edmonton and Area Tourism Region in 2017.¹⁴
3. Dining at restaurants offering local ingredients is often one of the top 10 travel activities found most appealing by Explorer Quotient profiles targeted by Travel Alberta.¹⁵

CASE STUDY: SIP AND STAY WINERY TOUR

The Sip and Stay Winery Tour was a packaged offering south of Calgary, Alberta that included a behind the scenes look at the operations of the award-winning Spirit Hills Winery, followed by a wine tasting experience, and capped off with an executive style accommodation at the Hotel Blackfoot. The entire experience was offered to visitors for a single price and transportation was included.



4. Farm Tours

Farm Tours offer an experiential and often educational opportunity for visitors to celebrate agriculture and foster a deeper connection with their food and the people who produce it. Strathcona County has many farms and ranches that could offer farm tour experiences that would be attractive to visitors interested in learning about their food and agricultural lifestyles. Farm tours can take many forms, but they often include a variety of engaging, hands-on activities that are fun for the whole family. Examples would include harvesting demos, animal care instruction, stick calf roping, horseback riding, line dancing classes, and much more. There are also endless opportunities to weave culinary, cultural, and heritage elements into farm tours to add enhanced value to the visitor experience.

With the planned development of the Pointe-aux-Pins Acres facility, there is significant potential to position Strathcona County as a hub for agritourism. This high quality, multipurpose agricultural facility is envisioned to become a destination for people to enjoy agricultural education, history, and events.¹⁶

From an operator’s perspective, offering farm tours is often viewed as an attractive opportunity by farmers who are passionate about their agricultural lifestyle and want to share it with others, while also increasing the financial sustainability and return on investment of their land and operations. Operators typically begin their entry into tourism by offering small scale experiences and tours, and then building from there as their own interest and interest from visitors grows. There are several examples across Alberta of farms and ranches that have transitioned their operations into highly successful agritourism businesses, including [Prairie Gardens and Adventure Farm](#), [Kraay Family Farm](#), and the [Rocking R Guest Ranch](#).



Market Insights:

1. According to a study on potential demand for rural vacation experiences in Alberta by residents of Alberta, participants indicated that agritourism and culinary-related experiences would be an ideal activity on a same-day trip (54%) or an overnight trip (57%).¹⁷
2. A recent survey of urban Albertans in Calgary found a high level of interest in agritourism experiences. Interest was gauged on a scale from 1 (not interested at all) to 10 (extremely interested) and the average level of interest was 8.¹⁸
3. Destination Canada targets Explorer Quotient profiles domestically and internationally that seek activities related to agritourism, including attending farmers’ markets, visiting small towns and villages, and dining at restaurants offering local ingredients.¹⁹



CULTURAL TOURISM PRODUCTS

5. Arts and Culture Animation

Strathcona County has an active arts and culture scene that can be further leveraged as a means to attract and engage visitors. A powerful way to do this is through a destination animation program. Through this program, key areas of the County, such as Centre in the Park, would be animated with arts and culture installations and small-scale experiences. These animations would position the area as the cultural “heart” of the community and transform it into a unique destination to visit. The proposed area has several facilities and organizations that could participate in a destination animation program, including many private businesses, Festival Place, Strathcona County Library, and Gallery@501. Facilities and businesses located outside the area, like the Strathcona County Museum and Archives, could also be engaged through the program as a way to drive visitation and spending to their locations. Furthermore, the program could be expanded to include parks and outdoor areas in the County to encourage visitation.

Destination animation programs engage the private and non-profit sectors by providing matching funding to help bring animation ideas to life. The intent of the program would be to fund new experiences and provide support to develop those experiences into ongoing tourism product. The program could be implemented in Strathcona County by establishing a shared vision with business owners and arts and culture organizations, communicating the potential for return on investment, and providing ongoing support in developing arts and culture animation experiences. Once participants see success and an increase to their bottom line through increased visitation and spending, they are likely to be energized to become even more involved.

Stratford, Ontario has successfully implemented a [destination animation partnership program](#) and is well known for its ongoing animation. Jasper, Alberta is another good example of a community that has engaged local business owners in developing unique and interesting experiences that help bring the destination to life during planned events.²⁰

Destination Animation Defined

“Smaller performances, interactive displays, or experiences that take place repeatedly, mostly in the heart of a town, and help enliven the visitor’s or local’s experience. Can be used to enhance existing events or as a stand-alone program.”



Market Insights:

1. Entertainment and cultural activities are among the top 5 activities participated in by overnight visitors to the Edmonton and Area Tourism Region.²¹
2. Participating in cultural experiences ranked in the top five most popular activities for domestic (Canada and Alberta) visitors to Alberta.²²
3. Cultural experiences are an important driver for people visiting Canada and traveling within Canada. Young Canadians aged 18-34 rate culture in their top three reasons for visiting a destination, even going so far as stating their dream Canadian vacation would include experiencing culture.²³
4. Millennials are a major audience for events as 75% of these individuals state they value experiences over things. Over half of millennials (53%) are parents and are attending more daytime, family-friendly events on the weekends.²⁴

6. Our History and Heritage Tour Itinerary

Strathcona County has a rich and diverse history that is constituted by the stories of Indigenous peoples, European settlers, and interesting and influential people who left their mark on the community.²⁵ However, it is not easy for visitors to engage with this history due to a lack of interpretation and experiences related to it. One way to overcome this barrier is through the development of an Our History and Heritage Tour Itinerary. This itinerary could be positioned as a self-guided or guided tour that would direct visitors to important and interesting heritage sites located throughout Strathcona County (e.g. Museum and Archives, Smeltzer House, Bremner House, Mennonite Heritage Farm, Indigenous sites, etc.). The itinerary would include well-written and compelling content that would connect participants to history and give them a distinct sense of place.

To incentivize uptake, the itinerary could be positioned as a “passport” whereby participants are challenged to visit every site. Once participants can prove they visited all the locations included in the itinerary, either through collecting a stamp or taking a photo at each location, they would be rewarded with a small gift, such as a certificate of completion, recognition on a website or social media post, or a savings voucher for a local business.

Itinerary development is an easy and inexpensive way to combine existing assets together in a way that is attractive for visitors. Itineraries lend themselves well to activating heritage attractions, but they could also be made available for each of the product offerings. Examples of successful self-guided itineraries include the [Triple Crown Challenge](#) in Canmore, Alberta and the [Passport to the Peaks Program](#) in Grande Cache, Alberta.

Market Insights:

1. According to a study on potential demand for rural vacation experiences in Alberta by residents of Alberta, participants indicated that culture and heritage-related experiences would be an ideal activity on a same-day trip (67%) or an overnight trip (66%).²⁶
2. International travel markets are most interested in the following types of experiences:²⁷
 - a. Enriching, engaged, immersive experiences with culture;
 - b. Experiences that are related to nature and learning;
 - c. Authenticity;
 - d. Seeking benefits of ‘discoveries’ and ‘adventures’;
 - e. Connection to nature and Indigenous way of life in context of spirituality and culture traditions.

CASE STUDY: BANFF HISTORY WALK

The Banff History Walk is a 90-minute guided walking tour of historic landmarks and trails in and around Banff, Alberta with Alpine Jake. Visitors are treated to interesting stories about Banff’s natural and human history, and the experience can be customized to suit the interests of participants. Ice cleats and hiking poles are included so the tour can be offered year-round.



4

ACTION PLAN





Proposed Action Plan

The focus of the product development plan is on encouraging the development of new high-potential tourism products, and impactful support programs, launched over the short to medium term (i.e. 1 – 5 years). For this reason, the plan should not be considered a comprehensive account of all tourism opportunities currently available in Strathcona County. In fact, it is anticipated that tourism stakeholders will pursue and capitalize on other high potential opportunities for tourism development as they arise (e.g. sport tourism, festivals and events, large capital development projects, etc.). Furthermore, tourism stakeholders are encouraged to begin developing new experiences and tourism packages right away.

Tourism stakeholders are encouraged to begin developing new experiences and tourism packages right away!

Implementation of the tourism product development plan will take concerted effort from the public and private sectors. It will be important to diversify the workload to those that have the most to gain by building the tourism industry. This will help to leverage the energy and creativity of the private sector. The main groups that will be involved in implementation include the following.

Strathcona County

Strathcona County consists of municipal administration. Their role is to oversee implementation of the plan and ensure action items are moving forward in an effective and cohesive manner. Strathcona County will organize and provide support to the Product Development Action Team, and be responsible for completing action items they are assigned the lead on.

Product Development Action Team

The Product Development Action Team will consist of businesses, organizations, individuals, and Strathcona County representatives who have a stake in tourism product development. The role of the Action Team will be to take the lead on developing new tourism product.

Experience Development Teams

Experience Development Teams are task orientated groups made up of stakeholders that share an interest in specific experience development opportunities (e.g. dark sky, wildlife viewing, culture, culinary, agritourism, etc.). Members of these teams will work together to build experiences and packages. For example, one team may have an accommodation provider collaborating with an experience provider and a culinary partner to offer a multi-faceted experience.

Quick Wins



A blue star indicates that an action item is a “Quick Win.” Quick wins are actions that can be implemented in the near term, have a high probability of success, and are relatively simple to complete.

Years 1 – 5 (Get Organized and Launch New Products and Programs)

Action Items	Lead	Proposed Timeline	Notes
1. Approve the Product Development Plan. ★	Strathcona County	(Start of Timeline)	
2. Strike a Product Development Action Team. ★	Strathcona County	Within 2 Months	
New Event Development			
3. Choose one destination-wide launch event to pilot and allocate resources over a three-year period with a goal to launch the first event in year 3.	Action Team	Within 3 Months	The events will be a way to focus attention on specific programming on a specific date. A key benefit of the events will be giving stakeholders something concrete to rally behind early in the process.
4. Develop the event (and year-round tourism) website.	Website Provider	1 – 2 Years	The website must have the capability for experience providers to list their offerings and for visitors to easily book experiences.
5. Promote the upcoming launch event opportunity to existing and potential new experience providers. Encourage them to put forward and/or develop experiences that will be featured during the event.	Action Team	1 – 2 Years	It is not recommended that the website be made public during this time. However, experience providers should be allowed to post their experiences if they are prepared to do so.
6. Identify partners and sponsors for the event.	Action Team	1 – 2 Years	Funding support for event development and collaborative marketing is available through Travel Alberta's Tourism Investment Program . Additionally, local businesses and industries may be interested in sponsoring the event.
7. Develop a marketing plan and operational plan for the event.	Action Team	1 – 2 Years	It is expected that private operators will develop event-related experiences, and Strathcona County will provide marketing support.
8. Launch the website and begin promoting the inaugural event to target markets.	Action Team	2.5 Years	Experience providers listed on the website must be prepared to accept bookings once the website is launched.
9. Execute the inaugural event.	Action Team	3 Years	The event should be evaluated and amended in future iterations to respond to market demand, business needs, and operational requirements.
10. Choose a second event to pilot utilizing the established website infrastructure. Allocate resources over a two-year period with a goal to pilot the second event by year 5.	Action Team	4 – 5 Years	

Action Items	Lead	Proposed Timeline	Notes
Program and Product Development to Support the New Event and Year-Round Experiences			
★ 11. Strike Experience Development Teams that will work toward the creation of tourism products and packages.	Action Team	Within 6 Months	
12. Establish a clear process and evaluation criteria for private businesses to operate in public parks in Strathcona County.	Strathcona County	Within 1 Year	Currently, private businesses can operate in public parks if they receive written approval from the Director. However, there is no codified process for how to secure and maintain such permissions. Amendments to the Parks Bylaw (21-2013) may be required.
★ 13. Encourage tourism businesses to leverage Travel Alberta’s Learning Portal in their efforts to build new experiences.	Action Team	6 Months – 1 Year	The Travel Alberta Learning Portal is a free resource that connects tourism businesses with insights, expertise, and best practices to help guide their marketing and business activities.
★ 14. Consider taking the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village up on their offer to deliver an educational presentation about tourism-related promotions and media relations to tourism operators.	Action Team	6 Months – 1 Year	The Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village has offered to deliver an educational presentation on tourism-related promotions and media relations to tourism operators in Strathcona County. This presentation is used as part of the UCHV’s annual staff training, has been delivered at several conferences, and was incorporated into a university-level course. This offer could be leveraged to provide further training to tourism businesses.
15. Develop and implement a Tourism Spark Program.	Strathcona County	2 – 3 Years	A Tourism Spark Program offers grants, mentorship, access to a support network, or a combination of all of these to support the development of new tourism experiences. For an example of a successful Spark program, see: https://www.tourisminnovation.ca/ontario.html .
★ 16. Create a licensing, permitting, and certification information package for tourism operators.	Strathcona County	1 – 2 Years	The information package should clearly describe what licenses, permits, and certifications are required to operate various types of tourism business in Strathcona County. Information on processes and anticipated timelines should be included.
17. Facilitate the packaging of experiences to increase value to the visitor and increase overnight stays.	Development Teams	1 – 3 Years	Packaging can be facilitated by organizing workshops and/or discussions between experience providers. Development Teams may consider bringing in third-party expertise to help facilitate packaging between experience providers. Package development best practices are provided in Appendix A and can be referenced to support future package development.
18. Attract operator(s) who will offer experiences in Strathcona County.	Development Teams	1 – 3 Years	This could include existing operators or those who are considering starting a new tourism business. Some experiences could also be offered by Strathcona County. Operators can be attracted through the development of requests for proposals to offer specific experiences or by contacting them directly to find out what would entice them to offer experiences in Strathcona County.

Action Items	Lead	Proposed Timeline	Notes
19. Fully develop new experiences and tours including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Product offering (i.e. the experience) • Target markets • Business model • Delivery and logistical plan • Marketing plan • Strategic partnerships • Approvals • Evaluation metrics 	Operators	1 – 3 Years	To support development of logistical components, operators can refer to the Logistical Planning Template provided in Appendix B. Funding support to create new or enhance existing tourism experiences and products is available through the Tourism Relief Fund . For any experience offered as part of the event, it is recommended that the product plan is approved by the Action Team to ensure quality control over the visitor experience.
20. Begin delivery of experiences.	Operators	Ongoing	Product delivery must be paired with strong marketing to help ensure success.
★ 21. Encourage operators to register their experiences on the Alberta Tourism Information Service (ATIS).	Development Teams	Ongoing	ATIS is a free digital marketing platform designed to help Alberta tourism businesses amplify their marketing efforts.
★ 22. Develop and maintain an inventory of tourism attractions and activities, and share the inventory with stakeholders to encourage packaging and cross promotion.	Strathcona County	Ongoing	
★ 23. Create experience reference sheets and make them available to tourism operators in the form of an Experience Toolbox.	Development Teams	1 – 3 Years	An Experience Toolbox is an easy-to-use resource for operators to augment or complement their offerings and enhance visitor experiences. The Toolbox should contain multiple reference sheets for how operators can incorporate simple activities that enhance the overall visitor experience (e.g. cultural storytelling and demonstrations, foraging instruction, etc.). Each reference sheet would be 1 to 2 pages in length and contain straightforward set up and delivery instructions, in addition to a list of required materials.
24. Explore opportunities to participate in regional marketing campaigns and leverage package development services provided by Go East of Edmonton.	Development Teams	Ongoing	Go East of Edmonton is a regional tourism marketing organization that holds accreditations in destination marketing from Travel Alberta and Destination Marketing International. Go East manages several tourism marketing initiatives including a visitor-facing website, Travel Guide, events calendar, itinerary development, and a Road Trip Savings Passport.
25. Explore opportunities to participate in regional marketing campaigns with Explore Edmonton.	Development Teams	Ongoing	
26. As part of ongoing infrastructure planning, consider the opportunity to develop complementary infrastructure to support tourism activity.	Strathcona County	Ongoing	Some examples could include enhanced access to natural areas, dedicated walking and biking trails along main transportation routes (particularly in rural areas), pull outs with visitor amenities (e.g. washrooms, tables, information kiosks), and sightseeing areas/viewing platforms.
27. Advocate for affordable insurance coverage for tourism operators in Strathcona County.	Strathcona County	1 – 3 Years	The cost of insurance was identified as a barrier to product development by stakeholders.

Action Items	Lead	Proposed Timeline	Notes
Actions Specific to Identified Product Opportunities			
Stargazer Tour			
28. Identify the best locations for dark sky viewing including opportunities within the Beaver Hills Dark Sky Preserve.	Development Teams	6 Months – 1 Year	These locations should have low light pollution, be easily accessible year-round for tours, and have visitor amenities, such as washrooms, tables, fire pits, etc. Identified locations can be used to support the Stargazer Tour and can also be promoted to visitors interested in self-guided dark sky experiences.
29. Attract experience providers to offer the Stargazer Tour and other dark sky programming.	Development Teams	1 – 2 Years	
30. Encourage the development of complementary dark sky experiences in Strathcona County.	Development Teams	Ongoing	The private sector, governments, and the non-profit sector can all play a role in growing the amount of dark sky experiences available in Strathcona County. There is particular opportunity for the Strathcona Wilderness Centre to position itself as the “home base” for dark sky programming. This could be accomplished through the development of year-round programming and infrastructure development (e.g. outdoor viewing platforms, interpretive signage, directional signage, etc.).
31. Explore the opportunity to develop a planetarium facility in Strathcona County to support dark sky experiences.	Development Teams	2+ Years	This facility could be a permanent or non-permanent structure and could be modelled after existing planetarium facilities in Alberta.
32. Explore the opportunity to develop complementary or satellite dark sky programming that can serve to drive visitors to Strathcona County.	Development Teams	2+ Years	The Development Team may consider reaching out to the TELUS World of Science or University of Alberta.
Strathcona County Wildlife Viewing Excursion			
33. Identify wildlife viewing hotspots in Strathcona County’s natural areas and within Elk Island National Park.	Development Teams	6 Months – 1 Year	Identified locations can be used to support the Strathcona County Wildlife Viewing Excursion and can also be promoted to visitors interested in self-guided wildlife viewing experiences.
34. Attract experience providers to offer the Strathcona County Wildlife Viewing Excursion.	Development Teams	1 – 2 Years	
35. Explore the opportunity to offer birding tours.	Development Teams	1 – 2 Years	
36. Encourage the development of complementary wildlife viewing experiences in Strathcona County.	Development Teams	Ongoing	The private sector, governments, and the non-profit sector can all play a role in growing the amount of wildlife viewing experiences available in Strathcona County.

Action Items	Lead	Proposed Timeline	Notes
Taste of Strathcona County Packages			
37. Identify businesses in Strathcona County who would be interested in offering packaged culinary experiences.	Development Teams	6 Months – 1 Year	Food and beverage businesses would be the primary audience, but other businesses should be considered as well (e.g. accommodations, transportation, experience providers, etc.).
★ 38. Host a package development workshop.	Development Teams	1 Year	The purpose of this workshop would be to introduce businesses interested in developing packages to each other and begin the package development process. Businesses from other jurisdictions could be invited to share success stories about their packages for added value and encouragement for participants.
39. Support the efforts of operators to package their experiences.	Development Teams	Ongoing	
Farm Tours			
40. Identify agricultural operators in Strathcona County who would be interested in offering farm tours.	Development Teams	6 Months – 1 Year	<p>There may be opportunity to partner with Strathcona County’s Transportation and Agricultural Services department to identify interested operators.</p> <p>Some agricultural operators may not be fully aware of the opportunity tourism presents. Fortunately, there are many examples of mutually beneficial partnerships between agricultural operators and experience providers that have opened the door to further investment in tourism. As one example, a restaurant in the Capital region recently partnered with a local farm to feature the farm’s high-quality meat products on their menu. The farm’s sales have increased 40% since the beginning of the partnership. Potential financial incentives such as this provide strong encouragement for farms to get more involved in experience development and tourism. There may be opportunities for Development Teams to help facilitate these types of partnerships.</p> <p>Another opportunity that may help encourage agricultural operators to invest in tourism would be to host an Agritourism Forum. Through this forum, successful agritourism operators would be invited to share their stories, answer questions, and provide ideas and encouragement to local operators to become involved in tourism.</p>

Action Items	Lead	Proposed Timeline	Notes
41. ★ Host a farm tour seminar.	Development Teams	1 Year	The purpose of this seminar would be to provide information and encouragement toward agricultural operators interested in offering farm tours. It is recommended that guest speakers from successful agritourism operations be brought in to share their stories.
42. Support operators in their efforts to develop farm tours.	Development Teams	Ongoing	
Arts and Culture Animation			
43. Develop and implement an arts and culture animation program.	Strathcona County	2 – 3 Years	The program should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A clear application and selection process. • Development of an adjudication committee and criteria for idea selection. • Provision of matching funds to businesses, non-profit organizations, and individuals to implement new destination animation initiatives. • Provide support to organizations to help them build ongoing tourism product that can add to the tourism offering. • Focus on key areas of the community to draw visitors in and encourage spending (i.e. Town Centre, Centre in the Park). • Develop clear evaluation and performance measures and monitor success.
44. ★ Consider participating in Alberta Culture Days.	Development Teams	Ongoing	Alberta Culture Days is a month-long celebration of arts and culture across the province. Organizers of Alberta Culture Days events, activities and promotions can apply for funding assistance .
Our History and Heritage Tour Itinerary			
45. Identify interesting and compelling stories about the history and heritage of Strathcona County that would be of interest to key target markets. Once identified, develop the stories into a consumable, visitor friendly format for inclusion in the itinerary.	Development Teams	1 Year	A professional researcher and/or travel content writer could be hired to complete this work.
46. Reach out to Indigenous Tourism Alberta and local Indigenous groups to explore opportunities to weave Indigenous history and heritage into the itinerary.	Development Teams	1 Year	It may be worthwhile to develop a stand-alone Indigenous history and heritage tour itinerary.
47. Develop the Our History and Heritage Tour Itinerary.	Development Teams	1 – 2 Years	Please see Appendix C for a simple 10-step process that can be implemented to support itinerary development.

Top 5 Proposed Action Items

The following action items have been identified as the top priorities of the tourism product development plan.

- 1 Strike the Product Development Action Team and Experience Development Teams.
- 2 Choose one launch event idea to pilot. Allocate resources and develop marketing and operational plans with a goal to launch the event in year 3 of implementation.
- 3 Develop the new tourism website and populate it with bookable experience offerings.
- 4 Attract operators who will offer experiences in Strathcona County and support their efforts to develop new tourism product.
- 5 Develop and implement new tourism support programs, including a Tourism Spark Program and an Arts and Culture Animation Program.



Estimated Implementation Budget

The following figure provides an estimated implementation budget for the Strathcona County Tourism Implementation Plan over the first three years.

Figure 3. Estimated Implementation Budget (Years 1 – 3)

	2022	2023	2024
Revenue			
Municipal Contributions	2,500	82,500	75,000
Grants and Partnerships ¹	2,500	22,500	15,000
Total Revenue	\$ 5,000	\$ 105,000	\$ 90,000
Expenses			
Develop Business Cases to Acquire Funding for New Projects	Internal resources		
Event and Experience Booking Website ²		40,000	5,000
Marketing Campaign for the Event and New Tourism Experiences ³			20,000
Tourism Training and Education	5,000	5,000	5,000
Tourism Spark Program ²		30,000	30,000
Arts and Culture Animation Program ²		30,000	30,000
Total Expense⁴	\$ 5,000	\$105,000	\$ 90,000

Notes:

- ¹ Grants and partnerships are assumed to cover some of the costs associated with the new website, marketing campaign, and training.
- ² Business cases will need to be developed by Strathcona County’s Economic Development and Tourism team to secure additional funding for these initiatives.
- ³ Tourism marketing investments could be further leveraged through cooperative marketing between Strathcona County and local tourism-related organizations/businesses/events and/or Travel Alberta.
- ⁴ Expenses do not include internal administrative costs.

Revenue Considerations

Revenue from grants and partnerships are not guaranteed. Therefore, municipal contributions toward implementation may differ from the budget outlined in Figure 3.

New Tourism-Focused Municipal Position

Strathcona County is currently in the process of hiring a full time Economic Development Officer of Tourism. This new position will be available to support initiatives put forward in this plan. It will be important for this position to support the Product Development Action Teams by providing administration, expertise, and to act as an information resource.

5

OUTCOMES AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Outcomes

As the product development plan is implemented, the following outcomes are anticipated.

1. *New highly engaging tourism experiences and packages become available in Strathcona County.*

2. *Visitation and visitor spending in Strathcona County increases year over year.*

3. *Awareness of Strathcona County as a tourism destination increases among target markets.*

4. *The capacity of operators to develop new experiences and sustain existing ones is enhanced.*

5. *Residents express a high degree of satisfaction with new experiences and are participating in them enthusiastically.*



Proposed Performance Measures

The following performance measures can be used to gauge success in implementation.

Focus Areas	Performance Measures	Measurement Tool
1. New Experiences	1.1 The new event and experience booking website is launched in year 3 with a full weekend of programming.	Website Review
	1.2 Five new experiential offerings or packages have been created and are available to visitors (year 3).	Product Development Action Team Reporting
	1.3 Ten new experiential offerings or packages have been created and are available to visitors (year 4).	Product Development Action Team Reporting
	1.4 25% annual increase in offerings available on the new website (year 5 on)	Website Review
2. Visitation and Visitor Spending	2.1 10% annual growth in number of visitors to attractions, tour operators, and tourism-related businesses (year 2 on).	Operator Survey
	2.2 10% annual growth in revenue from visitors at attractions, tour operators, and tourism-related businesses (year 2 on).	Operator Survey
3. Awareness	3.1 Strong engagement from visitors on the new website during the first year of operation and 15% annual increases in key metrics from then on (e.g. users, sessions, pageviews, etc.).	Website Metrics
	3.2 95% of experiences based offered in Strathcona County are registered on ATIS.	ATIS Review
	3.3 Increased social media engagement related to new product offerings.	Social Media Metrics
4. Operator Capacity	4.1 At least one training opportunity is offered for tourism businesses in Strathcona County each year.	Product Development Action Team Reporting
	4.2 Participation in the Tourism Spark Program increases year over year and leads to new self-sustaining tourism product.	Program Reporting
	4.3 Participation in the Arts and Culture Animation Program increases year over year and leads to new experiential offerings in targeted areas.	Program Reporting
5. Resident Engagement	5.1 Residents report an 85% positive rating with new experiences.	Resident Survey
	5.2 If applicable, operators report strong uptake on their offerings from residents.	Operator Survey

6

CONCLUSION





Conclusion

This plan puts forward a vision for new tourism product development and tactical actions that will lead to new and enhanced tourism product offerings in Strathcona County. Collaborative efforts and investment from the public, private, and non-profit sectors will be needed to fully realize the objectives of the plan. The investment will be well worth it to support the growth of Strathcona County's visitor economy and the sustainable economic, community, and environmental benefits tourism can generate.

APPENDICES



Appendix A: Package Development Best Practices

The following are best practices regarding package development for tourism operators.

Packaging Description

The clear advantage of packaging is the leveraging of existing assets to create customer value, instead of developing new products from scratch. Value is added to the visitor experience by combining existing products into new and innovative packages that will attract and excite visitors. From a tourism perspective, packaging refers to the linking of several individual products/services into a single experience, typically for a single price. A package is a saleable item, with a set price for a set period of time. There is a broad range of products and services that can be linked in a package, including:

- Food and beverage
- Accommodation
- Built attraction – museum, art gallery, theme park, etc.
- Natural attraction – water access, scenic vistas, etc.
- Transportation
- Programming – gourmet cooking, wine tasting, wood carving, etc.
- Guided tour
- Entertainment – theatre performance, stage show, concert
- Event/festival
- Shopping
- Activity – hiking, kayaking, skiing, snowmobiling
- Ability to experience local culture.

Packages can be linked in many ways and have varying durations (e.g. from a half day to multi-day packages). As packages are developed, consideration should be paid to the destination’s tourism brand to ensure alignment in the product offerings.

Types of Packages

Individual: tourism businesses may offer bundled services within their own operation to consumers.

Partnered: package is a partnership among complementary tourism businesses to offer a convenient and attractive experience for the consumer.

Packaging Benefits

Packaging can generate a variety of benefits to businesses and customers. A summary of the benefits to is shown below.

Benefits to Tourism Businesses

They help with:

1. Market penetration
2. Market development
3. Improve operational efficiencies
4. Increase capacity
5. Improve focus and fit for customers
6. The tailoring of experiences for specific target markets

Benefits to Customers

They provide:

1. Consumer convenience
2. Perception of value
3. Perception of quality
4. Ability to budget for trips
5. Flexibility to choose or build

Elements of a Successful Package

Successful packages share a number of characteristics that experience providers should strive to achieve.

- Provide value to customer
- Provide a distinct customer benefit
- Ensure the package is well planned and coordinated
- Offer consistent quality
- Measure key performance indicators
- Evaluate the success of the package

Steps to Ensure the Package Succeeds

The figure below provides a broad overview of an approach to developing packages.



Step	Description
1. Determine package components	Identify product/market match. Package components should complement each other and provide the customer with a memorable, immersive experience and the opportunity to engage in additional future business. Value-added services or products are encouraged to create an enhanced customer experience.
2. Focus on value	The value to the customer should be focused on real/monetary value by offering the package components at a discount or perceived discount by offering an otherwise unattainable, unique experience opportunity.
3. Name the package	<p>The name of the package should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • be clear and concise • indicate the offering • encourage people to purchase • target specific market segments • fit within the branding of each business and the destination
4. Price the package	<p>Package pricing should consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the fixed and variable costs of the components • any added costs associated with the package offering • the real or perceived value of the package • seasonality or timing • individual or group pricing • market demand and package supply • anticipated profit
5. Add to plan (determine logistics)	<p>Logistical package planning should consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Product/experience scheduling • Customer and staff safety • Operational capacity • Transportation • Accommodations • Availability • Administration • Service level • Evaluation and performance tracking • Communication • Insurance and liability
6. Test the package	Test the individual components, operations, logistics, and overall experience to ensure the delivery of a successful package. Testing can be done internally, through limited customer sampling, or a third party.
7. Promote and market	Package product/market match should be further solidified and used to select specific target market segments and appropriate marketing channels. Industry partners and package participants should work together to develop a marketing plan for the package.
8. Evaluate the package	<p>Packages can be evaluated across a variety of metrics including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Packages purchased • Package profit • Customer feedback • Operational performance • Staff feedback • Market reach/development <p>Key learnings from the evaluation should be shared with package participants and industry partners. Further package development should incorporate these key learnings to create an iterative cycle.</p>

Appendix B: Package Development Logistical Planning Template

Logistics and Operations

Availability

During which days and times are tour operators/suppliers available to offer the package?

Dates, Days of Week, Times	Available Operators/Suppliers

Operational Capacity

How many customers can be accommodated by each tour operator/supplier at one time? What are the impacts to normal operations?

Operator/Supplier	Capacity	Notes/Justification	Operational Impact

Product/Experience Offering

What products/experiences are being offered as part of the tour? How long does it take to offer the product/experience? What staffing requirements are needed? What facilities, equipment, or technology are required?

Operator/Supplier	Offering Description	Staffing	Facility & Equip.

Safety

What measures will be in place to ensure the safety of customers and participants? How will COVID-19 health regulations impact the delivery of the package?

Operator	Safety Measures

Transportation

Will transportation be made available to customers? If so, how will that be done?

Operator/Supplier	Transportation Description	Cost

Accommodations

Will accommodations be made available to customers? What suppliers are capable of providing accommodations for the package?

Supplier	Accommodations Description	Cost

Administration

Are you able to take bookings, collect payments, manage cancellations, and distribute funds? How will proof of purchase be communicated? What are the associated costs?

Operator	Administration Description	Cost

Communication

How will operators/suppliers communicate with each other (phone, text, email, other)?

Channel	Communication	Frequency

Insurance/Liability/Approvals

What insurance or liability coverage is needed to offer the tour? Who will acquire the coverage? Is a liability waiver necessary? What approvals are needed?

Operator/Supplier	Coverage/Waiver/Approval Needed

Seamlessness

How can the tour be a seamless experience to the visitor?

Operator/Supplier	Seamlessness Efforts

Scheduling

During what times will the tour components be offered? Will they be offered sequentially or left open for the customer to choose? How will transportation times be accounted for?

Date	Itinerary	Time	Operator/Supplier

Market Information

Customer Profile

What are the characteristics of your customer(s)?

Demographics

Age(s)	Gender	Family Size	Education Level	Occupation
Discretionary Spending	Other Factors			

Geographics

Target Market Locations				
Geographic Breakdown (%)				
Alberta	BC/Sask.	Rest of Canada	USA	Overseas

Psychographics

Characteristic	Description
Interests	
Personality	
Lifestyle	
Opinions, attitudes, and beliefs	
Values	

Marketing Channels

Operator/Supplier	Description of Channels	Market Reach or Size

Packaging Opportunities

Package Ideas

What packages make the most sense for you and your business?

Operator/Supplier	Description of Package(s)

Complementary Experiences

What other regional experiences and offerings complement your offering?

Complementary Supplier	Description of Experience or Offering

Appendix C: Itinerary Development Process

When developing new itineraries, it is helpful to think through the following steps:²⁸

STEP 1: Research other itineraries in the marketplace

Take a tour which will be similar to the tour you wish to develop through your itinerary and obtain copies of other itineraries for comparison. This will help you develop ideas for your tour, give you an idea of what is already in the marketplace and provide possible ideas for itinerary design and content.

STEP 2: Name your itinerary

Come up with an interesting or catchy name that will resonate with your target audience.

STEP 3: Map out the duration, locations, and other logistical details

When and where will your itinerary begin?

When and where will your itinerary end?

Will operators and attractions be open to visitors during the tour?

What time of year can the itinerary be completed?

STEP 4: List the major locations and highlights

What major attractions will your itinerary bring visitors to? What are the main locations and highlights that visitors are going to experience?

STEP 5: Research itinerary content

List the main topics you wish to include in your itinerary, such as unique stories, history, flora, fauna, culture, as well as the main points to consider with each of these topics and the resources you will use to find the information.

STEP 6: List any 3rd party activities, attractions, entrance fees and inclusions

List any activities offered by tourism operators or entrance fees along your itinerary and be sure to identify them.

STEP 7: Provide options for food and beverage

Your itinerary should identify options for food and beverage along the tour at regular mealtimes.

STEP 8: Provide options for accommodations

If your itinerary takes place over multiple days, it should provide options for accommodations.

STEP 9: Perfect the timing

Prepare a table that shows start, stop, and duration times for each location, attraction, or activity.

STEP 10: Test drive your itinerary

It is recommended that several 'dry runs' of your itinerary be completed prior to launch. This will ensure the timing is right.

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