



**Lake Country  
Community Tourism Strategy  
2024-2028**



# Acknowledgement



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# I Executive Summary



## BACKGROUND

Destination British Columbia, with support from PacifiCan, is offering Community Tourism Planning assistance to foster vibrant and resilient communities across the province. The Community Tourism Planning program (CTPP) is designed to assist BC communities in developing a long-term tourism plan.

The purpose of the CTPP is to create a select number of community tourism plans that will serve as roadmaps for participating communities and tourism partners. Through collaboration, a broad cross-section of community partners in each community will be engaged, including businesses, destination management organizations, municipal government, Indigenous communities, and local groups to establish a shared vision and strategic priorities, address barriers, and identify tourism opportunities.

The Plan is based on a review of data and information obtained from statistical agencies (such as Statistics Canada and BC Stats), Destination BC and Destination Canada, Tourism Kelowna and the Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association (TOTA). This was supplemented with primary research consisting of a focus group, key informant interviews and two planning workshops that generated insights and content for the Plan.

## CURRENT SITUATION

Lake Country is known for its three main lakes, Kalamalka Lake, Wood Lake and Okanagan Lake, which provide residents and visitors convenient access to a variety of water-based activities and adventures. The visitor economy is based on nature-based activities, agri and wine tourism, arts, culture, history and sport tourism. Accommodation includes RV/campgrounds, vacation rentals and motels.

The District of Lake Country manages tourism through its economic development office and a partnership with Tourism Kelowna. Planning guidance is provided by three regional tourism strategies from Destination BC and Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association.

Visitor activity in Lake Country is concentrated in the summer months and is only now recovering from the Covid pandemic. In 2022 a total of 216,000 travellers visited the community, most of which were from the BC and Alberta markets. Although minor, the European and US markets are growing.

The key strengths of Lake Country are its natural assets, history and culture, as well as its core lake, winery and trail experiences. The lack of hotel accommodation, seasonality and limited winter experiences are weaknesses. Enhancing trail products, new accommodation, expanding winter activities and growing sport tourism are all promising opportunities. Building an inclusive local network of operators and stakeholders can help drive product development and grow the visitor economy.

## ESSENCE OF LAKE COUNTRY

Where land and water, nature and wine, orchards and farms, past and present blend to perfection in the Okanagan. Where trails are cycled, hiked and paddled; where lakes are fished and sport is celebrated summer and winter; where discovery of local flavours awake the senses; where colours intrigue and a feeling of well-being emanates from ancient soils; and where community is local. This is LAKE COUNTRY.

## VISION

A **destination** where visitors feel intimately connected to our lakes and trails, and where our diversity of experiences and welcome underpin a strong tourism economy and inspire a deep desire to return. A **community** that takes pride in stewarding its natural assets and its cultural heritage, and an **industry** that works collaboratively to co-facilitate the growth of sustainable tourism and to position Lake Country as a unique blend of all that makes the Okanagan distinctive.

## STRATEGIC PILLARS



People

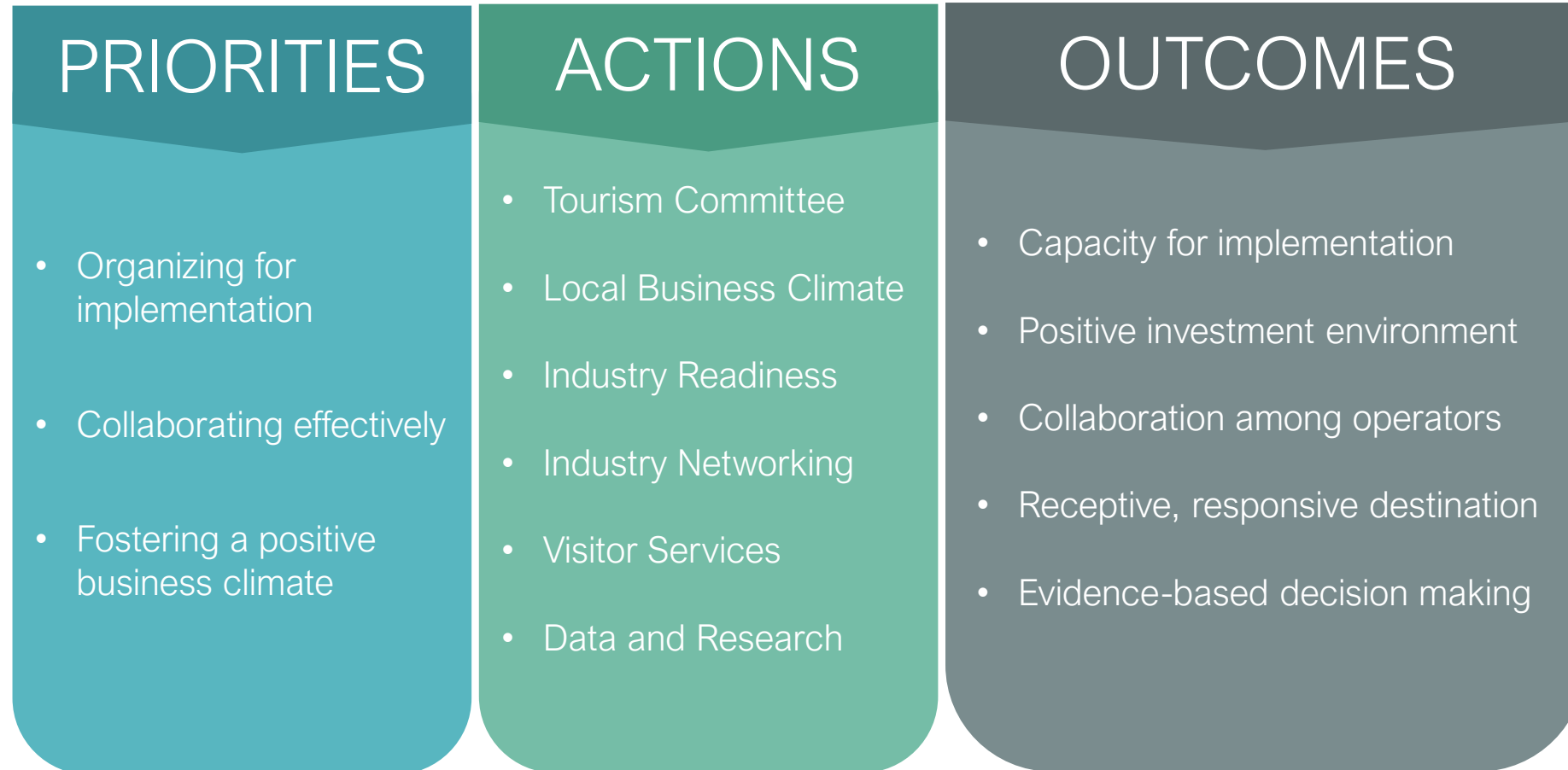


Place

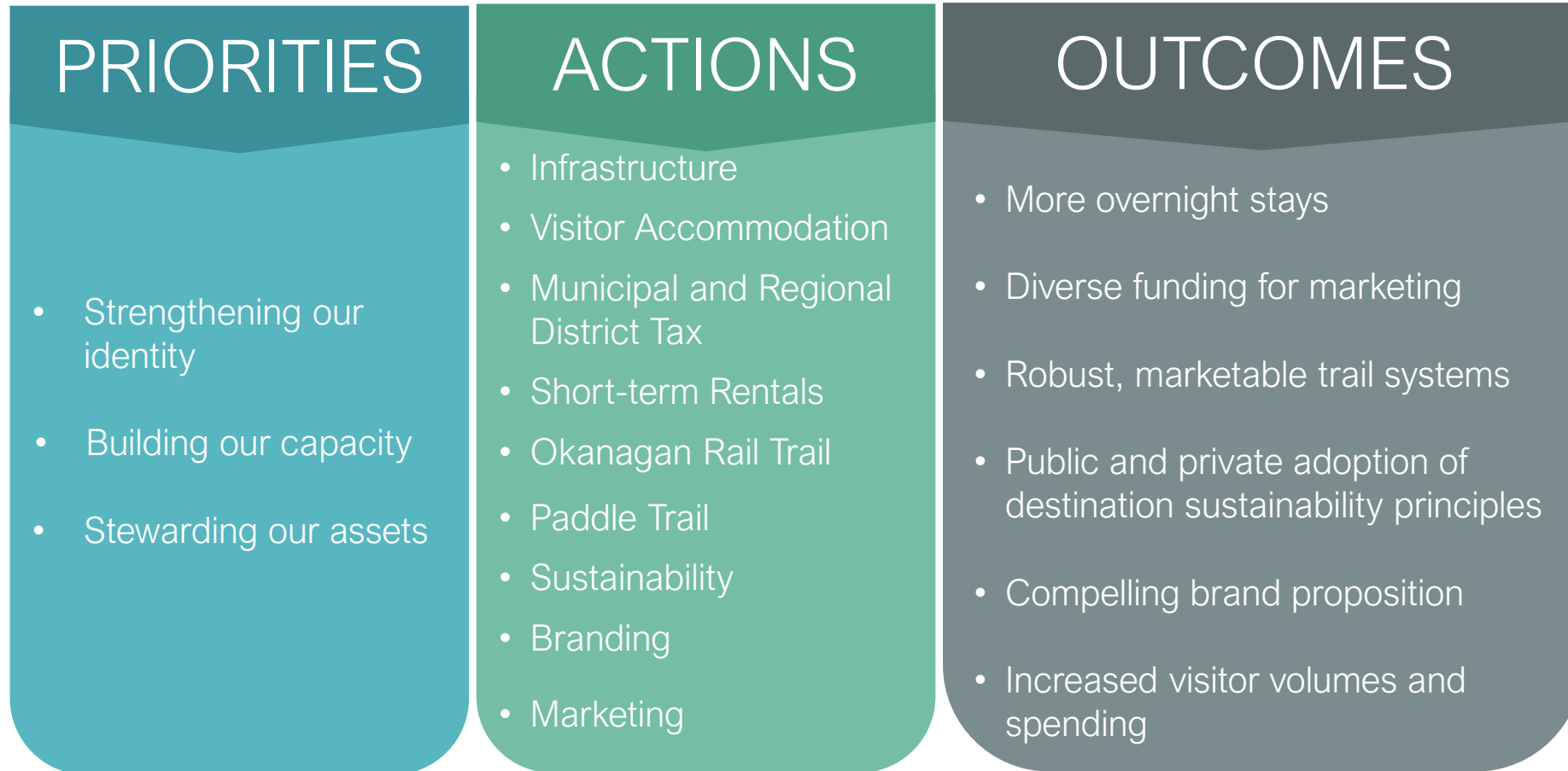


Product

## STRATEGIC PILLAR: PEOPLE

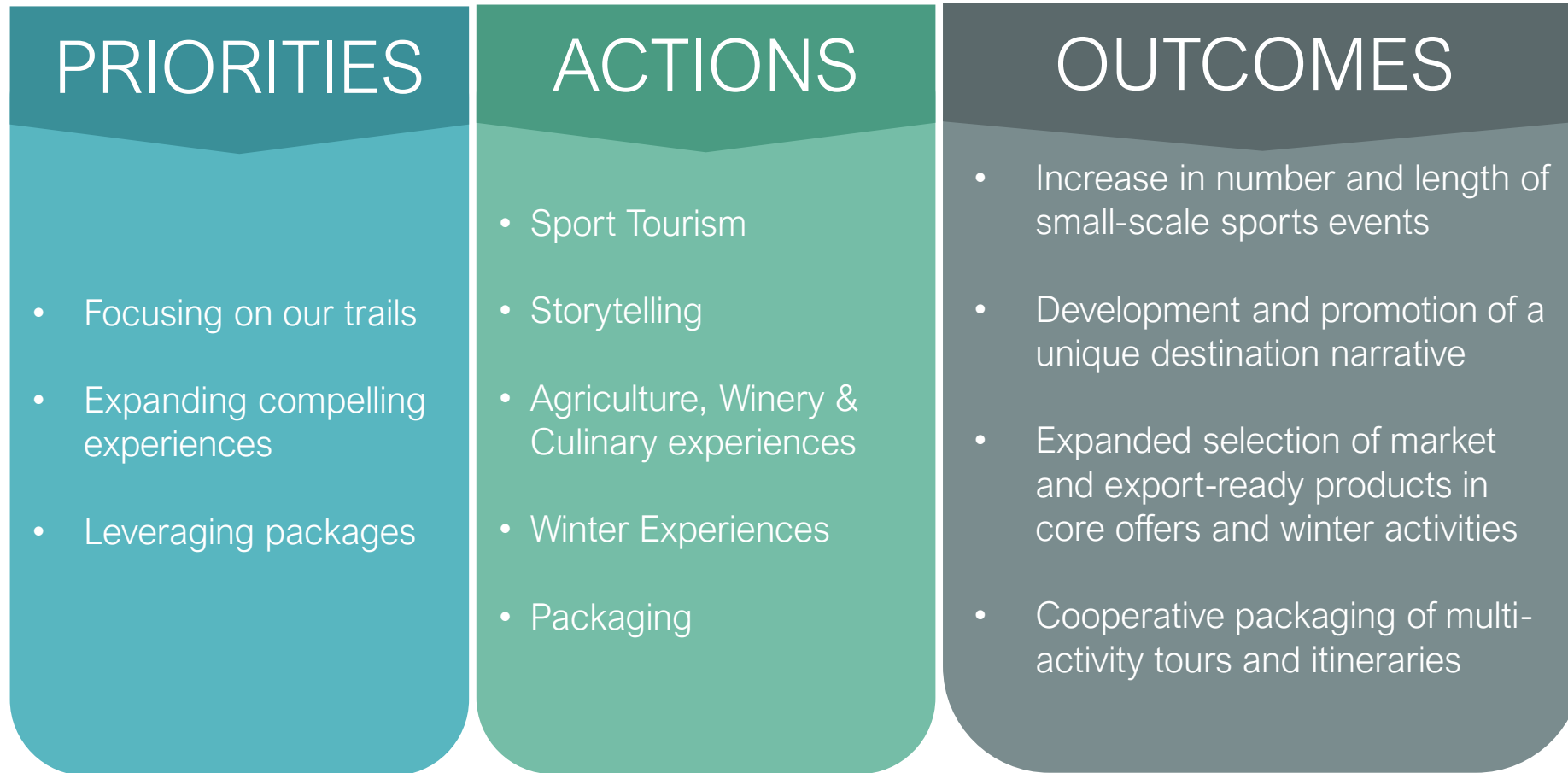


## STRATEGIC PILLAR: PLACE





## PLAN ACTIONS - PRODUCT





## 2 Introduction

## BACKGROUND

Destination British Columbia, with support from PacifiCan, is offering Community Tourism Planning assistance to foster vibrant and resilient communities across the province. The Community Tourism Planning program (CTPP) is designed to assist BC communities in developing a long-term tourism plan. The program connects communities with an experienced facilitator, contracted through Destination BC, who will guide them through a collaborative planning process, facilitate sessions and draft a well-defined tourism plan. By involving a diverse range of partners in each community, the process encourages the creation of a shared vision for tourism. Additionally, by leveraging each community's inherent strengths, the program facilitates the identification of initiatives that can attract visitors and provide social, cultural, and economic benefits to the community.

The purpose of the CTPP is to create a select number of community tourism plans that will serve as roadmaps for participating communities and tourism partners. Each plan will establish clear objectives and deliverables, providing a framework for collective success.

Through collaboration, a broad cross-section of community partners in each community will be engaged, including businesses, destination management organizations, municipal government, Indigenous communities, and local groups to establish a shared vision **and** strategic priorities, address barriers, and identify tourism opportunities.

Moreover, the program aims to drive sustainable economic development in each participating community by leveraging tourism to increase economic activity, while prioritizing the preservation and enhancement of local resources and fostering community pride.

## APPROACH

The Plan is based on a review of data and information obtained from statistical agencies (such as Statistics Canada and BC Stats), Destination BC and Destination Canada, Tourism Kelowna and the Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association (TOTA). This was supplemented with primary research consisting of a focus group, key informant interviews and two planning workshops that generated insights and content for the Plan.



# 3 Current Situation



# The Destination

The District of Lake Country is a rural municipality of approximately 16,000 residents, located between Kelowna and Vernon in the Central Okanagan. Wards within Lake Country include Carr's Landing, Okanagan Centre, Oyama and Winfield.

Lake Country is known for its three main lakes, Kalamalka Lake, Wood Lake and Okanagan Lake, which gave rise to the community's name and character, and provide residents and visitors convenient access to a variety of water-based activities and adventures.

Key tourism assets include:

- **Nature-based tourism**—lakes, beaches, parks and trails
- **Agri and wine tourism**—eight wineries, orchards, farm gate sales
- **Arts, culture, history**—Lake Country Museum, Creekside Theatre, Live! In Lake Country, Art Walk, festivals, galleries and studios
- **Sport tourism**—tournament and training hosted at Beasley Park, Swalwell Park, Jack Seaton Park, Winfield Arena and Winfield Curling Club.
- **Accommodation**—RV/campgrounds, licenced short term vacation rentals, motels

In Lake Country, responsibility for tourism falls to the Economic Development office. The Parks and Recreation Department is responsible for parks, trails and public spaces that serve visitors and residents. Lake Country has a close relationship with Tourism Kelowna which provides destination marketing on a fee-for-service basis. Additionally, it provides for a fee a Mobile Tourism Centre (kiosk) at events and popular tourist areas throughout Lake Country from May to September.

There are three regional tourism strategies that provide guidance for Lake Country's Community Tourism Plan.

- **Thompson Okanagan Regional Tourism Strategy**—key themes of celebrating winter, enriching local flavours, living well, iconic trails, authentic and Indigenous experiences and epic road trips
- **Okanagan Valley Destination Development Plan**—has a focus on natural assets, infrastructure, industry readiness and experience development
- **Southern Valleys Iconic (forthcoming)**— has a focus on place making, as well as seasonal and geographic dispersion

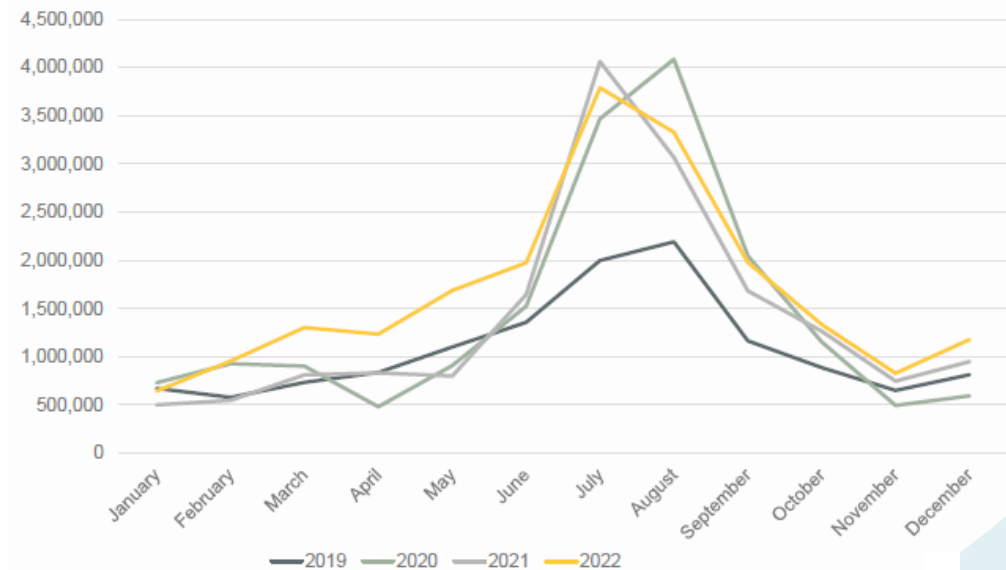
# Performance - Regional

The last full year of travel prior to Covid was 2019, after which travel restrictions and other pandemic-related measures severely disrupted domestic and international tourism activity. The data indicate however, that the amount of domestic travel to the Thompson Okanagan as measured by number of visitors, number of trips, overnight stays and length of stay grew between 2019 and 2020, and it was not until 2021 that the numbers plateaued or declined in response to intensive restrictions and health measures. It is noted however, that while physical travel was maintained, the hotel data presented above does show a severe drop in demand. This implies that while travel was still occurring it did not translate into typical tourism spending on services such as accommodation, food and beverage, transportation and retail. A recovery trend commenced in 2022 when vaccines became available and many travel restrictions were lifted.

In terms of seasonality, the reliance on summer travel is evident in Figure 5 for all markets. The influence in holiday and winter travel to ski resorts can be seen in the uptick in activity beginning in December, otherwise visitation to the Thompson Okanagan is still heavily concentrated in the June to September months.

| THOMPSON OKANAGAN | 2022         | 2022/2020 |
|-------------------|--------------|-----------|
| VISITORS          | 3.7 million  | 27.6%     |
| TRIPS             | 6.7 million  | 17.5%     |
| NIGHTS STAYED     | 20.2 million | 16.7%     |
| LENGTH OF STAY    | 5.5 nights   | -8.3%     |

Canadian Visitors by Month



Source: Symphony Tourism Services. 2023. Canada, British Columbia & Alberta 2022 Year In Review Thompson Okanagan. BC Regional Tourism Secretariat.

# Performance - Local

## LAKE COUNTRY UNIQUE VISITORS 2022

Destination BC has provided a profile of unique visits to Lake Country in 2022 based on Environic Analytics MobileScapes (see side table). Counts include day and overnight visits and captures an individual visitor or visiting party only once throughout the year. The data aligns with the regional profiles indicating a dominant BC market (81%), followed by Alberta (11%), notably Calgary, and the rest of Canada (8%). More than half of BC visitors to Lake Country are from the North Okanagan, predominantly Vernon and Coldstream. Kelowna residents are not included in the data.

Attendance data from local attractions underline the importance of the regional market in Lake Country. The Lake Country Museum and Archives attracts over 1,000 annually. Its most recent attendance figures show 68% are from Lake Country, 14.5% are from the Okanagan and 17.5% are from farther afield.

|                             | Visits         | %           |
|-----------------------------|----------------|-------------|
| British Columbia            | 138,700        | 81%         |
| <i>North Okanagan</i>       | <i>72,100</i>  | <i>42%</i>  |
| <i>Vernon</i>               | <i>37,400</i>  | <i>22%</i>  |
| <i>Coldstream</i>           | <i>14,100</i>  | <i>8%</i>   |
| <i>Greater Vancouver</i>    | <i>21,400</i>  | <i>12%</i>  |
| <i>Columbia-Shuswap</i>     | <i>13,800</i>  | <i>8%</i>   |
| <i>Okanagan-Similkameen</i> | <i>8,300</i>   | <i>5%</i>   |
| Alberta                     | 19,200         | 11%         |
| <i>Calgary</i>              | <i>7,400</i>   | <i>4%</i>   |
| Rest of Canada              | 13,400         | 8%          |
| <b>Total</b>                | <b>216,000</b> | <b>100%</b> |

# Performance - Local

## ROOM REVENUES

Room revenues collected as part of the Municipal and Regional District Tax (MRDT) for the province and Kelowna are shown in the table opposite. Revenues dropped sharply in 2020-21 in B.C. and Kelowna but recovered strongly in 2022 to record levels. This appears to indicate that overall levels of leisure and business travel rebounded relatively quickly after the pandemic.

|                  | 2019      | 2020      | 2021      | 2022      | 2023 (YTD) |
|------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| British Columbia | 3,233,867 | 1,484,969 | 2,124,849 | 3,833,024 | 2,160,365  |
| Kelowna          | 127,825   | 83,678    | 116,181   | 174,011   | 82,550     |

## OCCUPANCY METRICS

The hotel occupancy data in the table opposite clearly shows the drop-off between 2019 and 2020 as Covid took hold and disrupted the travel and tourism industry. Occupancies, daily revenue per room, and revenue per available room have more than recovered to recent highs as of September 2023.

|                            | 2019     | 2020     | 2021     | 2022     | 2023 (YTD) |
|----------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|------------|
| Occupancy                  | 69.60%   | 39.40%   | 48.50%   | 66.50%   | 71.50%     |
| Average Daily Revenue      | \$197.10 | \$151.40 | \$176.10 | \$218.10 | \$244.30   |
| Revenue per Available Room | \$137.20 | \$59.60  | \$80.90  | \$144.90 | \$174.70   |

## NUMBER OF BUSINESS ESTABLISHMENTS

The number of business establishments in the Central Okanagan Regional District in tourism-related industries is shown opposite. Like room revenues, there was a drop-off in the number of tourism establishments in 2020 due to pandemic affects, whereas the total number of establishments did not decline.

|                                  | 2019  | 2020  | 2021  | 2022  |
|----------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| All Industries                   | 9,044 | 9,024 | 9,245 | 9,662 |
| Arts, Entertainment & Recreation | 150   | 144   | 143   | 149   |
| Accommodation & Food Services    | 528   | 516   | 509   | 523   |



# Trends

- **Changing travel patterns post-COVID-19**—profound impact on travel patterns, shift to outdoor and nature-based activities
- **Longer stays**—prior to pandemic, longer trips were increasing in demand (but may be reversing post-Covid)
- **Hybrid work**—“wocations” and “flexcations” increasing in popularity
- **Secondary destinations**--growing demand for unfamiliar destinations
- **Sustainability**—interest in reducing human impacts on destinations
- **Digital transformation**—increasing use of online and other technologies across the planning and trip cycle
- **Health and safety concerns**—post-Covid concerns about health and desire for contactless technologies and health monitoring
- **Experiential travel**—increasing interest in learning about local culture, history and authentic memorable experiences that can be shared
- **Multi-generational travel**—multiple generations travelling together
- **Solo travel**—travelling alone allowing independence to explore and freedom; especially popular among Millennials
- **Personalization**--bespoke experiences tailored to a traveller’s needs, values and interests
- **Wellness tourism**--desire to spend more time and money on self-care, wellness, and stress relief
- **Indigenous tourism**—growing interest in and learning about the traditions, history, and customs of Canada's Indigenous peoples
- **Events and festivals**—increasingly important as a demand generator. Global market value estimated at US\$1.5 trillion in 2022, and forecast to reach US\$2.33 trillion by 2033
- **Culinary tourism**—unique and memorable eating and drinking experiences, as well as agri-tourism experiences
- **Wine, cider and craft beer tourism**—growing demand for this core BC experience

# Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

- Lakes
- International airport access
- Service and tech-based economy
- Access to natural environment

- Parks, trails and sports facilities
- Wineries
- Agriculture and agri-tourism base
- Heritage and culture



- Drive-by traffic
- Inter-community transit
- Housing availability and prices
- Highly seasonal

- Lack of overnight accommodation
- Limited visitor services
- Short-stay and day market
- Few winter experiences



- Trail- related experiences
- Expand existing festivals and regattas
- Hotels and resorts
- Sport tourism

- Experiences in town centre
- First Nations partnerships
- Winter experiences
- Paddle trail



- Funding and capacity constraints
- Lack of cooperation among operators
- Local business climate
- Climate change and wildfires

- Water and lake quality
- Over-development in areas
- Access to developable land
- Access to volunteers



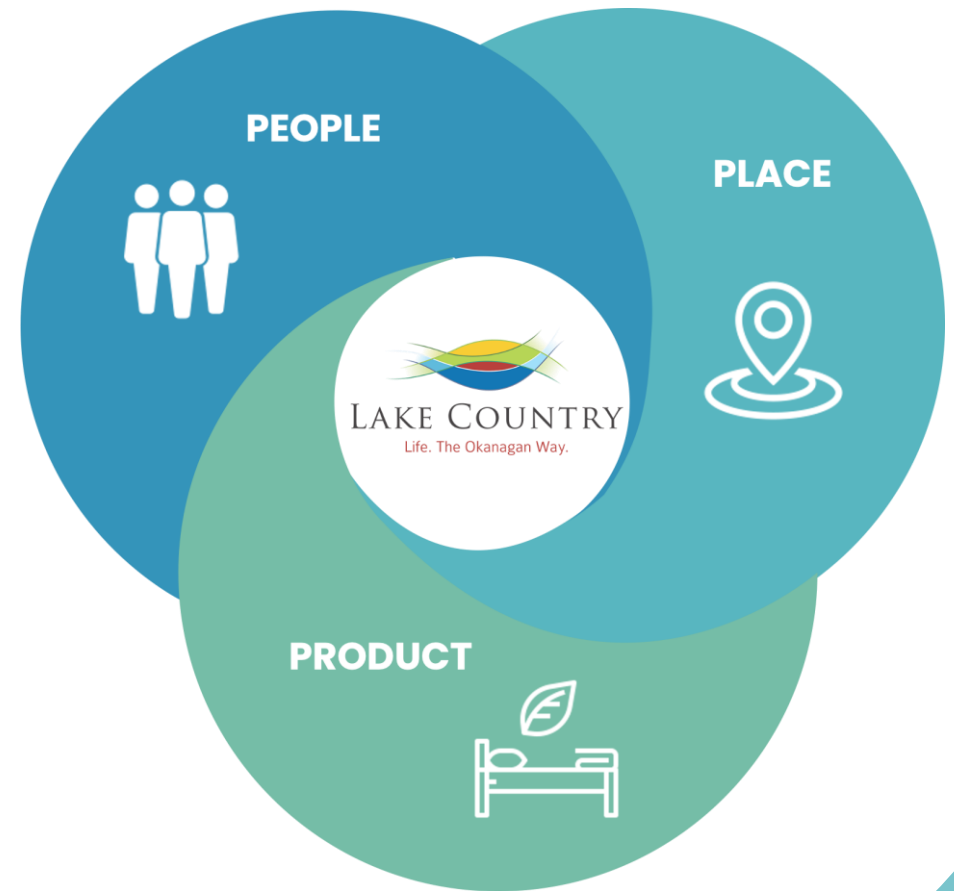
# A Holistic Approach

Over the next five years, Lake Country can pursue its vision and realize its strategic priorities by focusing on three interconnected areas of action, ensuring a holistic perspective that encompasses all aspects of destination and industry management.

**PEOPLE:** Tourism development involves working collectively across a wide spectrum of people or players. It requires a cohesive approach between operators, service providers, elected officials, sports and community groups and stakeholders to realize the vision.

**PLACE:** Infrastructure like trails, transportation services and public amenities creates capacity for moving visitors into and around the community and providing access to areas and sites of interest. Infrastructure serves residents as well as visitors and therefore contributes to local quality of life, as well as the visitor economy.

**PRODUCT:** Lake Country will need to work with tourism operators and stakeholders to raise the bar on competitiveness, creating compelling experiences that are market and export-ready. The visitor experience is essentially a composite of interactions with attractions, hospitality services, transportation providers and the community itself. Successful destinations strategically manage all elements affecting the tourism offer and how it is delivered to the visitor.





## 4 Plan Direction



# Essence of Lake Country

Where land and water, nature and wine, orchards and farms, past and present blend to perfection in the Okanagan. Where trails are cycled, hiked and paddled; where lakes are fished and sport is celebrated summer and winter; where discovery of local flavours awake the senses; where colours intrigue and a feeling of well-being emanates from ancient soils; and where community is local. This is LAKE COUNTRY.

# Destination Vision

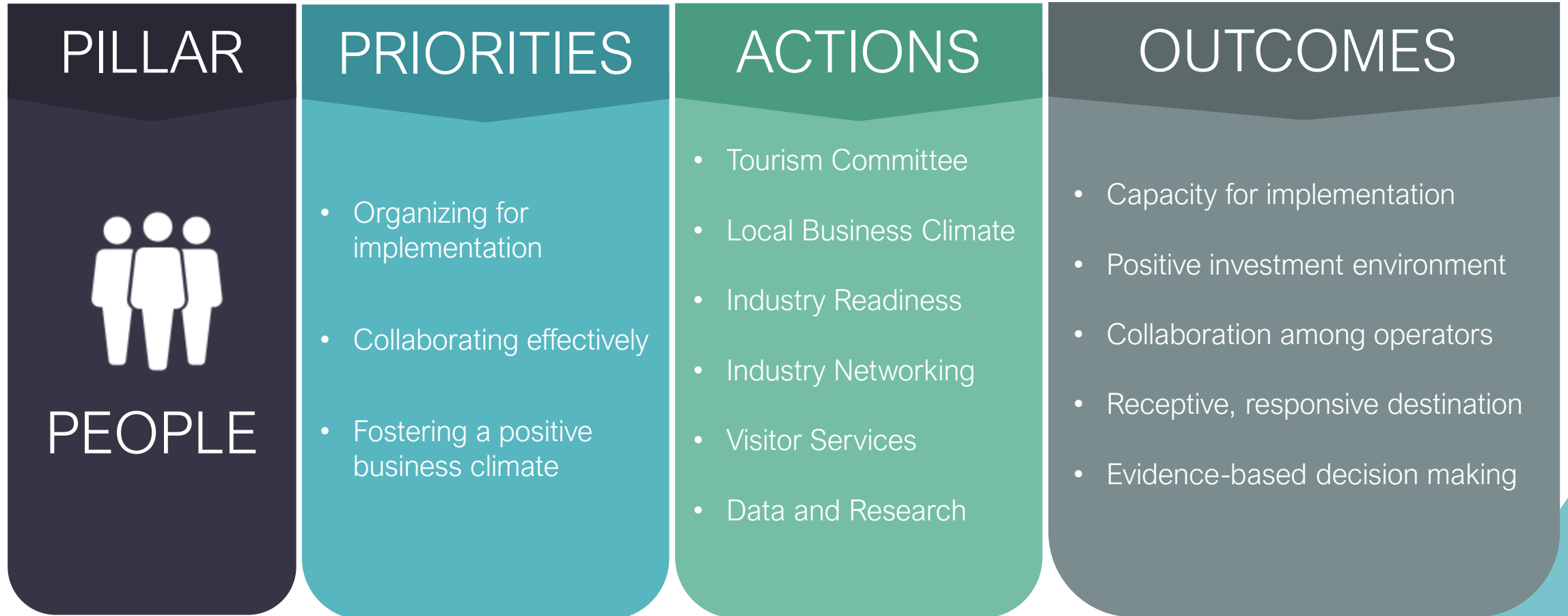
- A **destination** where visitors feel intimately connected to our lakes and trails, and where our diversity of experiences and welcome underpin a strong tourism economy and inspire a deep desire to return. A **community** that takes pride in stewarding its natural assets and its cultural heritage, and an **industry** that works collaboratively to co-facilitate the growth of sustainable tourism and to position Lake Country as a unique blend of all that makes the Okanagan distinctive.



# Strategic Pillars



# Overview of Plan Actions





# Overview of Plan Actions



# Overview of Plan Actions





## 5 Plan Actions



# People

- Organizing for implementation
- Collaborating effectively
- Fostering a positive business climate

# People

## TOURISM COMMITTEE

The Economic Development and Tourism Committee (EDTC), is an advisory committee of council that is called upon when projects are being evaluated. It was put on hold because of inactivity and challenges identifying appropriate areas of action. With new strategic plans coming up for adoption, including this Tourism Strategy and anticipated Agri-tourism Plan, a renewed group with clear direction would provide local knowledge guidance and experience for navigating implementation.

### Actions

1. Determine the format, whether it would be a committee of council as set out in the Community Charter, including membership, meetings, minutes and reporting or a less formalized group.
2. Prepare a revised Terms of Reference (TOR) identifying the delegated authority, roles, responsibilities, operations, tenure and obligations, in accordance with any specific legislative requirements.
3. Establish a budget (primarily administrative) and secure funding.
4. Recruit community members with tourism expertise and experience and orientate members.

## LOCAL BUSINESS CLIMATE

The business climate is the general economic environment that businesses operate in. In the local context, it is characterized in terms of tax burden, service and infrastructure quality and regulatory regime.

A positive business climate in Lake Country is important because of the lack of developable land outside the town centre, and under-investment along Main Street where developable land is available. Feedback from the focus groups and workshops indicated the District could be more responsive to the needs of entrepreneurs that wish to do business in the community.

### Actions

1. Review practices within municipalities that support a strong tourism industry, and work with District staff to assess and improve a fair and timely regulatory process, and to modernize bylaws and tax competitiveness.
2. Undertake a review of current incentive programs and research options for more effective incentives that will encourage infill in the town centre.

# People

## INDUSTRY READINESS

Destination BC partners with the tourism industry on a set of market ready criteria designed to strengthen competitiveness. The Market Ready Standards have been broken down into three categories of “readiness” to assist tourism-related businesses in progressively increasing the quality and professionalism of their operations. Lake Country can promote these standards to local businesses and improve capacity for the development of new and enhanced products and experiences.

### Actions

1. Develop an inventory of local tourism operations.
2. Work with the Chamber of Commerce to undertake an audit of local tourism operators using Destination BC’s market-ready criteria, classifying all current offerings into one of the three categories (visitor, market, export-ready).
3. Encourage uptake of Destination BC’s Learning Centre resources and Co-op Marketing Programs.
4. Highlight TOTA’s training programs and encourage participation.

## INDUSTRY NETWORKING

One of the biggest concerns expressed by participants in the focus groups and planning workshops was the lack of networking in Lake Country, not just among tourism operators in general, but even within niche sectors like wineries. Through a focus on facilitating networking events, Lake Country can collaborate with relevant partners to generate and amplify discussion on trends, issues, opportunities and other topics of relevance.

### Actions

1. Work with the Chamber of Commerce to host a regular schedule of networking events, including breakfast or luncheon series, ‘speed-dating’ between operators to build partnerships, training programs and invited speakers.
2. Deliver a tourism newsletter or blog on the District website.
3. Host an annual tourism forum to inform tourism stakeholders of the objectives of the tourism plan and its implementation.
4. Consider hosting workshops on experience and market development in partnership with Tourism Kelowna, Destination BC and TOTA.

# People

## VISITOR SERVICES

Lake Country no longer has a permanent visitor centre and does not participate in Destination BC's Visitor Centre Network Statistics Program, which comprises 132 community-owned visitor centres. The program sets out standards for the collection and reporting of attendance and other visitor data.

The objective of visitor services is to get information to visitors when they need it so they have a better and longer stay in the community. Historically, this required face-to-face contact between travel counsellors and travellers, but increasingly information is being exchanged online and through social media.

Lake Country has an agreement with Tourism Kelowna to operate a mobile visitor kiosk in the summer. Mobile and pop-up kiosks became popular during Covid when many bricks-and-mortar centres were closed. Tourism Kelowna also has baseline data from a Telus Insights study of local visitor centres that could provide guidance on visitor services in Lake Country.

## Actions

1. Prepare a Visitor Services Plan that sets out expectations and outcomes for the mobile visitor centre. This can be done in house and should identify targets for attendance, events and related evaluation metrics. A simple logic model with inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes should be included.
2. Work with Tourism Kelowna on implementation of the Plan and reporting on performance measurement. This should include minimum monthly reporting according to BC's Visitor Centre Network Statistics Program so Lake Country can monitor short-term trends in attendance and better understand visitor activities.
3. Undertake an annual Plan evaluation based on achievement of logic model parameters, including expected outcomes. Seek the input and insights of tourism stakeholders on value-for-money services provided in the Plan.
4. Revisit the Telus Insights study of the Lake Country visitor centre commissioned by Tourism Kelowna to determine the impacts and benefits of these services locally.

# People

## DATA AND RESEARCH

Destination development in Lake Country, whether it is product and experience development or marketing, is hampered by a poor understanding of its visitor markets. Firstly, data relating to visitor volumes, activities and spending patterns are rarely available and not well understood. While data for the Thompson Okanagan region and BC are relatively robust and informative, the absence of local data means that visitors to individual communities are presumed to behave in an “average” sort of way when that may not necessarily be the case. Secondly, supply-side information on services and amenities is highly dispersed physically and digitally across numerous platforms that are not generally convenient to access.

This situation represents a vulnerability for Lake Country as it makes decisions about how to improve its destination offer, reach out and attract new markets and expand its visitor economy. The fact that it is a small community means data that drives evidence-based decision making can have outsized impacts on budget effectiveness and efficiency.

## Actions

1. Work with Tourism Kelowna to establish a visitor research baseline with indicators and metrics that could be used to benchmark and evaluate change over time.
2. Request that Tourism Kelowna provide guidance on a cost-effective data framework utilizing Environic Analytics' services and based on geo-fencing Lake Country.
3. Examine the potential for using local data sources for measuring tourism activity, for business counts, tax base and permitting times.
4. Use the data to:
  - Develop a tourism dashboard for the District tourism webpage ([visitlakecountry.ca](http://visitlakecountry.ca)); and
  - Communicate with and report to tourism partners on visitor trends and opportunities.
5. Consider implementing Destination BC's value of tourism model for Lake Country to support funding applications for tourism projects.



# Place

- Strengthening our identity
- Building our capacity
- Stewarding our assets



# Place

## INFRASTRUCTURE

Public infrastructure plays a critical role in destination development and sustainable development. It involves the creation, improvement, and maintenance of physical, social, and organizational structures and facilities that support and enhance the visitor experience.

In Lake Country there is clear evidence that infrastructure is driving visitor demand. The Okanagan Rail Trail, and the Spion Kop trails, are obvious examples, but even relatively minor investments like the public washrooms at Okanagan Centre are making a marked difference in visitor levels to local sites and attractions. Lake Country will soon have the Okanagan's largest EV charging station which will facilitate capacity for this segment of the market and contribute to sustainability.

New amenities for animating public spaces in the town centre could leverage private investment in the creation of a tourism hub or precinct that would give Lake Country an identifiable destination for visitors.

## Actions

1. Promote development of a tourism hub in the town centre by working with District staff and tourism stakeholders on:
  - A precinct of parcels and vacant properties;
  - Future public infrastructure investments;
  - Targeted incentives; and
  - Outreach to property owners.
2. Evaluate signage and develop a strategy that will improve wayfinding within the community and among its key attractions:
  - Conduct a signage audit. There are many simple audit templates available on the internet;
  - Compile signage manuals and policies from other BC communities and work with local partners on a signage framework; and
  - Fund and prepare the strategy.
3. Continue to focus on trails connectivity, and parking access and related supporting infrastructure at trail heads.
4. Advocate for coordinated, unified management and promotion of the Okanagan Rail Trail.
5. Further promote the 'safe harbour' at Okanagan Centre and related recreational opportunities.

# Place

## VISITOR ACCOMMODATION

There is a lack of hotel accommodation in Lake Country with only two properties totalling 68 units. While there is a considerable inventory of vacation rentals listed on online accommodation platforms, this category of accommodation does not suit all forms of demand including inbound and bus tours, tournaments and the small meeting and convention trade.

The loss of campground and RV sites in recent years is also a concern as it may be preventing some important market segments such as younger families and singles from coming to and staying in the community.

The overall lack of formal accommodation inventory limits the spending that occurs in the community and the potential of the visitor economy. More rooms would create more overnight stays, new pedestrian traffic and trade for businesses and contribute to overall community vibrancy. It could also enhance the viability of a local hotel tax to drive more tourism marketing.

## Actions

1. Identify parcels suitable for hotel or campground development and undertake preplanning that would support marketing and recruitment efforts.
2. Work with Tourism Kelowna on site identification and outreach to hotel developers for investment in 3-star or boutique properties.
3. Work with Tourism Kelowna on market demand research and develop a business case for an offer in Lake Country.
4. Prepare a hotel investment document that outlines the local potential for new accommodation in the context of District plans for a town centre tourism precinct, sport tourism, rail and paddle trail potential and winery/agritourism.
5. Develop a website and undertake other promotions to market the hotel opportunity to the real estate and hotel sectors.

# Place

## MUNICIPAL AND REGIONAL DISTRICT TAX

The Municipal and Regional District Tax (MRDT) is the provincial hotel tax applied to sales of short-term accommodation. Over 60 communities in BC have the tax, including Kelowna and Vernon. The MRDT is meant to promote a coordinated and efficient use of funds for tourism marketing, programs, and projects; effective local-level stakeholder support and inter-community collaboration; and coordinated and complementary marketing. Collecting the MRDT in Lake Country is a potential opportunity; however, it could be challenging given the program enlistment thresholds. A major bonus, if implemented, is that the tax is collected on all short-term rentals as well, which could provide a significant base of revenue for or marketing, product and experience development and visitor services.

### Actions

1. Canvas hotel properties for their initial thoughts on the tax.
2. Work with Destination BC and Tourism Kelowna for guidance on implementing the tax.
3. Prepare a business case to lobby hotels and achieve threshold enlistment requirements.

## SHORT-TERM RENTALS POLICY

Lake Country has many vacation properties listed on online accommodation platforms. The District is tracking its short-term rental listings through AirDNA and business licensing. Meanwhile the provincial and federal governments have enacted short-term rental policies that targets investment properties where the beneficial owner does not reside. The provincial speculation and vacancy tax will also apply to Lake Country starting in 2025. These new regulations may or may not have a substantive impact on local supply as most properties are believed to be primary residences.

### Actions

1. Work with Tourism Kelowna on a coordinated approach leveraging short-term rentals and their role in increasing overnight visits, including jointly initiating an educational and networking event on how to be a good host.
2. Monitor the rollout of the new provincial and federal regulations to gauge impacts and help shape local policy.
3. Review the existing 2017 short-term rental bylaw and assess the impacts on supply conditions.

# Place

## OKANAGAN RAIL TRAIL

The Okanagan Rail Trail (ORT) runs 52 km from the north end of Kalamalka Lake to downtown Kelowna. Opened in 2018, it connects three lakes with stunning views on an easy grade. It is a significant walking and biking route that benefits all the communities along the way as a recreational asset and an active transport route. It is also attracting significant visitation including international markets, notably from Europe.

A section of the trail is closed pending transfer to the Okanagan Indian Band (OKIB) but is expected to be opened soon. Local government, OKIB and Friends of Okanagan Rail Trail are cooperating on infrastructure, road access, accessibility and stewardship. Destination BC has produced a consumer website for the trail.

The District has a management plan for access points and interpretive sites, and a strategy for connecting the community to the trail and is developing associated infrastructure.

## Actions

1. Work with Parks, Recreation and Culture to support fundraising for trail improvements, amenity development and maintenance needs, and adoption of high accessibility standards, which can be coordinated with Tourism Kelowna and TOTA, both of whom are promoting accessibility in tourism.
2. Work with OKIB to leverage the proposed Indigenous Interpretive Centre on Wood Lake, specifically to encourage and support Indigenous experiences and services for trail users.
3. Create a product and events inventory as a baseline to assist with future planning. A central repository listing infrastructure, amenities, attractions and services could be shared with other trail partners.
4. Coordinate promotion of the ORT with regional partners and consider joint marketing initiatives that take advantage of the trail's highlights between Vernon and Lake Country.
5. Work with local tourism businesses to develop services that directly encourage trail use.
6. Work with Tourism Kelowna and Destination BC to promote the 17.5 km Wood Lake Loop Trail as a signature destination experience.

# Place

## PADDLE TRAIL

A paddle trail on Wood Lake that complements a similar ongoing initiative on Kalamalka Lake would represent a much-needed, new destination experience for Lake County.

The Greater Vernon Advisory Committee approved the Kalamalka project in 2019. It will see 43 buoys (11 in Lake Country) installed approximately every 500 metres as a trail mark and paddle zone near the shoreline. The estimated cost is approximately \$40,000. Installation began in fall 2023. A second phase would add a similar trail on Okanagan Lake. Key objectives of the paddle trail are as a recreational amenity, safe passage for paddlers and zoning of motorized boating away from the shoreline to reduce wake/erosion. Kelowna also has a paddle trail on Okanagan Lake from McKinley Beach to Bertram Creek Regional Park (27 km).

The District has supported the Kalamalka project and presumably would participate in an Okanagan Lake extension. It could easily expand the trail to Wood Lake thereby creating a destination paddle circuit.

## Actions

1. Liaise with Kelowna and Vernon paddle trail organizations:
  - Meet with Greater Vernon Advisory Committee for a debrief on the Kalamalka Paddle Trail status and potential expansion to Okanagan Lake; and
  - Meet with Tourism Kelowna and gather intelligence on Kelowna's paddle trail experience, recommended amenities and tours.
2. Liaise with Paddle BC to enhance the attractiveness of a Wood Lake paddle trail with strategic amenities, facilities and infrastructure.
3. Prepare a development concept and feasibility plan, outlining a capital and maintenance budget based on the Vernon experience.
4. Prepare a marketing program and budget that could be implemented as part of Lake Country's marketing contract with Tourism Kelowna. Co-marketing with other paddle trails, digital outreach, listing with Destination BC, achieving trail designations, listing on trail websites/apps, maps/guide are recommended tactics.
5. Promote innovative paddle, rail trail, winery and agri-tourism packages among local operators.

# Place

## SUSTAINABILITY

One way for Lake Country to differentiate itself as a destination is through a commitment to sustainability. The UN defines sustainable tourism as "Tourism fully aware of its current and future economic, social and environmental impact, taking into account the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and local communities."<sup>\*</sup>

TOTA is promoting sustainability regionally through its Biosphere Commitment Program. The Program follows a simple process to be recognized as a Biosphere Committed Company. While uptake within Lake Country has been slow, TOTA will be working in partnership with the BC Tourism Climate Residency Initiative to offer micro-grants to eligible businesses.

Tourism Kelowna has Sustainable Tourism 2030 certification through GreenStep. The Pledge can be taken by businesses or communities. The Biosphere program aligns with UN tourism sustainability guidelines.

<sup>\*</sup> Source: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics/sustainabletourism>

## Actions

1. Work with the Chamber to conduct an online survey of tourism operators and stakeholders to determine:
  - existing sustainability commitments;
  - interest in a potential sustainability program in Lake Country; and
  - the expected level of commitment should such an initiative go ahead.
2. Compile research on programming already in place in the Okanagan, including initiatives related to accessibility:
  - Request that Tourism Kelowna provide an evaluation of the GreenStep program (Sustainable Tourism 2030 Certification) and its suitability for Lake Country; and
  - Request that TOTA provide feedback on the Biosphere program and its renewal.
3. Develop a sustainability webpage that can be used to host information on the above research, promote awareness of sustainability issues generally and those specific to Lake Country, including water use, food production and wildlife habitat.
4. Work with businesses to highlight progress.

# Place

## BRANDING

One of the refrains from the focus groups and planning workshops was Lake Country's lack of identity as a destination and poor awareness among the travelling public. Location is a factor as many visitors may simply perceive Lake Country as being part of Kelowna. Another factor is Lake Country's recent vintage as a municipality and its previous identity as Winfield.

It is not suggested in this Plan that Lake Country needs to engage in a full-scale branding exercise with a visual identity, but it would be helpful to articulate the community's unique selling proposition and a compelling narrative as a destination.

### Actions

1. Work with Tourism Kelowna to:
  - Secure grant funding for a limited branding project in Lake Country that will focus on competitive differentiation;
  - Identify opportunities for co-branding within Tourism Kelowna's new open branding strategy; and
  - Undertake webpage enhancements to reflect the new brand identity.

## MARKETING

The focus of this Plan is on destination development rather than marketing. The District has an agreement with Tourism Kelowna for a limited marketing program that produces a visitor guide and other programs.

### Actions

1. Work with Tourism Kelowna to evaluate the optimum use of the total visitor services and marketing budget.
2. Work with Tourism Kelowna on the proposed development of a new Lake Country landing page within their website.
3. Pursue cooperative marketing, and travel trade and media opportunities with TOTA.
4. Collaborate with neighbouring DMOs to include Lake Country in touring and sector-based marketing programs.
5. Undertake content gathering, creation and promotion, production and distribution of collateral, digital media and conventional advertising.
6. Work with Tourism Kelowna on ways to raise social media activity and conversations to expand awareness and draw more off-peak visitation and outreach and request an annual activity report for Lake Country.



# Product

- Focusing on our trails
- Expanding compelling experiences
- Leveraging packages



# Product

## SPORT TOURISM

Sport tourism is a significant element in global tourism and has become a highly competitive niche business. Sport tourism doesn't just involve participants but coaching staff, family members and spectators that can amplify visitor impacts.

The District is generating significant use levels and cost recovery for the Winfield Arena. In the fall and winter months, arena use is mostly residential but in spring there is more regional use and in summer there are hockey camps, including a US-based organization. A sports and recreation needs assessment has been undertaken and there are plans for expansion, but funding has yet to be secured. Lake Country's soccer fields are known to be among the best in the province and can operate from April to October.

The District has recently prepared a Lake Country Sport and Recreation Needs Assessment which outlines several amenity strategies that could be pursued to meet expected future demand.

## Actions

1. Support Parks, Recreation and Culture with its implementation of the Sport and Recreation Needs Assessment, specifically in the context of potential sport tourism demand.
2. Prepare an inventory of sports venues with facilities, services, seasons, ownership, tenants, contract commitments, overall condition and compliance with accessibility standards.
3. Provide research support such as venue demand analysis, market research, economic and financial impacts, target sports and feasibility assessments.
4. Undertake a value of tourism study of an existing sports event that will demonstrate the economic impacts to the community and strengthen the business case for new events. This can be easily undertaken through Sport Tourism Canada's STEAM model.
5. Engage local sports organizations to identify new opportunities.
6. Assist with event bidding and hosting, and fundraising.

# Product

## STORYTELLING

A Storytelling Project should be undertaken to compile and curate some of the stories, characters and events that can be used to interpret and reveal the fascinating history and culture of the area. A focus on current initiatives such as the new Sylix sculptures and Indigenous culture would be a good place to start. The Lake Country Museum & Archives has abundant, rich content that could be highlighted on interpretive signage, the website and social media. Operators could be encouraged to pick up and incorporate themes into their own products.

Other potential thematic content includes:

- Stories of biodiversity, adaptation to climate change and how operators and visitors are adopting sustainable practices;
- The proposed wetlands project and the designated wildlife corridor that connects Okanagan Mountain Park and Kalamalka Park; and
- Ancient soils/agriculture and the role different ethnic groups had in developing agriculture.

## Actions

1. Work with the North Okanagan Naturalists Foundation and Okanagan Indian Band to pursue renaming of Grant Island back to its original Sylix name of Nahun Wenox (child of the rock). The Foundation owns the Island.
2. Work with Lake Country Museum and Archives to position the museum as a staging area for a bookable program of guided interpretive experiences (birding etc.).
3. Work with the Museum, OKIB and historical societies in the Okanagan on a story project that brings to life the culture and history of the region. Animating local stories, characters, sites and events would enrich activity experiences and elevate marketing narratives.
4. Work with the Museum and other partners to create a work group and work plan for this initiative. In addition to curated content, available audio-visual materials would be identified and sourced.
5. Work with Tourism Kelowna, TOTA and Destination BC to adapt all copy and visual materials to EQ standards and to appeal to leading PRIZM profiles.

# Product

## AGRICULTURE, WINERY AND CULINARY

Agricultural tourism is a core experience in Lake Country. The Farm Gate Trail features 52 farms that offer a variety of products and services, including markets, restaurants, orchard tours, bakeries, fruit processing facilities, heritage interpretation and accommodation. The Lake Country Farmer's Market operates every Friday afternoon June to September at Swalwell Park.

Eight wineries participate in the Scenic Sip Tour. Five are open year-round and the majority have restaurants. Some significant capital investments are occurring that will raise the winery destination profile of Lake Country.

The District plans to prepare a separate agri-tourism strategy in 2024. The following does not presume the contents of that strategy but recommends some basic capacity building that will facilitate implementation.

## Actions

1. Work to strengthen collaboration between wineries, orchards, farm-gate operators and restaurants, specifically in support of the planned agri-tourism strategy and other potential joint initiatives. There are major opportunities to leverage resources, capacity, marketing, expertise and best practices in areas such as packaging.
2. Provide research services and support for potential new products identified in the planning workshops:
  - New self-guided tours like Dinner on the Drive;
  - Increasing the awareness of and interest in Scenic Sip;
  - Identifying products and services that target Okanagan Rail Trail visitors; and
  - Working with wineries to strengthen Lake Country as a wine destination through add-on experiences such as an Okanagan Symphony Orchestra satellite experience.
3. Provide access to Destination BC planning resources to partners on building exceptional experiences, being market and export ready and collaborating on packaging.
4. Work with Tourism Kelowna to highlight Lake Country experiences within Tourism Kelowna's Local Flavours program.

# Product

## WINTER EXPERIENCES

The Wonder of Winter was identified as a core experience in the Thompson Okanagan Regional Tourism Strategy (2019). Winter experiences can provide seasonal diversity to the traditional peak summer demand and disperse visitor spending into otherwise slow periods. They have the additional advantage of increasing the appeal of Lake Country as a domestic 'snowbird' destination.

Enviroic Analytics data shows that there are large volumes of visitors transiting Lake Country throughout the year, not just summer. This means there is potential demand today that could be converted into committed day or even overnights visits.

Although conditions typical of the region's mountain resorts are not available locally, there is the opportunity to provide complementary experiences, for example by linking the five local wineries that remain open year-round to winter (and shoulder season) activities. Lake Country is a gateway to the high elevation lakes and resorts that are mostly closed in winter but could possibly be used for specific events or tours.

## Actions

1. Work with Tourism Kelowna as they develop an upcoming winter strategy for the Central Okanagan:
  - participate in a winter experiences audit and inventory;
  - create a companion Lake Country winter strategy.
2. Investigate the potential for winter tourism through new or improved events:
  - continue to develop the Halloween event as a Lake country signature event; and
  - develop a food, culinary or winery event that would utilize the capacity of Lake Country wineries and other facilities that are open in winter.
3. Work with partners to expand the product offering in spa, culinary, and special events:
  - research and promote best practices in winter tourism;
  - liaise with high elevation lodges to see if there are winter tourism products that could be leveraged in Lake Country; and
  - provide research and support on utilizing public infrastructure such as rinks, trails and parks that does not require snow.

# Product

## PACKAGING

Packaging can refer to the offering of multiple trip components such as flights, accommodation, car rental, event tickets and local guided tours, but in the context of this plan it refers to a grouping of local products and services into a single purchase. Packaging can not only increase market reach for the participating operators, but also improves ease and convenience for visitors. EQ research indicates many segments prefer packaged offerings, which in turn can encourage new demand and, if effectively, delivered generate more social media conversations and exposure.

Despite ample online resources illustrating how tourism packaging can be implemented, including from Destination Canada and Destination BC, it remains a challenging product to actually deliver.

## Actions

1. Prepare an inventory of products and experiences that could be packaged, and identify the market and export readiness factor for each.
2. Identify operators who are market and export ready, and encourage partnerships and packaging opportunities.
3. Compile and promote themed itineraries that can then be used to recruit participating operators who are both market and export ready. The following could complement the existing Scenic Sip and Farm Gate Trail:
  - Paddle trail;
  - Rail trail;
  - Indigenous experiences; and
  - Wildlife and bird viewing.
4. Optimize website exposure of all themed itineraries.
5. Investigate opportunities for guided tours and related booking services that could generate revenues.

# 6 Tracking Performance



## FRAMEWORK

There are four components to a performance management framework:

- **Inputs** – The financial and human resources that are assigned to the Tourism Strategy.
- **Activities** – The actions taken to enact change.
- **Outputs** – Immediate measures of **execution**—“what we did”.
- **Outcomes** – Long-term measures of **achievement**—“how we did”.

Data sources, frequency and collection procedures can be prepared as the framework is operationalized.

Data can then be used to help with engagement activities. Internally, reporting can inform District staff, elected officials and partners on strategy progress, major projects and changes in the local visitor economy. Progress on key indicators and measures can be released to stakeholders and public through dashboard reporting on the webpage and social media channels.

## Actions

1. Create a tourism dashboard as a communication and reporting tool for industry and tourism stakeholders.
  - Report on all Framework metrics;
  - Report on other data as identified in the Data and Research strategy; and
  - Work with Tourism Kelowna on identifying new metrics and data sources that can inform local visitor trends.
2. Prepare an Annual Report and Action Plan for distribution to industry and partners on Tourism Strategy progress. This could be integrated with broader economic development reporting undertaken by the District.
3. Annually review and evaluate tourism service contracts:
  - Request that Tourism Kelowna provide an annual report on services delivered; and
  - Evaluate performance and adjust budgets and contract conditions accordingly.





# 7 Implementation

| Year 1                                     | Who Is Involved?   | Time Commitment | Priority |
|--|--|-----------------|----------|
| Tourism Group/Committee                    | DLC – Chamber, Operators   | Moderate        | High     |
| Visitor Services                           | Tourism Kelowna, Destination BC, Operators   | Low             | Medium   |
| Data and Research                          | Tourism Kelowna, Destination BC, Operators   | Moderate        | Flex     |
| Okanagan Rail Trail                        | DLC—Parks, Recreation & Culture, Tourism Kelowna, TOTA, Okanagan Indian Band, Operators                        | Moderate        | High     |
| Paddle Trail                               | DLC—Parks, Recreation & Culture, Greater Vernon Advisory Committee, Paddle BC, Tourism Kelowna, Destination BC | Moderate        | High     |
| Sport Tourism                              | DLC—Parks, Recreation & Culture, Operators, Sport groups/clubs   | High            | Medium   |
| Agriculture, Winery & Culinary experiences | Operators, Wineries, Food and Beverage Sector, Tourism Kelowna, TOTA, Destination BC                           | High            | High     |
| Municipal and Regional District Tax        | DLC—Economic Development, Finance, Destination BC, Tourism Kelowna, Accommodators                              | Moderate        | Flex     |

| Year 2                 | Who Is Involved?  | Time Commitment | Priority |
|------------------------|---|-----------------|----------|
| Local Business Climate | DLC—Planning & Development, Economic Development  | Low             | High     |
| Short-term Rentals     | DLC—Economic Development  | Low             | Flex     |
| Marketing              | Tourism Kelowna, TOTA, Destination BC, Neighbouring Destination Marketing Organizations, Operators  | Low             | High     |
| Storytelling           | Lake Country Museum and Archives, North Okanagan Naturalists Foundation, Okanagan Indian Band, Operators, Tourism Kelowna, TOTA, Destination BC | High            | Flex     |
| Packaging              | Operators, Destination BC, TOTA   | Moderate        | Flex     |
| Industry Readiness     | Operators, Destination BC, TOTA   | Low             | Medium   |
| Industry Networking    | Operators, Chamber, Tourism Kelowna, Destination BC, TOTA   | Moderate        | Medium   |

| Year 3                | Who Is Involved?   | Time Commitment | Priority |
|-----------------------|--|-----------------|----------|
| Infrastructure        | DLC—Planning & Development, Engineering & Environmental Services               | Moderate        | Flex     |
| Visitor Accommodation | DLC- Economic Development, Planning & Development, Tourism Kelowna, Landowners | High            | High     |
| Sustainability        | Chamber, Tourism Kelowna, TOTA, Greenstep                                      | Low             | High     |
| Winter Experiences    | Operators, Wineries, Tourism Kelowna   | High            | Flex     |
| Branding              | DLC, Tourism Kelowna, Operators  | Moderate        | Medium   |

# Prepared by:

LIONS GATE CONSULTING  
TOURISM PLANNING GROUP  
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