

**Hamilton Halton Brant Regional
Tourism Association
2025-26 Business and Operational Plan**



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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT We are grateful to have the opportunity to work and create on the Treaty Lands and Territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation as well as the traditional territory of the Huron-Wendat, Neutral and the Haudenosaunee peoples of the Six Nations Grand River Territory. We are committed to fostering meaningful relationships and supporting a diversity of Indigenous practices and cultural expressions through tourism efforts.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the RTO3 Hamilton Halton Brant region continues its post-pandemic tourism recovery amid evolving economic conditions and changing visitor preferences, Hamilton Halton Brant Regional Tourism Association's (HHBRTA's) 2025-26 Business Plan reflects our commitment to building a resilient and sustainable tourism ecosystem. Building on key accomplishments from 2024-2025, we are positioning our organization to address both immediate industry needs and long-term destination development priorities.

2024-25 Key Accomplishments

- **Advancing Our Transformative Regional Strategy:** The first full year of implementing *RTO3's Strategic Plan for Regional Tourism Development 2024-26* demonstrated exceptional progress, with all 23 action items tracking on or ahead of schedule through strategic resourcing and organizational alignment. Building on this momentum, RTO3's 2025-26 business plan fully integrates these initiatives across the four key focus areas, ensuring continued advancement of this transformative agenda while maximizing operational efficiency and strategic impact.
- **Collaborative Leadership in Destination Development:** The formation of the Hamilton Halton Brant Destination Leadership Alliance (HHBDLA) in 2024 marked a significant milestone in regional tourism collaboration. This innovative partnership brings together senior leaders from municipal tourism offices, Indigenous tourism representatives, economic development offices, and DMOs to drive coordinated action on shared priorities. In its inaugural year, the Alliance has established a robust framework for destination sustainability, product development, and strategic marketing while ensuring alignment with Ministry priorities and global best practices. Through its collaborative approach, the HHBDLA has created new efficiencies in regional data collection and decision-making, setting a strong foundation for evidence-based tourism development across Hamilton, Halton, and Brant.
- **Leading in Destination Sustainability:** In 2024-25, RTO3 achieved Bronze Sustainable Tourism Certification for Destination through GreenStep, marking a significant advancement in regional sustainability leadership. This certification followed the establishment of the Destination Sustainability Stakeholder Committee and completion of a comprehensive Destination Sustainability Action Plan in spring 2024. The organization strengthened its commitment by creating a new Destination Sustainability Officer position, supported by FedDev Tourism Growth Program funding through 2025-26. Through collaboration with the HHBDLA, RTO3 has begun implementing strategic actions from the Sustainability Plan, engaging DMOs and Economic Development leaders across Hamilton Halton Brant in coordinated sustainability initiatives. This work positions the region as a leader in sustainable tourism development while aligning with global best practices in destination management.

Our 2025-26 business planning benefits from enhanced tourism intelligence through the pan-RTO Research Consortium and Canada Tourism Data Collective, resources we began accessing in 2024-25. These data sources provide timely insights that guide our strategies and measure our impact, ensuring alignment with both the forthcoming Provincial Tourism Strategy (currently under development by TIAO) and the Federal Tourism Growth Strategy.

Our work in 2025-26 reflects HHBRTA's commitment to comprehensive destination development, implemented through strong collaboration with our sub-regional Destination Management Organizations via the HHBDLA. This integrated approach aligns with our Strategic Plan, Ministry of Tourism, Culture & Gaming (MTCG) priorities, and global best practices in destination management.

Our 2025-26 priorities reflect significant investments in several interconnected areas that will enhance our destination's competitiveness and sustainability:

- **Product Development:** We are advancing both ongoing initiatives and creating a comprehensive Regional Product Development Framework to guide future experience development across the region.
- **Marketing Transformation:** Implementation of our new Consumer Marketing Strategy includes transitioning to an in-house delivery model, optimizing resource allocation and reducing reliance on external agencies.
- **International Market Growth:** Development of an International Travel Trade Framework will provide strategic direction for expanding our international visitor base, offering a structured approach for both product development and market expansion to address our current gaps in international visitation and spending.
- **Industry Capacity Building:** Launch of a comprehensive year-long Sustainable Tourism Learning Series will support operators and businesses in adopting sustainable practices, strengthening our destination's commitment to responsible tourism development.

While operating within unchanged funding levels despite expanding regional needs and growing expectations for destination development leadership, we are maximizing impact through operational efficiencies, strategic partnerships, and careful resource allocation across all program pillars. Our commitment to destination sustainability has evolved from aspiration to action, with concrete steps toward GreenStep Destination certification and implementation of our Destination Sustainability Action Plan.

The 2025-26 Business Plan demonstrates HHBRTA's continued leadership in advancing regional tourism development through strategic collaboration, sustainable practices, and innovative approaches to destination management. Our work actively supports Ministry priorities while implementing relevant recommendations from the Auditor General's December 2023 Value for Money Report, ensuring both accountability and measurable impact in building a tourism ecosystem that supports the flourishing of our economy, society, and environment.

Strategic Focus

Vision, Mission, Mandate & Values

Our strategic direction is founded on an inspiring vision for the future of tourism in our region, a strong mission for our organization, and a comprehensive mandate illustrating our approach to work and collaboration.

Vision: RTO3 - Hamilton Halton Brant, which includes Hamilton, Burlington, Oakville, Halton Hills, Milton, Brant, Brantford, Six Nations of the Grand River Territory, and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, is a region of choice whose destinations make up a tourism ecosystem that supports the flourishing of our economy, society, and environment.

Mission: We are a leader and innovator working to steward a regional destination into the future. Through our programs and services, collaborations with partners, and strong connections, we support a breadth and diversity of local, regional, and pan-regional stakeholders in harnessing the value that tourism can bring to our destinations and province.

Mandate: We are a non-profit Regional Tourism Organization (RTO) that works to increase tourism visitation, economic activity and job growth throughout the Hamilton Halton Brant region. In Ontario, RTOs are responsible for tourism marketing, product development, workforce development and destination management at a regional level.

Values

| VALUE | BEHAVIOURS |
|----------------------|--|
| Leading | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• We lead by helping others grow and evolve through mentorship, partnership, and collaboration.• We recognize and support practices that promote sustainability and conservation.• We will consider the past, present, and future of our actions to be forward thinking. |
| Connection | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• We are committed to ongoing communication to engage and network with the industry.• We facilitate relationship building and function as a conduit to connect stakeholders and partners.• Through RTO channels and programs, we are initiative-taking, sincere, and value-driven in our interactions. |
| Inclusiveness | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• We invite, welcome, and listen to new ideas and perspectives in our work with regional partners and stakeholders.• We promote and highlight the many ways to experience the region.• We welcome everyone. |

Strategic Framework

HHBRTA's 2025/26 Business and Operational Plan is guided by the overarching principle of Destination Development, aligning with the Ministry's framework to maximize the region's appeal, competitiveness, and economic impact. This approach ensures that all activities contribute to building a sustainable, resilient tourism ecosystem that meets current and future visitor demands.

Building on the goals and objectives established in our 2023-2026 Strategic Plan for Regional Tourism Development, this plan focuses on delivering meaningful and measurable impacts across four key focus areas:

- **Relationship Development and Communications:** Enhancing partnerships, community engagement, and strategic communications to foster alignment and collaboration.
- **Leadership and Representation:** Ensuring tourism priorities are integrated into broader regional policy, planning, and advocacy efforts.
- **Ecosystem Development and Value Co-Creation:** Strengthening collaboration and shared value creation through coordinated destination development initiatives.
- **Resource Management:** Optimizing organizational capacity and resilience to deliver on priorities efficiently and effectively.

The priority pillars mandated by the Ministry and operationalized in this business plan—Product Development, Workforce Development, Investment Attraction, Marketing, and Partnerships—are integral to advancing Destination Development. Together, these pillars create a cohesive framework that supports strategic collaboration, addresses evolving visitor expectations, and drives sustainable tourism growth in the Hamilton Halton Brant region.

REGIONAL OVERVIEW AND ASSESSMENT

Tourism is a key driver of economic, social, and cultural vitality for the Hamilton Halton Brant region (RTO3). In 2019, the sector generated \$1 billion in spending, supported 8,900 jobs, and contributed \$305 million in tax revenue. Beyond these economic contributions, tourism enriches the region by fostering social connections, promoting cultural awareness, and offering opportunities for residents and visitors to engage with the diverse heritage and landscapes that define the area. It is an industry that connects people to place, encouraging exploration, understanding, and shared experiences that strengthen the region's identity.

As RTO3 continues its post-pandemic recovery, the tourism sector reflects a landscape shaped by resilience and adaptation. Broader provincial trends, including inflationary pressures, evolving traveler preferences, and workforce challenges, intersect with local dynamics such as seasonality and transportation accessibility. These factors not only highlight the complexity of tourism recovery but also underscore the need for innovative approaches to ensure long-term sustainability and growth.

Economic Trends Impacting Tourism in Ontario

Ontario's tourism sector continues to recover from the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrating resilience in key areas while grappling with persistent macroeconomic and structural challenges. Inflationary pressures, evolving visitor spending behaviours, and seasonal imbalances are shaping the sector's recovery trajectory, impacting all regions, including RTO3.

Inflation and Price Sensitivity

Inflation remains a significant challenge for Ontario's tourism industry, influencing both consumer behaviour and operational costs. The Ontario Travel Price Index rose by 2.1% in early 2024, reflecting broader economic conditions that are increasing the cost of transportation, accommodations, and food services. Price sensitivity among visitors has become more pronounced, with many opting for budget-friendly or 'close-to-home' experiences.

Domestic Tourism Growth

From January to October 2024, domestic tourism has emerged as the foundation of Ontario's tourism recovery. Intra-provincial travel contributes the majority at 67% of total spending, while domestic visitors overall account for 53% of total tourism spending.

The data shows domestic tourism spending rose by 9.0% during this period compared to 2023. Specifically:

- Intra-provincial spending reached \$19.0 billion (up from \$17.4 billion in 2023)
- Inter-provincial spending from key markets like Quebec (4%), British Columbia (3%), and Alberta (2%) provides additional stability

This strong domestic performance, particularly from within Ontario, has helped offset declines in international visitor spending and demonstrates the vital role of Ontario residents in maintaining the province's tourism economy during a period of global economic uncertainty.

International Tourism Trends

International tourism in Ontario faces significant challenges, with overseas spending declining by 13.5% in 2024, totaling \$3.8 billion. Despite signs of stabilization in the latter half of the year, average annual growth of 1.7% since 2019 remains slightly below inflation, indicating stagnant or marginally declining volumes compared to pre-pandemic levels.

The United States remains Ontario's most significant international market, contributing 22% of total tourism spending. However, U.S. spending has declined by 29.5% year-over-year in 2024. While favorable exchange rates and ease of access remain advantages, potential shifts in U.S. border and trade policies following the 2024 presidential election may further impact cross-border travel patterns.

Emerging markets show mixed results, with China maintaining its position in the top 10 markets and Germany entering this tier, surpassing some traditional source markets. The overall overseas market decline of 31.5% year-over-year suggests a need for renewed focus on international market recovery strategies.

Seasonality

Seasonal fluctuations continue to affect Ontario's tourism sector, with winter underperforming compared to summer. While summer tourism has experienced strong recovery, driven by domestic and international engagement, the winter season lags, particularly among U.S. visitors.

Shifting Spending Trends

Visitor spending patterns in Ontario reveal both opportunities and challenges. Of total \$29.1 billion 2024 (January to October) visitor spending, Food & Beverage continues to lead all spending categories, accounting for 33% of total spending during January to October 2024. However, figures show a decline in Recreation & Entertainment on average across the province.

Workforce Dynamics

The tourism workforce in Ontario has demonstrated resilience post-pandemic, employing over 713,000 people in 2022, representing 9.3% of Ontario's total employment. While growth in travel services shows promise, the sector continues to face workforce challenges, particularly in key areas like food and beverage and accommodation services. These staffing pressures are an important consideration as the industry manages increasing domestic tourism demand and works to rebuild international visitation.

RTO3 Regional Insights

Visitation Overview

Current visitation trends in RTO3 reflect a strong reliance on domestic travel, with Ontario consistently dominating as the primary source market. Visitor volumes steadily improved from the sharp decline in 2020, with the region recovering from a pre-pandemic baseline of 9.24 million visitors in 2019 to 7.76 million in 2022—representing 84% of pre-pandemic levels. By 2024, total visitation numbers remained slightly below pre-pandemic levels, but spending growth indicates a shift in visitor behaviour toward higher per-visitor expenditures.

Ontario's visitor share grew from 52.6% in 2019 to 66.3% by 2024 (January–October), providing stability during global uncertainty. Compared to Ontario overall, RTO3 mirrors the provincial trend of domestic visitation driving recovery, with the province relying on Ontario residents for 53% of its tourism spending. International visitation, however, continues to lag, particularly from overseas markets, contributing to slower growth in visitor volumes and revenue.

Origin Markets

Ontario remains RTO3's largest and most stable origin market, with domestic travelers contributing to the majority of visitors and maintaining a reliable foundation for recovery. By 2024, domestic visitors accounted for 66.3% of the region's visitation, reflecting strong alignment with Ontario's broader reliance on local markets.

Inter-provincial travel also plays a key role in RTO3's tourism economy. Inter-provincial visitors accounted for 11% of RTO3's visitation share in 2024, slightly higher than Ontario's provincial average of 9%. Quebec, British Columbia, and Alberta remain the largest inter-provincial contributors, though RTO3 has seen declines from specific provinces, such as Quebec (down from 6.5% in 2021 to 3.7% in 2024) and New Brunswick (from 6.5% in 2021 to 0.6% in 2024).

RTO3's international origin markets continue to underperform, with the U.S. market recovering more slowly than at the provincial level. U.S. visitors accounted for 11% of RTO3's visitation in 2024, compared to the provincial average of 22%. Overseas visitors remain a smaller segment, with their share declining from 5.2% in 2019 to 4.3% in 2024, reflecting a more pronounced underperformance in RTO3 than provincially.

Visitor Spending

Current trends in RTO3 reflect a strong reliance on domestic travel, with Ontario consistently dominating as the primary source market. While specific visitor volumes are not detailed in the data, spending patterns indicate a shift in visitor behavior, with domestic tourism providing stability during this period of recovery.

Intra-provincial travel now accounts for 67% of total spending in RTO3, significantly above the provincial average where Ontario residents account for 53% of total tourism spending. International

visitation continues to lag, particularly from overseas markets, contributing to slower growth in tourism revenue. This is evidenced by declines in both U.S. spending (-29.5%) and overseas spending (-31.5%) year-over-year in 2024.

Visitor Spending Patterns

Visitor spending in RTO3 highlights both notable strengths and areas for improvement, with key insights emerging in the Recreation and Entertainment and Food and Beverage categories. Food and Beverage remains the leading category, contributing 39% of total tourism expenditure in 2024 and reflecting a 17.1% year-over-year increase.

The Recreation and Entertainment category, closely tied to arts and cultural experiences, outpaced provincial growth trends in 2024, growing by 43% year-over-year compared to Ontario's average increase of 28%. This demonstrates RTO3's relative strength in leveraging its cultural assets, such as festivals, galleries, and performing arts, to attract visitors and drive spending.

Conversely, Transportation and Retail spending—key contributors to visitor satisfaction and overall experience—declined significantly in RTO3, with year-over-year drops of 33.3% and 11.1%, respectively. These declines mirror broader provincial challenges in recovering transportation-related spending, particularly among international travelers, but are more pronounced in RTO3.

Seasonality continues to influence spending patterns, with summer months driving most of the activity and winter showing significant declines across all categories. This trend aligns with provincial patterns, where winter underperforms relative to summer. However, RTO3 exhibits a slightly sharper drop in winter visitation and spending, indicating an even greater need for targeted shoulder season initiatives.

The accommodation sector in RTO3 demonstrates both resilience and ongoing challenges. Hotels have maintained stable performance with occupancy rates at 64% in September 2024, comparable to the provincial average of 69%. The Average Daily Rate (ADR) for hotels in RTO3 reached \$168, showing steady growth but remaining below the provincial average of \$207.

Short-term rentals present a more complex picture. ADR increased significantly to \$162 in September 2024, reflecting a 58% increase from 2023. However, occupancy rates stand at 44%, aligning with but slightly below the provincial average of 48%. This suggests a need to balance pricing strategies with occupancy optimization.

Seasonality remains a challenge for both hotels and short-term rentals. The data shows that while ADR growth has been strong, particularly in the short-term rental segment, maintaining consistent occupancy levels throughout the year remains an important focus area.

Intra-Regional Transportation Challenges

Intra-regional transportation is a critical challenge for RTO3, with limited connectivity between urban hubs and rural attractions posing barriers to accessibility. Insufficient transit options hinder the region's ability to accommodate non-driving visitors, such as international travelers and younger demographics, restricting their ability to fully experience RTO3's diverse offerings.

The reliance on private vehicles further exacerbates these limitations, misaligning with trends in sustainable tourism and the increasing demand for eco-conscious travel. Compared to other Ontario regions, RTO3 faces a disadvantage in capturing non-driving and international markets, highlighting the need for improved transit accessibility to maximize its tourism potential.

Tourism Businesses

The tourism sector in RTO3 has demonstrated structural resilience, evidenced by growth in the number of tourism-related establishments. From 6,373 establishments in 2019, the sector grew to 7,090 establishments in 2023, reflecting an 11.2% increase. However, year-over-year comparisons are complicated by a shift in provincial classification methodologies in 2020, which introduced changes to how tourism-related establishments are defined to align with federal definitions. This reclassification makes the 2020 data non-comparable to previous years.

Despite these limitations, the post-2021 recovery indicates a positive trend, with the number of establishments rising from 5,917 in 2021 to 6,213 in 2022 and then increasing further to 7,090 in 2023. This growth highlights the adaptability of the sector in responding to challenges, such as those posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and suggests a strong rebound in tourism-related economic activity in the region.

While caution is warranted in interpreting these figures due to classification changes, the general upward trend reflects a resilient business environment that continues to expand and adapt to evolving market conditions.

Strategic Opportunities and Challenges for RTO3

The Hamilton Halton Brant region (RTO3) continues to be a dynamic component of Ontario's tourism landscape, showcasing resilience and adaptability in a dynamic and evolving environment. With a robust domestic tourism base and notable strengths in arts, culture, and culinary tourism, RTO3 has a strong foundation to build upon as it moves forward in recovery and growth. However, systemic challenges must be addressed to unlock the region's full potential. The following opportunities and challenges shape RTO3's priorities within the 2025-26 Business Plan.

Opportunities

- **Strengthen Domestic Tourism**

Intra-provincial travelers accounted for 67% of total spending in 2024, reflecting their critical role in RTO3's tourism economy. By continuing to enhance value-driven, regional experiences and leveraging the growing appeal of close-to-home travel, the region can sustain and grow this reliable market segment.

- **Expand Engagement with Inter-Provincial Markets**

Inter-provincial visitors contributed 11% of RTO3's total tourism spending in 2024, slightly above Ontario's provincial average of 9%. Stable markets such as Quebec, British Columbia, and Alberta present potential opportunities for targeted marketing and cross-provincial collaboration with Destination Ontario and other RTOs to attract high-value travelers and diversify RTO3's visitor base.

- **Leverage Gateway Market Position**

Hamilton Halton Brant's strategic location between Toronto and Niagara presents significant opportunities to capture visitor flow between these major tourism gateways. This positioning could be leveraged to increase overnight stays, particularly targeting international visitors moving between these destinations and seeking to avoid the higher accommodation rates associated with stays in these markets.

- **Reinvigorate the U.S. Market**

The U.S. market remains underperforming for RTO3, contributing 11% of total spending in 2024, compared to the provincial average of 22%. While year-over-year spending declined by 29.5% and some uncertainty exists regarding cross-border travel patterns under the new U.S. administration, favourable exchange rates present a significant opportunity. RTO3 can leverage this currency advantage through targeted re-engagement efforts, including cross-border promotions and partnerships with Destination Ontario, to help regain ground in this key international market. The anticipated continuation of favourable exchange rates could particularly appeal to value-conscious U.S. travelers seeking new destinations within driving distance.

- **Support Overseas Market Recovery**

Overseas markets showed a significant decline in RTO3 in 2024, with spending down 31.5% year-over-year, yet present significant growth potential through coordinated efforts with Destination Ontario and strategic travel trade partnerships. By aligning with Destination Ontario's broader international marketing initiatives and developing targeted travel trade relationships in key source markets like China and India, RTO3 can position itself effectively within Ontario's tourism narrative. The development of market-ready experiences that appeal to international tour operators and travel trade partners, particularly those operating in the Toronto-Niagara corridor, represents an efficient use of regional resources while maximizing exposure in priority markets. This dual approach of destination marketing and travel trade development can help create sustainable pathways for international market recovery and growth.

- **Expand Culinary Tourism**

Food and Beverage spending, which contributed 39% of total tourism revenue in 2024 and showed strong growth of 17.1% year-over-year, highlights the region's position as a culinary hub. Expanding product and experience offerings in the culinary category can attract both local and international visitors, strengthening Hamilton Halton Brant's brand as a leading culinary destination.

- **Leverage Growth in Arts and Culture**

With Recreation and Entertainment spending in RTO3 growing by 43% in 2024, significantly outpacing Ontario's 28% growth, the region has demonstrated its appeal in arts and cultural tourism. Promoting its cultural assets, including galleries, festivals, and performance venues, can further drive visitor engagement and spending.

- **Focused Development of Year-Round Offerings**

Addressing seasonal imbalances is critical for RTO3, where winter spending shows sharper declines compared to provincial trends. Introducing winter-specific cultural events, culinary promotions, and bundled experiences can stabilize visitation and support consistent economic activity across all seasons.

Challenges

- **Inflationary Pressures and Visitor Price Sensitivity**

Rising costs in transportation, accommodations, and food services have heightened price sensitivity among travelers. RTO3 must focus on delivering value-for-money experiences to remain competitive and encourage repeat visitation.

- **Underperformance in International Markets**

Building on the broader spending trends, international visitor markets showed pronounced weakness in 2024. U.S. visitors contributed only 11% of total spending in RTO3, compared to 22% provincially. Overseas markets experienced an even more dramatic 31.5% year-over-year spending decline. While favorable exchange rates present a potential opportunity, uncertainty surrounds future cross-border travel patterns due to potential policy changes under the new U.S. administration.

- **Declining Retail and Transportation**

Spending Transportation and Retail spending in RTO3 fell by 33.3% and 11.1%, respectively, in 2024. These declines directly correlate with the significant drop in international visitation, highlighting the region's economic vulnerability to tourism fluctuations.

- **Workforce Shortages**

Persistent labour shortages in key sectors, combined with an aging workforce, pose challenges to service quality and capacity across the region. While primary responsibility for workforce development lies with industry organizations and educational institutions, HHBRTA can support regional stakeholders by amplifying tourism HR initiatives, sharing labour market intelligence, and participating in coordinated advocacy efforts with DMOs and post-secondary institutions.

- **Transportation Connectivity Gaps**

The region faces dual transportation challenges: limited transit options between urban hubs and rural attractions create barriers for intra-regional tourism, while gaps in broader regional connectivity affect our ability to capture visitor flow between Toronto and Niagara. These limitations particularly impact international visitors and younger demographics who may not have access to private vehicles. The heavy reliance on private vehicles for both local and visitor transportation also misaligns with growing demand for sustainable travel options. While HHBRTA cannot directly address transportation infrastructure, we can support regional partners in advocacy efforts and help tourism operators develop innovative solutions to enhance visitor mobility.

Hamilton Halton Brant's tourism sector demonstrates significant resilience and strengths, particularly in domestic travel, culinary tourism, and cultural experiences. However, addressing systemic challenges such as international recovery, seasonality, and transportation accessibility will be essential to achieving sustained growth and competitiveness. By leveraging its strengths and strategically addressing its gaps, RTO3 is well-positioned to thrive within Ontario's dynamic tourism landscape. These insights will directly inform the 2025-26 Business Plan, guiding the region toward sustainable development and long-term success.

SOURCES: The data referenced in the preceding section has been compiled from a few sources including the Ontario Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries. (2019) "RTO3 Economic Impact Summary Report"; Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Sport and Gaming Regional Data Reports; Canada Tourism Data Collective, Lodging Aligned Spend Reporting, January to October 2024; Tourism HR Canada Snapshot of The Tourism Sector Labour Market: Ontario February 2023.

Other National and Global Trends

Destination Canada Research Summary, September 2021; "Tourism's Big Shift" identifies the following industry and key market trends impacting tourism:

Industry Trends

1. **Lack of Access and Reduced Transport Connectivity**
2. **Labour and Skills Shortage**
3. **Higher Costs**
4. **Reduced Business Travel and Events**
5. **Product Degradation**
6. **Reduced Access to Capital and Limited Liquidity**
7. **Shift in Capacity and Role of Destination Marketing Organizations**

Key Market Trends

1. **Frictionless Travel**
2. **Domestic Travel**
3. **Responsible Travel**
4. **Ascendence of Communities**
5. **Indigenous Connection**
6. **Wild for Wilderness**
7. **Health and Healing**
8. **Affluent Travel Boom**
9. **Great Resignation and Retirement**
10. **Remote Work and Residential Tourism**

Destination International identified Top 50 Trends in their DestinationNext 2023 Futures Study as identified through their survey of global destinations. The following list captures the top 25 trends from that list:

1. **Artificial intelligence** will become increasingly prevalent at an accelerated pace
2. Customers are increasingly seeking a **unique, authentic travel experience**
3. **Communities expect to be more engaged** in destination, product and experience development for locals and visitors
4. **Destinations are looking at sustainability/regeneration more broadly**, encompassing economic, social and environmental impacts
5. Greater **industry, community and government alignment is driving destination competitiveness** and brand
6. **Resident sentiment** is becoming a key measurement
7. **Labor and skill shortages** are increasingly being felt in sectors of the tourism industry
8. There's a greater focus on **placemaking to benefit both locals and visitors**
9. DMO/CVBs are **increasing advocacy to communicate value of visitor economy to government**

10. New **data management platforms provide a 360-degree view** of visitors and destination to help optimize strategy
11. **Content creation** and dissemination by the public and stakeholders across all platforms **drives the destination brand and experience**
12. Organizations are increasingly developing **strategic alliances across multiple economic sectors to leverage resources**
13. **Travelers are seeking more personal enrichment and wellbeing**
14. **Short-form video** becomes the new currency of destination marketing and storytelling
15. There is greater **focus on equity, diversity and inclusion** in the workplace and across the supply chain
16. **Business events** are increasingly being positioned as catalysts for economic and social benefits
17. Visitors are increasingly seeking **experiences that embrace equity, diversity and inclusion** and support underserved communities
18. Governments are more aware of the **visitor economy's impact on jobs, tax base and the overall economy**
19. Combined business and leisure travel ("**bleisure/blended travel**") is becoming more popular
20. There is greater **demand for more dynamic outdoor experiences**
21. More destinations are focusing on **improving accessibility** for travelers of all abilities
22. **Demand** across the global visitor economy continues to be strong
23. More destinations are focusing on **attracting "high value" visitors** to increase economic impact
24. Meeting attendees, event owners, sponsors, etc. are **expecting destinations and venues to have established sustainability goals and metrics**
25. More destinations are **increasing their focus on sports tourism and major cultural events** for short and long-term business development

Data Appeal, recently published their 5 Megatrends Reshaping International Tourism in 2025:

1. **Sustainability and responsible tourism**
2. **Tech-driven innovation through data and AI**
3. **Next-level personalization**
4. **Human-centric travel experiences**
5. **Resilience and crisis management**

BUSINESS AND OPERATIONAL OVERVIEW

HHBRTA's business operations are structured to support effective implementation of our business plan through robust governance, efficient staffing models, and comprehensive performance monitoring. Through a combination of full-time staff, specialized contract positions, and strategic use of external expertise, we maintain operational agility while building long-term organizational capabilities to deliver on our objectives. This integrated approach ensures our organization can effectively advance regional tourism development while responding to emerging opportunities and challenges.

Strategic Framework and Context

At time of writing, HHBRTA has completed its first full year operating under the framework of our *Strategic Plan for Regional Tourism Development 2024-2026*. This comprehensive plan, with its 23 action items organized across four focus areas, provides clear direction for our organization's efforts to strengthen tourism across the Hamilton Halton Brant region.

Our 2025-26 Business Plan has been developed to ensure strong alignment with our Strategic Plan's objectives while responding to emerging opportunities and challenges in our tourism landscape. Our approach to implementation emphasizes collaboration with regional partners and the development of focused frameworks and strategies to guide specific areas of our work.

Throughout 2024-25, we developed key frameworks and action plans in response to priority action areas identified in our Strategic Plan, including:

- Regional Destination Management Collaboration Framework
- Destination Sustainability Action Plan
- Consumer Marketing Strategy & Plan
- Industry Communications Strategy & Plan

Looking ahead to 2025-26, we will undertake two additional key strategic initiatives to be developed in collaboration with regional DMOs:

- Regional Product Development Framework & Action Plan
- Travel Trade Development Framework & Action Plan

Collectively, these strategic documents and plans serve as long-range roadmaps for our work, ensuring that HHBRTA's initiatives are well-coordinated, strategically aligned, and developed through meaningful collaboration with our regional partners.

Governance Structure

HHBRTA's governance structure is anchored by a dynamic Board of Directors that brings together diverse expertise from across the tourism sector and related industries. Our Board composition balances public and private sector representation, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of both business dynamics and community interests across the geographic Hamilton Halton Brant region.

Board Directors serve three-year terms during which they provide strategic oversight, guide policy development and maintain fiscal accountability. This engagement ensures that our organization's initiatives benefit from both strategic vision and practical industry experience.

Board of Directors

The Directors as of January 2025 are as follows (*please see EXHIBITS for Director biographies*):

Julian Kingston, Chair

*Director, Cultural Services, Planning and
Legislative Services, Region of Waterloo
Oakville Community Member*

Sara Munroe, Vice Chair

*Manager, Museum & Archives, Region of
Waterloo
Brantford Community Member*

Marilyn Butkovic, Secretary/Treasurer

Regional Sales Manager, Vrancor Hospitality

Kelly Harris, Past Chair

*Director of Marketing & Stakeholder Relations,
Greater Toronto Hotel Association*

Rebecca Edgar

Executive Director, Visit Oakville

Jillian Fisher

*Business Development Manager, VIA Rail
Canada*

Trish Gerth

General Manager, African Lion Safari

Jaquie Jamieson

Tourism Manager, Six Nations Tourism

Lisa LaRocca

Director of Operations, Sonic Unyon Records

Angela Paparizo

Burlington Community Member

Garth Pottruff

Owner, Grand River Rafting Company

Hildegard Snelgrove, CMC

*Business Development Consultant, Tourism
Hamilton*

Kimberly Viney

*Chief Operating Officer, Royal Botanical
Gardens*

Resource Members

Caroline Polgrabia, Industry Development Advisor – Tourism (GGH & Niagara)

Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming

Board Committees

Through a robust committee structure, Board members provide focused leadership in key operational areas. These committees include:

- Finance & Audit Committee
- Governance & Nomination Committee
- HR & Compensation Committee
- Board Outreach & Education Development Committee
- Strategic Plan Implementation Sub-Committee
- Board Policy Sub-Committee (as needed)
- Strategic Task Force (as needed)

Organizational Structure & Staffing

HHBRTA's organizational structure continues to evolve to meet the changing needs of our region's tourism sector and the implementation of our strategic priorities. By maintaining a core team of specialized full-time staff, complemented by contract expertise, we ensure comprehensive coverage of all priority areas while maintaining operational efficiency. The structure aligns our human resources with our primary business functions while providing the agility to respond to emerging opportunities and challenges.

Full-Time Staff

Please see EXHIBITS for biographies for all Full-Time Staff.

Our current full-time team includes:

- **Maria Fortunato**, Executive Director
- **Bev Scott**, Manager, Business & Visitor Experiences Development
- **Angelica Seraj**, Manager, Industry Relations and Partnerships (*maternity leave continues through September 2025*)
- **Aiden Eng**, Marketing and Industry Development Officer
- **Hamid Dwyer**, Destination Sustainability Officer* (*through December 2025*)
- **Maureen Beatty**, Executive Assistant

**The Destination Sustainability Officer position is supported through FedDev funding.*

New Position for 2025-26

A new full-time position will be created to support Consumer Marketing and Industry Communications activities. This strategic addition will enable HHBRTA to bring previously outsourced activities in-house, creating operational efficiencies while expanding our organizational capacity.

Contract and Part-Time Equivalent Positions

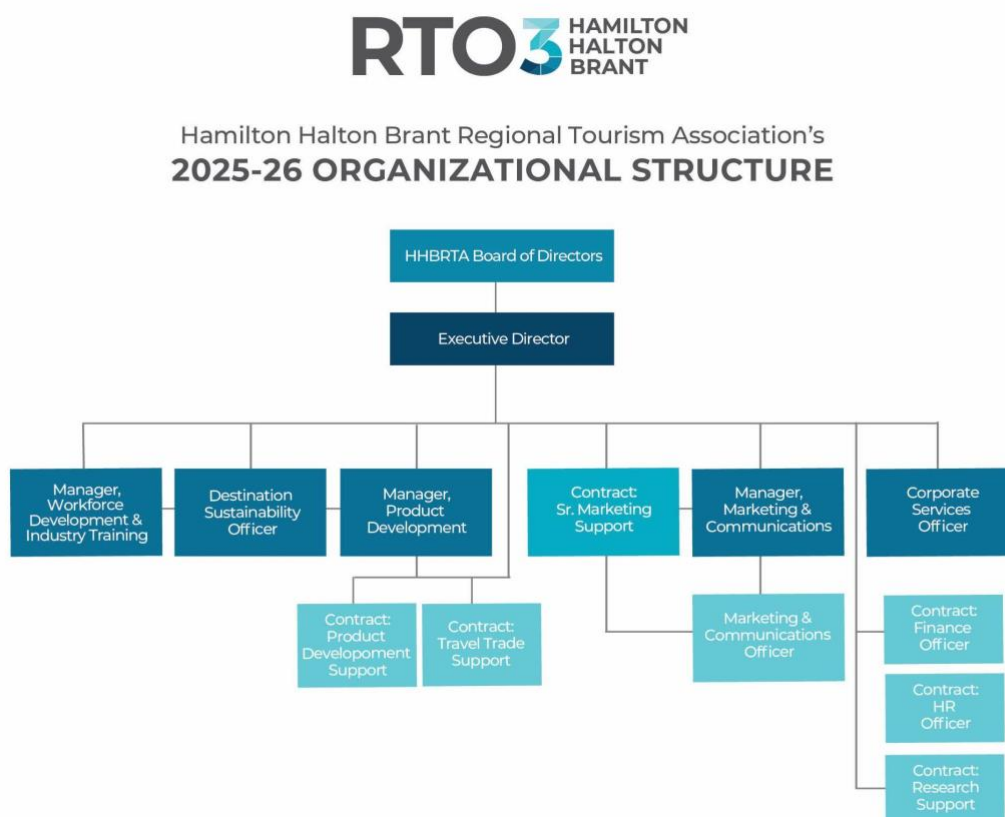
To complement our full-time staff, in **2024-25** we retained specialized expertise through the following contracts:

- Finance Management Support
- Human Resources Management Support
- Strategic Initiatives Management Support

In **2025-26**, HHBRTA will retain the following specialized expertise to support ongoing work and the development of two key strategic initiatives:

- Finance Management Support
- Human Resources Management Support
- Senior Marketing Support
- Research Analysis Support
- Development of Regional Product Development Framework and Action Plan
- Development of Travel Trade Development Framework and Action Plan

The following illustrates HHBRTA's Organizational Structure for 2025-26 reflecting proposed updates to job titles:



Operational Infrastructure

In March 2024, HHBRTA relocated to new office facilities in the historic Cotton Factory building in lower Hamilton. Built in 1900, this restored former cotton mill exemplifies successful adaptive reuse, having been transformed into a vibrant creative industries complex. The location offers strategic advantages for our operations, providing easy highway access for team members who live across the region.

HHBRTA operates in a hybrid work model that balances flexibility with collaboration. Team members work remotely while maintaining regular in-office presence, with one designated day per week where the entire team works on-site together. This approach supports both individual productivity and team cohesion.

In 2025-26, we will undertake a comprehensive review of our hybrid work model to evaluate its effectiveness, employee satisfaction, operational costs, and practical considerations. This assessment will inform decisions about maintaining or adjusting our work model for 2026-2027 and beyond.

Performance Monitoring & Reporting

Effective performance monitoring and reporting are essential to HHBRTA's successful implementation of our business plan and strategic objectives. Our approach integrates multiple levels of oversight and accountability, ensuring we maintain clear visibility of progress while enabling informed decision-making.

Internal Performance Monitoring

Our performing monitoring approach includes:

- Regular tracking of pillar project progress
- Financial performance monitoring
- Measurement of established KPIs and OKRs as outlined in the annual business plan
- Weekly team meetings to ensure operational alignment
- Quarterly reviews of business and strategic plan milestones

Board Reporting

The Board of Directors receives:

- Regular operational updates on pillar projects and key initiatives (based on Board Meeting schedule)
- Quarterly updates on performance metrics and strategic plan progress
- Quarterly financial reports

Enhanced Performance Tracking

In 2025-26, HHBRTA will implement a new centralized data management system designed to consolidate organizational performance metrics, program impact data, and operational KPIs. By leveraging new data resources from the pan-RTO Research Consortium project and the Canada Tourism Data Collective tools, this system will streamline data visualization and improve tracking efficiencies, enabling more effective reporting and decision-making across all areas of operations.

Evolving Success Metrics

HHBRTA is advancing its performance measurement framework in alignment with the Regional Destination Sustainability Action Plan, emphasizing metrics that encompass social, cultural, and environmental value alongside traditional economic indicators. In collaboration with local partners, we are identifying and prioritizing sustainability-focused key performance indicators to track progress toward destination sustainability. This approach reflects global best practices, including *Destination Canada's Wealth & Wellbeing Index* and the United Nations' Measuring Sustainability in Tourism (MST) framework, and supports the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), ensuring a holistic evaluation of our region's tourism impact.

Ministry Reporting

HHBRTA maintains strict compliance with all Ministry reporting requirements, submitting progress reports, final reports, financial documentation, and attestations as outlined in the Transfer Payment Agreement (TPA).

GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

Objective: To drive organizational excellence through strategic resource management, operational efficiency, strong board leadership, and exemplary financial stewardship.

In fiscal 2025-26, HHBRTA will strengthen its organizational foundation through four interconnected priority areas: team development, technological advancement, financial stewardship, and board governance. This approach focuses on building internal capacity through enhanced HR systems and professional development, modernizing operations through AI and data management solutions, maintaining rigorous financial controls and risk management practices, and ensuring strong leadership through strategic board development and committee effectiveness.

Through these coordinated efforts, HHBRTA aims to create a resilient, future-ready organization that effectively serves its stakeholders while meeting Ministry requirements for accountability and transparency. This integrated approach will empower our team, optimize our resources, and strengthen our ability to deliver measurable impact across the region while advancing both regional and provincial tourism priorities.

| PRIORITY ACTION AREA 1: TEAM DEVELOPMENT AND ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY | | | | | |
|--|--|---|--|----|--------|
| Objective: To strengthen HHBRTA organizational effectiveness, engagement, and culture. | | | | | |
| Activity | | Output | Key Results and KPIs | Q | Status |
| A | Conduct a comprehensive staffing analysis aligned with current and future business needs to inform the development of the 2026-2027 Business Plan. | Detailed assessment of staffing levels, role definitions and skill gaps, with prioritized recommendations for hiring or reallocating resources. | A staffing structure optimized for operational efficiency and achievement of strategic goals. | Q3 | Cont'd |
| B | Update human resources policies (HR) and procedures, implement an HR management platform, and streamline processes to reflect industry best practices and evolving organizational needs. | Revised HR documentation, including DEI policies, and an implemented HR management platform with integrated key HR data. | Streamlined HR operations, improved compliance, enhanced staff support, and data-driven decision-making through an efficient and user-friendly platform. | Q1 | New |

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|----------|---|--|--|----------------|--------|
| C | Establish team performance management systems with clearly defined goals and metrics. | New performance review templates, goal-setting frameworks, and processes for regular feedback and evaluations specifically designed to enhance team performance. | Increased accountability and motivation within teams, and stronger alignment between individual contributions and team objectives. | Q2, Q3, Q4 | New |
| D | Expand professional development initiatives tailored to team growth and career progression. | Comprehensive professional development plans, including access to workshops, certifications, and mentorship opportunities. | Enhanced team capacity, job satisfaction, closing skill gaps and retention through continuous learning. | Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 | Cont'd |

| PRIORITY ACTION AREA 2: OPERATIONAL PROCESSES, SYSTEMS AND TECHNOLOGY | | | | | |
|--|---|--|---|----------------|---------------|
| Objective: To enhance operational efficiency and effectiveness through optimized systems and technology adoption. | | | | | |
| Activity | | Output | Key Results and KPIs | Q | Status |
| A | Conduct annual reviews and updates to operational documentation. | Comprehensive and up-to-date policies, procedures and operational standards. | Improved operational efficiency and organizational compliance. | Q3 | Cont'd |
| B | Assess technology infrastructure for gaps and improvements. | Evaluation reports highlighting areas for technological upgrades and resource allocation. | Strengthened infrastructure supporting operational efficiency and staff productivity. | Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 | Cont'd |
| C | Implement a centralized data management system to consolidate organizational performance metrics, program impact data, operational KPIs and other data. | A unified data management platform with automated data collection and real-time dashboards for visualizing key organizational metrics. | Streamlined reporting with less manual compilation time, enhanced decision-making through real-time data access, and improved ROI demonstration through visual analytics. | Q3, Q4 | New |

| | | | | | |
|----------|---|--|---|----------------|-----|
| D | Explore and implement AI solutions across organizational tasks. | Identified and implemented AI-powered tools and applications to enhance various organizational tasks, such as data analysis, research, communication, and decision-making. | Improved efficiency, accuracy, and innovation across departments through the strategic use of AI technologies. | Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 | New |
| E | Conduct regular technology training for staff. | Increased staff proficiency in using organizational technology tools and software. | Improved staff productivity, reduced technical support needs, and enhanced employee satisfaction. | Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 | New |
| F | Assess hybrid working arrangement and office location. | Evaluation of the hybrid work model and office location, including employee satisfaction, operational costs, and effectiveness in supporting productivity and collaboration. | Evidence-based recommendations to optimize the hybrid work model and office utilization for 2026-2027 and beyond, improving staff satisfaction, operational efficiency, and cost-effectiveness. | Q3, Q4 | New |

| PRIORITY ACTION AREA 3: FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP | | | | | |
|---|---|--|--|----------------|---------------|
| Objective: To ensure sound financial management and controls that support organizational sustainability. | | | | | |
| Activity | | Output | Key Results and KPIs | Q | Status |
| A | Strengthen financial oversight and reporting systems. | Enhanced financial controls, standardized reporting templates, and clear financial policies and procedures. | Improved financial accuracy, transparency, and team accountability in financial processes. | Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 | Cont'd |
| B | Implement an automated expense management system. | A digital platform integrating automated expense tracking, approval workflows, and real-time reporting dashboards. | Reduction in administrative processing time and improved accuracy in expense tracking. | Q1 | New |

| PRIORITY ACTION AREA 4: BOARD LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|----------------|---------------|
| Objective: To maintain an engaged, high-performing board that ensures strategic oversight and leadership continuity through effective governance and succession planning. | | | | | |
| Activity | | Output | Key Results and KPIs | Q | Status |
| A | Strengthen board recruitment and succession planning. | Comprehensive recruitment and succession strategy that integrates diversity goals, skills requirements, and leadership transition timelines. | A strategically composed board with sustained governance effectiveness through planned leadership transitions. | Q1, Q2 | Cont'd |
| B | Develop and implement annual board orientation and training programs. | Create comprehensive onboarding materials and deliver customized training sessions that address current best practices in governance and emerging trends relevant to the organization. | Enhance board capacity for strategic leadership and informed decision-making. | Q2, Q3 | Cont'd |
| C | Conduct annual board effectiveness assessments to identify and address improvement opportunities. | Implement tailored surveys and facilitate discussions to evaluate board performance, contributions, and areas for improvement. | Strengthen board effectiveness and ensure alignment with organizational goals. | Q4 | Cont'd |
| D | Provide regular updates and support to Strategic Plan Implementation Committee. | Regular strategic plan progress updates, established reporting structures and communication protocols to support committee meetings and implementation oversight of current Strategic Plan (2023-2026). | The committee has organized processes and timely information needed to effectively monitor strategic plan implementation and prepare for the next planning cycle. | Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 | Cont'd |
| E | Strengthen the functioning of Board | Review and revise defined roles, responsibilities, and annual work plans for each | Enhance sub-committee contributions to | Q2 | New |

| | | | | | |
|----------|---|--|---|--------|--------|
| | committees to ensure clarity and efficiency. | sub-committee to enhance their contributions to organizational priorities. | organizational priorities through improved clarity and efficiency. | | |
| F | Conduct a comprehensive review of the Board of Directors' Governance Policies Manual. | Develop and up-to-date Governance Policies Manual that supports the HHBRTA incorporation By-Law #1-2024, to ensure compliance with provincial legislation. | A compilation of up-to-date policies to ensure sound and efficient governance policies and practices. | Q1, Q4 | Cont'd |

DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT: A KEY DESTINATION MANAGEMENT FUNCTION

The Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Gaming (MTCG) defines Destination Development as the "strategic planning and implementation of activities to support the evolution of destinations to maximize overall attraction for visitors." It focuses on creating and enhancing tourism products, workforce capacity, infrastructure, and community engagement.

Destination Management ensures that these development efforts are integrated into a coordinated system, driving long-term sustainability and alignment with strategic priorities through governance, marketing, and stakeholder collaboration. Together, these functions create a comprehensive approach to building and managing thriving tourism destinations.

The Hamilton Halton Brant Destination Leadership Alliance (HHBDLA), established by RTO3 in 2024, is a cornerstone of the region's destination development and management strategy. By bringing together senior leaders from key organizations—including municipal tourism offices, Indigenous tourism representatives, regional economic development offices, and Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs)—the HHBDLA ensures a unified and collaborative approach to advancing regional priorities.

Key Roles of the HHBDLA:

1. **Strategic Alignment:** The HHBDLA fosters alignment between RTO3's regional priorities and the goals of local communities, ensuring that initiatives address shared objectives while leveraging unique local assets.
2. **Collaborative Problem-Solving:** Through collective decision-making, the HHBDLA addresses regional challenges and maximizes the impact of development initiatives by pooling expertise, resources, and insights.
3. **Data-Driven Insights:** By coordinating research and data collection across the region, the HHBDLA provides a foundation for evidence-based decision-making, helping to identify opportunities, gaps, and areas for investment.
4. **Stakeholder Engagement:** The HHBDLA promotes active engagement with businesses, residents, and other stakeholders, fostering community ownership and pride in tourism development efforts.

This alliance exemplifies the power of collaboration in tourism, creating synergies that drive sustainable growth and innovation while ensuring alignment with the Ministry's priorities.

The alignment of Destination Development and Destination Management principles, supported by the HHBDLA's collaborative framework, provides the foundation for RTO3's 2025-26 business planning. This ensures a unified approach to advancing the Ministry's five core pillars of Product Development, Workforce Development, Investment Attraction, Marketing, and Partnerships, driving regional success and sustainability.

OUR PRIORITY ACTION AREAS FOR 2025-26

2025-26 Priority Action Areas: PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Objective: To enhance visitor experience through well-designed tourism products that meet current and future visitor demand.

Shaped by evolving visitor preferences and regional dynamics, Product Development in Hamilton Halton Brant focuses on aligning tourism offerings with trends such as sustainability, transformative travel, and authentic cultural experiences. These priorities are balanced against challenges identified in the regional assessment, including seasonality, transportation gaps, and inflationary pressures, which influence both visitor behavior and the capacity of operators to deliver market-ready experiences.

In 2025-26, HHBRTA's work will center on strategic initiatives to better understand the market, inventory and enhance regional assets, and develop targeted strategies for high-value tourism experiences. Collaboration with Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) will be integral to this work, ensuring alignment of priorities, resource-sharing, and effective implementation of strategies that reflect regional needs. Efforts will also include addressing gaps in visitor offerings, supporting operators with tools and resources, and fostering partnerships among stakeholders. Each of the outlined priority action areas provides a clear framework for the actions and activities that will guide regional product development efforts, ensuring alignment with visitor demand and regional goals.

| PRIORITY ACTION AREA 1: REGIONAL PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK & ACTION PLAN | | | | | |
|--|--|---|---|--------|--------|
| Objective: To establish a clear strategic direction for regional product development through comprehensive market analysis, asset evaluation, and stakeholder collaboration. | | | | | |
| Activity | | Output | Key Results and KPIs | Q | Status |
| A | Complete market research and visitor segment analysis. | Comprehensive market research report including visitor segmentation, trends analysis, and market opportunities. | Evidence-based market insights with clear prioritization of opportunities for Regional Product Development. | Q1, Q2 | New |
| B | Develop regional product asset inventory. | Complete database of regional tourism assets, including categorization, assessment, and gap analysis. | Comprehensive baseline of regional product assets to inform future | Q1, Q2 | New |

| | | | | | |
|----------|---|---|---|--------|-----|
| | | | development opportunities. | | |
| C | Complete the development of a five-year Regional Product Development Framework and Action Plan. | Strategic framework for product development co-created with regional DMOs, including implementation plans, resource requirements, and clearly defined roles and responsibilities between RTO3, DMOs, and other regional partners. | Adopted Regional Product Development Framework and Action Plan with 100% DMO endorsement, featuring specific collaborative initiatives with DMOs 10-15 industry participated | Q1, Q2 | New |
| D | Identify opportunities for new products and demographic markets for existing products. | Analysis of gaps in current offerings, emerging market segments, and development opportunities. | Clear identification of new and enhanced products to support Regional Product Development and meet evolving visitor demand. 5-8 products identified | Q1, Q2 | New |

| PRIORITY ACTION AREA 2: INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL TRADE DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK AND ACTION PLAN | | | | | |
|---|---|---|--|----------|---------------|
| Objective: To develop and implement a comprehensive approach to international travel trade that maximizes regional tourism opportunities and stakeholder engagement. | | | | | |
| Activity | | Output | Key Results and KPIs | Q | Status |
| A | Develop an International Travel Trade Framework | Comprehensive strategic framework including value proposition, market analysis, SWOT assessment, and ROI tracking models aligned with Regional Product Development Framework (see Action Area 1.) | Clear strategic direction for travel trade development with defined opportunities and success metrics. | Q1, Q2 | New |
| B | Conduct stakeholder engagement and capacity assessment. | Series of engagement sessions with DMOs and tourism operators, including | Comprehensive baseline of regional product assets to | Q1, Q2 | New |

| | | | | | |
|----------|--|--|--|--------|-----|
| | | educational workshops and role definition exercises. | inform future development opportunities. 8-15 industry partners engaged | | |
| C | Create Three-Year Travel Trade Action Plan | Detailed action plan including implementation timeline, resource requirements, business model for ROI measurement, and partner engagement framework. | Approved three-year plan with clear accountability measures and stakeholder endorsement. | Q1, Q2 | New |

| PRIORITY ACTION AREA 3: HIGH-YIELD TOURISM EXPERIENCE DEVELOPMENT AND PORTFOLIO MANAGEMENT | | | | | |
|--|--|--|---|----------------|---------------|
| Objective: To drive increased visitor spending and overnight stays through strategic experience development and product optimization. | | | | | |
| Activity | | Output | Key Results and KPIs | Q | Status |
| A | Optimize existing RTO3-led tourism product portfolio and adjust alignment with Regional Product Development Framework and Action Plan. | Comprehensive evaluation and enhancement of existing products across outdoor recreation, cultural, and entertainment sectors, including performance analysis, market alignment, and enhancement recommendations. | Comprehensive evaluation and enhancement of at least 12 existing tourism products across all sectors, resulting in improved product performance and increased visitor satisfaction. | Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 | Cont'd |
| B | Support the advancement of Transformative Tourism Design Program experiences developed in 2024-25. | Implementation support and optimization guidance for 14 tourism partners to progress their transformative travel experiences created through the FedDev-funded program. | 14 market-ready experiences were established with plans that demonstrate transformative tourism principles and create new demand for regional visitation. | Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 | Cont'd |

| | | | | | |
|----------|---|---|--|----------------|--------|
| C | Strengthen regional Culinary and Agri-tourism experiences in priority areas identified by the Regional Product Development Framework and Action Plan. | Development and launch of new Culinary/Agri-Tourism routes and itineraries focused on rural areas and small towns through the FedDev Tourism Growth Program, plus expansion of existing culinary experiences portfolio including operator engagement initiatives and farm-to-table connections. | Successful launch of a minimum of four new routes/itineraries with active operator participation | Q2, Q3 | New |
| D | Support and resource Indigenous tourism experience development and enhancement aligned with regional strategy priorities. | Development and enhancement of market-ready Indigenous experiences through collaborative partnerships, capacity-building initiatives, and the provision of relevant resources. | Increased Indigenous tourism participation and enhanced economic opportunities for Indigenous communities through the successful development and marketing of authentic Indigenous tourism experiences. 1-3 enhanced or new experiences developed | Q2, Q3, Q4 | Cont'd |
| E | Leverage key regional events to enhance tourism offerings and encourage longer stays. | Develop and promote attractive travel packages tied to key regional events, encouraging cross-sector collaboration and maximizing visitor participation. | Increase average length of stay and visitor spending by developing and promoting compelling event-based travel packages that encourage visitors to explore the region beyond the immediate event time frame. 2-5 new packages are developed | Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 | Cont'd |

| PRIORITY ACTION AREA 4: TOURISM OPERATOR TRAINING, MENTORSHIP AND SUPPORT | | | | | |
|---|--|--|---|----------------|--------|
| Objective: To strengthen regional tourism delivery through enhanced operator capabilities and support systems, aligned with priorities identified in the Regional Product Development Framework and Action Plan. | | | | | |
| Activity | | Output | Key Results and KPIs | Q | Status |
| A | Implement a comprehensive tourism operator resource center on the industry-facing website. | Launch a dedicated section on the industry-facing website providing operators with access to valuable tools, templates, and best practices focused on experience delivery excellence and business sustainability, informed by Regional Product Development Framework and Action Plan findings. | <p>Improved operator capacity with high utilization of the resource center and positive feedback from operators.</p> <p>Explore feasibility to establish regular offer of 30-minute virtual Lunch & Learn to support launch of resources & training opportunities.</p> <p>Set baseline of industry use of this resource. (clicks)</p> | Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 | New |
| B | Develop an operator coaching and mentorship program informed by the new Product Development Framework and Action Plan. | Develop a program offering targeted coaching to operators on developing new tourism products, incorporating best practices and industry trends. | Enhance operator capacity for new product development, leading to the creation of innovative and marketable tourism experiences. | Q3, Q4 | New |

2025-26 Priority Action Areas: INVESTMENT ATTRACTION

Objective: To increase investment in the tourism industry to enhance visitor experience.

HHBRTA's Investment Attraction focus for 2025-26 emphasizes supporting sustainable tourism growth through strategic use of data, targeted collaboration, and infrastructure planning. Global trends, such as the rising importance of data-driven decision-making and sustainable tourism investments, align with regional priorities to address transportation connectivity challenges and enhance the visitor experience. The availability of new data resources from the pan-RTO Research Consortium and the Canada Tourism Data Collective provides an opportunity to equip partners and investors with valuable insights to inform their strategies.

In 2025-26, HHBRTA will focus on consolidating and sharing tourism data, advocating for transportation infrastructure improvements, and facilitating access to funding resources. Collaboration with regional economic development offices and other partners will play a key role in aligning tourism investments with regional goals. The following priority action areas outline the activities and initiatives that will support informed decision-making, infrastructure planning, and the attraction of new investments to enhance regional tourism.

| PRIORITY ACTION AREA 1: TOURISM INVESTMENT INTELLIGENCE | | | | | |
|---|---|---|--|----------------|--------|
| Objective: To compile and share tourism data, research, and insights that support investment decision-making. | | | | | |
| Activity | | Output | Key Results and KPIs | Q | Status |
| A | Develop and maintain tourism data resource hub. | Online repository featuring curated tourism statistics, including visitor spending patterns, occupancy rates, attraction attendance, seasonal trends, and economic indicators. Data sources will include the pan-RTO Research Consortium, Canada Tourism Data Collective, Destination Ontario, Statistics Canada, and municipal partners. | Enhanced access to tourism data for economic development partners and potential investors. | Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 | New |

| | | | | | |
|----------|--|--|---|--------|-----|
| B | Produce annual regional tourism insights report for RTO3 Hamilton Halton Brant | Comprehensive annual report synthesizing key tourism performance indicators, regional tourism trends, visitor patterns, and market opportunities. The report will incorporate data from the pan-RTO Research Consortium and regional tourism partners. | Regular sharing of tourism insights with economic development partners to support investment discussions. | Q3, Q4 | New |
|----------|--|--|---|--------|-----|

| PRIORITY ACTION AREA 2: SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF A BETTER-CONNECTION REGION | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|----------------|---------------|
| Objective: To participate in discussions about regional tourism-related transportation priorities. | | | | | |
| Activity | | Output | Key Results and KPIs | Q | Status |
| A | Support stakeholder transportation planning initiatives. | Compilation and sharing of available data related to tourism visitation patterns, seasonal flows, and visitor access needs to inform municipal and regional transportation planning discussions. Participation in working groups and provision of tourism data and regional tourism context. | Enhanced understanding of tourism considerations in transportation planning. 2-5 industry engagement activities | Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 | New |
| B | Participate in regional transportation advocacy efforts. | Active participation in regional transportation working groups and planning sessions, providing a tourism industry perspective and data to support regional priorities. Updates will be shared regularly with regional transportation planning teams. | Integration of tourism considerations in transportation planning initiatives. 2-3 engagement activities | Q3, Q4 | New |

| PRIORITY ACTION AREA 3: INVESTMENT FUNDING RESOURCES DATABASE | | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|----------------|--------|
| Objective: To facilitate access to tourism investment and funding information. | | | | | |
| Activity | | Output | Key Results and KPIs | Q | Status |
| A | Develop and maintain a tourism funding resources database. | Regularly updated digital directory of municipal, provincial, and federal funding programs, including eligibility criteria, application deadlines, and funding priorities. Supporting resources will include application guides, partner contact information, and examples of successful applications. | Improved operator access to funding opportunity information. Baseline year of engagement (clicks) | Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 | New |
| B | Develop and share regional tourism investment success stories | Documented case studies highlighting successful tourism investments across the region, including project scope, economic impact, visitor experience enhancements, and lessons learned. These will be featured through website content, the industry newsletter, and economic development partner channels. | Enhanced awareness of successful tourism investments in the region. 3-5 case studies featured | Q3, Q4 | New |

2025-26 Priority Action Areas: WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT & INDUSTRY TRAINING

Objective: Facilitate and support the attraction, development, and retention of a tourism workforce to enhance the visitor experience.

Workforce challenges in the Hamilton Halton Brant region reflect broader trends across Ontario's tourism sector, including labor shortages, shifting skill demands, and the need for a more sustainable and resilient workforce. Recognizing the importance of addressing these challenges locally while contributing to province-wide efforts, RTO3 will focus on initiatives that align with regional needs and leverage the expertise and resources of provincial organizations such as OTEC and the Tourism SkillsNet Ontario (TSNO), as well as national partners like Tourism HR Canada.

A key priority for 2025-26 is the delivery of a year-long Sustainable Tourism and Destination Sustainability Training Program, funded through the FedDev Tourism Growth Program (2023-24, 2025-26), which will equip regional operators with the knowledge and tools to adopt sustainable practices. RTO3 will also explore opportunities to collaborate with other RTOs to amplify the impact of shared training initiatives and resources, providing greater efficiencies and value to regional stakeholders.

Collaboration with workforce development boards, post-secondary institutions, and tourism organizations will underpin these efforts, ensuring alignment with sector priorities while addressing local workforce gaps. The following priority action areas outline RTO3's targeted activities to support workforce development, industry training, and the attraction and retention of tourism talent in the region.

| PRIORITY ACTION AREA 1: WORKFORCE INTELLIGENCE AND RESEARCH | | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|--------|--------|
| Objective: To collect and share relevant workforce data and insights that inform regional tourism industry needs. | | | | | |
| Activity | | Output | Key Results and KPIs | Q | Status |
| A | Develop and maintain a regional workforce data collection framework and process. | Framework for collecting and analyzing secondary research and regional workforce data, including identification of key data sources and collection methods. | Established system for gathering and sharing relevant workforce insights with industry partners and HHBDLA. | Q3, Q4 | New |

| | | | | | |
|----------|--|--|--|----------------|--------|
| B | Produce quarterly regional workforce insights reports. | Produce and distribute quarterly reports synthesizing pan-RTO Research Consortium data, regional employment statistics, and industry feedback. | Two quarterly reports sharing workforce trends and opportunities to support industry planning. | Q3, Q4 | New |
| C | Connect industry with workforce development resources and opportunities. | Regular communication of resources and programs available through Tourism HR Canada, OTEC/TSNO, and other workforce development partners through RTO3 industry communication channels. | Increased industry awareness and utilization of available workforce development resources. | Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 | Cont'd |

| PRIORITY ACTION AREA 2: RELEVANT AND TIMELY INDUSTRY TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT | | | | | |
|---|--|--|---|----------|---------------|
| Objective: To facilitate access to training and development opportunities that enhance tourism workforce capabilities. | | | | | |
| Activity | | Output | Key Results and KPIs | Q | Status |
| A | Plan and deliver an annual industry conference (Southern Ontario Tourism Conference) in March 2026 in collaboration with RTO1. | Plan, execute, and promote an annual in-person industry conference featuring keynote speakers, workshops, and networking opportunities. | Provide valuable professional development opportunities. Enhance industry knowledge and best practices. Foster networking and collaboration among tourism operators. 250-300 attendees | Q4 | Cont'd |
| B | Plan and deliver two in-person Industry Exchange (IE) events. | Plan and execute biannual industry exchange events that deliver high-value content, timely insights, and strategic networking opportunities. | High event satisfaction scores, increased year-over-year attendance. 50-70 attendees for each event | Q1, Q3 | Cont'd |

| | | | | | |
|----------|--|--|---|----------------|--------|
| C | Maintain and enhance digital resource centre focused on Workforce Development and Industry Training on the industry-facing website. | Regular updates to online workforce development resources and tools launched in 2024-25. | Increased industry utilization of digital resources. Baseline of usage (clicks) | Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 | Cont'd |
| D | Develop and deliver Sustainable Tourism Learning Series through December 2025 (<i>continuation of FedDev Tourism Growth Program initiatives.</i>) | Educational program focused on sustainable tourism practices, including workshops, tools, and implementation guides. | Increased operator adoption of sustainable tourism practices. 20-30 partners participated in each training offer | Q1, Q2, Q3 | Cont'd |
| E | Develop Pan-RTO collaborative industry training program. | Coordinated annual learning calendar with RTOs across Ontario, including shared webinars, online training, and virtual networking opportunities. | Expanded learning opportunities for operators through efficient resource sharing and increased cross-regional knowledge exchange. 3-5 participating RTOs | Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 | New |

| PRIORITY ACTION AREA 3: STRATEGIC WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIPS | | | | | |
|--|---|--|---|----------|---------------|
| Objective: To strengthen tourism workforce development through strategic collaboration with key partners. | | | | | |
| Activity | | Output | Key Results and KPIs | Q | Status |
| A | Provide meaningful workforce development inputs through partnerships with regional post-secondary institutions. | Collaborative framework for industry input on curriculum and student engagement opportunities. | Enhanced alignment between tourism education programs and industry needs. 2-3 partners engaged | Q3, Q4 | New |

| | | | | | |
|----------|---|--|--|----------------|--------|
| B | Leverage national and provincial tourism workforce development organization memberships/partnerships. | Active engagement with Tourism HR Canada, OTEC/TSNO, and other workforce development partners to maximize regional benefits from available programs and resources. | Increased regional participation in partner-led workforce development initiatives. | Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 | Cont'd |
| C | Collaborate with regional workforce planning boards and employment services. | Partnership agreements with local workforce boards to support tourism sector talent development and job placement programs. | Improved access to workforce training resources and increased placement of job seekers in tourism positions. | Q3, Q4 | New |
| D | Explore need and feasibility of launching a job board on the industry-facing website | Assessment report on industry need, resource requirements, and operational considerations for self-serve job board platform. | Evidence-based recommendation on job board implementation based on industry feedback and resource analysis. | Q3, Q4 | New |

CONSUMER MARKETING OVERVIEW

Geographic Markets

RTO3's geographic target markets are informed by data-driven insights that highlight the region's strength, growth, and reliance on domestic markets, particularly in Southern Ontario and neighboring regions. These proximity markets represent the foundation of RTO3's tourism economy, consistently delivering high visitation and economic benefits.

In addition to proximity markets, HHBRTA acknowledges the importance of inter-provincial markets, which are drawn to Ontario for extended travel itineraries. Visitors from other provinces often include Toronto and Niagara as part of their trips, creating an opportunity to position the region as a complementary destination. These efforts, combined with targeted strategies to grow U.S. and overseas visitation, ensure RTO3 maintains a balanced approach to expanding its reach and economic impact.

Proximity Markets (Southern Ontario and Immediately Neighbouring Regions) *approx 75% marketing investment*

- **Target Audience:** Visitors from the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and municipalities within Niagara Region, Norfolk County, Oxford County, City of London, and Region of Waterloo.
- **Rationale:** Proximity markets represent the largest source of visitation, driven by their population density, economic strength, and accessibility to the region. Visitors from these markets frequently seek short-haul travel options, including day trips and weekend getaways. These audiences are also highly responsive to marketing that emphasizes convenience, diversity of experiences, and value.

Inter-Provincial Markets *approx 10% marketing investment (via DO)*

- **Target Audience:** Visitors from other provinces across Canada.
- **Rationale:** Inter-provincial visitors may be drawn to the region's unique culinary, cultural, recreational, and natural offerings. Many travel to Ontario for extended trips and include gateway markets like Toronto or Niagara in their itineraries. The region's proximity to these gateways positions it as an attractive addition to their plans.

U.S. Markets *approx 10% marketing investment (via DO)*

- **Target Audience:** Travelers from border states, including New York, Michigan, and Ohio.
- **Rationale:** U.S. visitors remain a critical market due to their proximity and interest in road trips and multi-destination travel. Many target Niagara or Toronto as their primary destination, creating an opportunity for the region to capture spillover visitation by offering complementary and easily accessible experiences.

International Markets *approx 5% marketing investment (via DO, DC)*

- **Target Audience:** Visitors from Europe, Asia, and other global regions.
- **Rationale:** International travelers frequently prioritize Ontario's gateway destinations but seek additional experiences to enhance their itineraries. RTO3's proximity to Toronto and Niagara positions it as an ideal addition to multi-destination travel plans.

Intra-Regional Travel and Visiting Friends & Relatives (VFR) *approx 0% marketing investment (achieved via Proximity Markets tactics)*

- **Target Audience:** Visitors hosted by residents of Hamilton, Burlington, Oakville, Milton, Halton Hills, Brantford, Brant, Six Nations of the Grand River Territory, and Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation.
- **Rationale:** The VFR market includes visitors traveling from geographic locations farther away, often requiring overnight stays. These visitors frequently originate from outside the province, the U.S., or overseas, making them a significant contributor to the region's tourism economy.

Consumer Profiles

In 2025-26, HHBRTA will adopt Destination Canada's newly defined visitor segments to enhance our ability to attract high-value travelers. These segments are rooted in extensive research and psychographics, reflecting modern travel motivations, preferences, and behaviors. By aligning with these segments, RTO3 positions itself to:

- Leverage data-driven insights for more targeted marketing.
- Align with broader provincial and national tourism strategies for collaborative impact.
- Enhance our focus on high-value visitors whose travel preferences align with our region's offerings.

Priority Visitor Segments for Hamilton Halton Brant

Based on HHBRTA's strategic priorities for our region—driving economic growth through proximity-based geographic markets, fostering sustainable tourism, and leveraging culinary, cultural, natural, and family-friendly experiences—the following Destination Canada defined segments align most closely with our goals:

1. Culture Seekers

- **Alignment:** These travelers value immersive cultural experiences, local connections, and sustainability—directly aligned with RTO3's commitment to cultural tourism and regenerative practices.
- **Strategic Fit:** Their preference for vibrant arts scenes and inclusion makes them ideal for promoting the region's cultural festivals, heritage sites, and Indigenous experiences.

2. Purpose-Driven Families

- Alignment: Family-focused and environmentally conscious, this segment aligns with our focus on family-friendly and nature-based tourism.
- Strategic Fit: Their demand for inclusive, safe, and educational experiences matches RTO3's offerings, including natural attractions and family-centered events.

3. Outdoor Explorers

- Alignment: These adventurers prioritize nature, physical activity, and authentic experiences—ideal for promoting RTO3's natural assets such as conservation areas, hiking trails, and water-based activities.
- Strategic Fit: Their high frequency of travel and preference for unique destinations align with our aim to attract repeat and engaged visitors.

Secondary and Low-Priority Segments

While the following segments have potential value, they do not align as directly with HHBRTA's current strategic objectives for the RTO3 region:

1. Refined Globetrotters

- Reason: Their focus on luxury and exclusive experiences is less aligned with RTO3's offerings, which emphasize approachable and community-oriented tourism.

2. City Trippers

- Reason: This group prioritizes urban nightlife and trendy locations, which do not represent RTO3's primary strengths as a largely natural and cultural destination.

3. Simplicity Lovers

- Reason: Their preference for familiar, low-impact travel makes them less likely to engage in high-value tourism activities or explore beyond traditional destinations.

4. Fun & Sun Families

- Reason: Their focus on beach and resort-style destinations contrasts with RTO3's natural and cultural tourism focus, making them a lower priority.

Products and Experiences

HHBRTA's marketing plan prioritizes integrating both pan-regional and sub-regional strengths to create a cohesive, strategic approach to tourism promotion. The plan highlights the region's key demand generator attractions, outdoor experiences, food & drink, and arts, culture & heritage, while leveraging marquee events and promoting opportunities to extend visitor stays by linking complementary experiences. Recognizing the diversity of priorities across DMOs, the strategy ensures that all parts of the region contribute to the broader goal of increasing visitation and economic impact.

Outdoors and Active Recreation

Focus: The region's abundant natural assets serve as a cornerstone for attracting visitors seeking adventure and recreation. From scenic trails and conservation areas to waterways and parks, outdoor experiences provide a compelling draw for both short and extended visits.

Highlights:

- Iconic features such as the Niagara Escarpment (a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve) and the Grand River (a Canadian Heritage River).
- Popular activities include hiking, paddling, cycling, and nature exploration.

Food, Drink, and Agritourism

Focus: Culinary tourism and agritourism are significant demand generators, showcasing the region's rich agricultural heritage and diverse food and drink offerings. From farm-to-table dining to craft beverage experiences, these products appeal to a wide range of travelers.

Highlights:

- A robust network of wineries, breweries, cideries, and restaurants featuring locally sourced ingredients.
- Opportunities for visitors to participate in agritourism experiences, such as farm tours and seasonal harvest events, culinary festivals and tasting events

Arts, Culture & Heritage

Focus: The region's cultural and historical assets provide depth and richness to the visitor experience, offering unique opportunities to engage with local heritage and creative talent.

Highlights:

- A variety of museums, galleries, and performance venues showcasing the region's history and artistic diversity.
- Vibrant festivals and events that celebrate arts, music, and cultural traditions
- Opportunities to engage with Indigenous tourism products that share authentic cultural stories and experiences.

2025-26 Priority Action Areas: MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

Objective: To increase awareness of Ontario as a travel destination and drive conversion in target markets.

Informed by trends in destination marketing, including the growing demand for personalized, experience-rich travel, sustainability-focused initiatives, and the appeal of authentic regional experiences, HHBRTA's marketing and communications efforts in 2025-26 will emphasize regional strengths such as culinary tourism and arts and culture. These areas, identified through data-driven insights, present key opportunities to address challenges such as increasing visitation during shoulder seasons, overcoming the slower recovery of international visitation and ensuring alignment with evolving traveler expectations. Collaboration with DMOs, Destination Ontario, and regional tourism businesses will remain central to creating cohesive messaging and maximizing the reach of marketing campaigns.

Building on our newly developed Regional Marketing Strategy completed in 2024-25, efforts in 2025-26 will reflect a shift from outsourced to insourced services, enhancing operational efficiency, internal capacity, and the ability to execute impactful, flexible campaigns. This transition supports the delivery of initiatives that align with market trends and regional priorities, and a focus on adopting and applying Destination Canada's new Traveller Segmentation Program to better target marketing efforts and create tailored messaging that resonates with specific traveler segments.

Industry communications will also play a vital role in achieving broader stakeholder engagement. Following the relaunch of the industry website and the execution of the updated Industry Communications Strategy in 2024-25, HHBRTA will prioritize maintaining timely updates and resources to engage stakeholders and expand its reach across a wider network of tourism businesses.

The following priority action areas outline the focused activities that will guide marketing and communications efforts, ensuring they effectively address the region's challenges and opportunities while driving meaningful results.

| PRIORITY ACTION AREA 1: IMPLEMENT NEW REGIONAL MARKETING STRATEGY | | | | | |
|---|--|---|--|----------------|--------|
| Objective: To execute a balanced regional marketing plan and approach that drives visitation across all sub-regions while optimizing seasonal distribution through alignment with national visitor segmentation. | | | | | |
| Activity | | Output | Key Results and KPIs | Q | Status |
| A | Implement and monitor the new regional marketing strategy and plan ensuring balanced representation across the region. | Integrated marketing framework detailing tactical mix, resource allocation, roles, and implementation timeline. | Enhanced coordination and effectiveness of marketing efforts between RTO3 and DMO partners. | Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 | New |
| B | Design and execute targeted product-focused and seasonal marketing campaigns to optimize visitor distribution. | Portfolio of seasonal campaigns with defined geographic targets, media mix, and performance metrics aligned with regional capacity. | Improved visitor distribution across geography and seasons, reducing pressure on peak periods. | Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 | Cont'd |
| C | Apply new Destination Canada traveler segmentation across all marketing activities. | Marketing strategy and tactical plans incorporating new segmentation data, with tailored content and channel strategies. | More effective targeting and increased conversion through segment-specific messaging. | Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 | New |
| D | Implement an enhanced social media, creator/influencer strategy. | Implement a new social media framework and content calendar. | Increased authentic destination awareness through trusted voices and engaged audiences. | Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 | New |
| E | Evolve the database marketing program to enhance personalization and effectiveness. | Launch a revitalized email marketing program with segmentation strategy, automation flows, and personalized content framework. | Improved conversion rates through targeted, data-driven consumer emailing communications. | Q3, Q4 | New |
| F | Conduct a comprehensive technical and content | Comprehensive website audit including technical SEO analysis, user experience (UX) review, content gap | Informed decision-making for the future website update, ensuring the platform is | Q1, Q2, Q3 | New |

| | | | | | |
|----------|--|---|--|--------|-----|
| | review of the consumer-facing website. | analysis, and competitive analysis. | optimized for user experience, search engine visibility, and effective content delivery. | | |
| G | Conduct biannual consumer marketing surveys to track awareness, interest, and travel intentions. | Detailed report analyzing travel trends, brand awareness, and consumer behaviour across target markets. | Establish baseline metrics in the first report to inform marketing strategy, and track changes to optimize campaign performance and guide future marketing investments and activities. | Q1, Q3 | New |

| PRIORITY ACTION AREA 2: BUILD AND MAINTAIN STRATEGIC MARKETING PARTNERSHIPS | | | | | |
|---|---|--|---|----------------|---------------|
| Objective: To maximize marketing impact through collaborative partnerships and shared resources. | | | | | |
| Activity | | Output | Key Results and KPIs | Q | Status |
| A | Establish and execute a comprehensive DMO partnership program for coordinated marketing activities. | Formal partnership framework with shared objectives, resource commitments, and collaborative marketing opportunities. | Increased marketing reach and efficiency through strategic resource sharing and aligned messaging. | Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 | New |
| B | Create and implement collaborative marketing initiatives with provincial and sector partners. | Portfolio of joint marketing programs with Destination Ontario and sector associations, including content sharing and cross-promotion. | Enhanced visibility and credibility through integration in provincial campaigns and sector-specific promotions. | Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 | New |
| C | Develop and maintain strategic partnerships with key regional demand generators. | Structured program of collaborative marketing initiatives with major attractions and tourism businesses. | Amplified marketing reach and impact through aligned messaging and shared audience engagement. | Q2, Q3, Q4 | New |

| PRIORITY ACTION AREA 3: ENHANCING OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY WITHIN MARKETING ACTIVITIES | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|----------|---------------|
| Objective: To optimize marketing operations through balanced resource allocation and enhanced internal capabilities. | | | | | |
| Activity | | Output | Key Results and KPIs | Q | Status |
| A | Implement a new marketing service delivery model to balance internal and external resources. | Updated operational framework defining internal responsibilities and external service requirements with clear efficiency metrics. | Reduced external/outsourced service costs and increased budget allocation for paid media activities. | Q1 | New |
| B | Strengthen internal marketing and communications capacity through strategic team development. | New integrated marketing position supporting both consumer marketing and industry communications. | Improved operational efficiency and effectiveness in program delivery through enhanced internal capabilities. | Q1 4 | New |

| PRIORITY ACTION AREA 4: COST-OFFSETTING AND REVENUE GENERATION | | | | | |
|---|---|--|--|----------------|---------------|
| Objective: To realize cost-offsetting and revenue generation and opportunities through marketing activities. | | | | | |
| Activity | | Output | Key Results and KPIs | Q | Status |
| A | Design and implement a suite of co-operative and partnered marketing campaigns with regional partners and stakeholders. | A year-round schedule of opportunities for DMOs and key demand generators to partner with RTO3 on its annual marketing plan and advertising campaigns. | Increased marketing budget through effective leveraging of provincial funding opportunities. | Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 | New |
| B | Create and launch pay-to-play marketing opportunities for tourism partners. | Menu of marketing opportunities made available to regional partners with value propositions, pricing structures, and participation guidelines. | Sustainable revenue stream supporting expanded marketing activities and partner engagement. | Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 | New |

| PRIORITY ACTION AREA 5: DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT ENHANCED INDUSTRY COMMUNICATIONS PLAN | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|----------------|---------------|
| Objective: To strengthen engagement with industry partners and ensure alignment with RTO3's role and opportunities for collaboration. | | | | | |
| Activity | | Output | Key Results and KPIs | Q | Status |
| A | Execute and expand the enhanced industry communications strategy (developed in 2024-25). | Enhanced digital communications program building on 2024-25 framework, including updated industry website, increased database communications frequency, expanded LinkedIn presence (organic and paid), and ongoing content development aligned with stakeholder needs. | Strengthened digital engagement with industry stakeholders through more frequent, targeted, and valuable communications across multiple platforms. | Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 | Cont'd |
| B | Implement and leverage refreshed organizational brand to strengthen stakeholder recognition and understanding. | Amplification of new organization brand including stakeholder education materials, communication templates, and engagement tactics. | Improved stakeholder recognition of RTO3's mandate and enhanced understanding of its role in supporting regional tourism development. | Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 | New |
| C | Strengthen and expand industry relationships through proactive engagement and outreach. | Comprehensive stakeholder engagement program including regional industry events, one-on-one meetings, networking opportunities, and targeted outreach to both new and existing operators. | Expanded and deepened industry relationships leading to increased awareness of partnership opportunities and enhanced regional collaboration. | Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 | Cont'd |
| D | Facilitate adoption of Destination Canada segmentation and marketing insights among regional stakeholders. | Training materials, workshops, and one-on-one support to help operators apply segmentation insights and leverage partnership opportunities. | Increased partner and stakeholder alignment with RTO3's strategic marketing approach to visitor segmentation for greater marketing effectiveness. | Q3, Q4 | Cont'd |

| | | | | | |
|----------|---|--|---|--------|-----|
| E | Implement industry feedback and satisfaction measurement program. | Annual industry satisfaction survey, regular feedback mechanisms, and action plan for addressing identified needs and opportunities. | Improved understanding of industry needs and satisfaction levels, leading to more effective support programs and stronger industry relationships. | Q2, Q4 | New |
|----------|---|--|---|--------|-----|

2025-26 Priority Action Areas: PARTNERSHIP

Objective: To become a catalyst in building strategic alignment and promoting collaboration within the tourism industry.

Partnerships are essential to advancing tourism growth, sustainability, and alignment in RTO3. Building on priority action areas identified in *RTO3's Strategic Plan for Regional Development 2024-26* and the HHBDLA's destination management collaboration framework established in 2024-25, HHBRTA's efforts in 2025-26 will prioritize partnerships with DMOs, sub-regional stakeholders, and private sector partners to address shared priorities and enhance the region's collective impact.

The Ministry Partnership Funding Allocation for 2025-26 will focus on marketing partnerships with DMOs, guided by the HHBDLA framework and the new Regional Marketing Strategy completed in Q4 of 2024-25. Resources will also support product development initiatives to strengthen shoulder season tourism, a coordinated pan-regional industry training collaboration with RTO1 through the Southern Ontario Tourism Conference, and a primary research initiative with DMOs. This research, identified as a key priority in our organization's 2024-26 Strategic Plan for Regional Tourism Development, will provide valuable insights to inform decision-making and drive regional alignment.

In addition to funded initiatives, HHBRTA will actively engage in partnerships and collaborations that extend beyond the Partnership Allocation. These include working with other RTOs, Destination Ontario, and industry sector organizations to share resources, align strategies, and amplify the impact of collective efforts. These broader collaborations underscore RTO3's commitment to leveraging partnerships to support sustainable tourism growth and regional alignment.

The following priority action areas outline the actions and activities that will guide HHBRTA's partnership efforts in 2025-26, focusing on targeted investments, meaningful collaboration, and regional competitiveness.

| PRIORITY ACTION AREA 1: PARTNERSHIP-FUNDED PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES | | | | | |
|---|---|---|--|----------------|--------|
| Objective: To leverage partnership funding for enhanced regional tourism product offerings. | | | | | |
| Activity | | Output | Key Results and KPIs | Q | Status |
| A | Develop and execute sub-regional shoulder season events program through strategic partnerships. | Support the development of sub-regional events that drive shoulder season visitation through co-funding partnerships. | Co-funding of 2 to 3 key shoulder season events. | Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 | New |

| PRIORITY ACTION AREA 2: PARTNERSHIP-FUNDED CONSUMER MARKETING PARTNERSHIPS | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|----------------|---------------|
| Objective: To extend consumer marketing reach through strategic partnership initiatives. | | | | | |
| Activity | | Output | Key Results and KPIs | Q | Status |
| A | Design and implement collaborative marketing campaigns aligned with DMO priorities. | Year-round product-focused and seasonal marketing campaigns leveraging DMO, and Destination Ontario. These initiatives will complement RTO3's core Consumer Marketing Budget. | Enhanced promotion of regional tourism experiences, improved alignment with DMO priorities, and extended reach through collaborative resource allocation. | Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 | New |
| B | Develop marketing assets through partnerships with DMOs | Collaborative initiatives with DMOs to create and share marketing assets, including visual content, influencer programs, and shared content development. | Increased availability of regional marketing assets, strengthened alignment across DMO marketing initiatives, and improved storytelling to showcase the region's offerings. | Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 | New |

| PRIORITY ACTION AREA 3: ADVANCE KEY COLLABORATIVE HHBLDA DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES | | | | | |
|--|---|--|---|----------------|---------------|
| Objective: To strengthen regional alignment and collective impact through the HHBDLA collaboration framework across key destination management functions. | | | | | |
| Activity | | Output | Key Results and KPIs | Q | Status |
| A | Lead collaborative implementation of Destination Sustainability initiatives | Coordinated advancement of GreenStep Destination Bronze Certification and implementation of priority actions from Destination Sustainability Action Plan with HHBDLA partners. | Progress toward Bronze Certification targets and measured advancement of sustainability priorities. | Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 | New |

| | | | | | |
|----------|---|--|--|--------|-----|
| B | Execute collaborative research initiatives. | Implementation of shared research priorities including resident sentiment study and other identified research needs through coordinated investment with HHBDLA partners. | Enhanced regional insights through collaborative data collection and analysis. | Q3, Q4 | New |
|----------|---|--|--|--------|-----|

| PRIORITY ACTION AREA 4: ADVANCE PAN-RTO COLLABORATION AND SHARED INITIATIVES | | | | | |
|--|--|---|--|----------------|---------------|
| Objective: To enhance inter-regional cooperation, leverage shared resources, and address Ontario-wide priorities through collaboration with other RTOs and industry networks. | | | | | |
| Activity | | Output | Key Results and KPIs | Q | Status |
| A | Participate in the Pan-RTO Research Consortium | Collaborative project to co-fund access to the Canada Tourism Data Collective and Environics Analytics through FedDev TGP funding through fiscal 2025-26; develop sustainable strategies for accessing regional tourism data sources. | Utilize consortium data resources for regional tourism research and analysis while contributing to sustainability planning for continued access beyond FedDev funding; measured by number of regional research projects completed using consortium data sources and progress toward securing post-2025-26 sustainable access arrangements. | Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 | Cont'd |
| B | Advance Grand River Corridor Development Initiatives | Coordinated efforts to promote and develop sustainable tourism opportunities along the Grand River, including shared events, promotional campaigns, and inter-regional project support. | Increased visibility of the Grand River's cultural and natural assets, driving tourism activity and supporting regional collaboration for sustainable growth. | Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 | Cont'd |

| | | | | | |
|----------|---|---|---|----------------|--------|
| C | Engage with the TIAO + Pan-RTO Destination Sustainability Working Group | Development and implementation of sustainability initiatives in partnership with TIAO and other RTOs, including shared tools, capacity-building activities, and alignment with provincial sustainability goals. | Measurable progress toward sustainable tourism practices across Ontario, supported by collaborative frameworks and consistent messaging. | Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 | Cont'd |
| D | Develop a Pan-RTO Coordinated Industry Training Program | Co-develop and deliver a coordinated regional training program combining online and in-person formats. | Successfully executed year-long calendar of training programmes. | Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 | New |
| E | Host the Southern Ontario Tourism Conference | Joint execution of the fifth Southern Ontario Tourism Conference in partnership with RTO1, including expert-led sessions, networking opportunities, and region-specific programming. | Enhanced professional development for tourism operators and stakeholders, promoting knowledge sharing and regional collaboration across Southern Ontario. | Q4 | Cont'd |

| PRIORITY ACTION AREA 5: REGIONAL TRUTH & RECONCILIATION ACTION PLAN | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|------------|---------------|
| Objective: To develop a framework for meaningful engagement and action toward reconciliation in tourism. | | | | | |
| Activity | | Output | Key Results and KPIs | Q | Status |
| A | Initiate Regional Truth & Reconciliation Action Plan development as identified as a priority in <i>RTO3's Strategic Plan for Regional Tourism Development 2024-26</i> | Collaborative development of action plan framework through engagement with Indigenous partners and regional stakeholders. | Established foundation for regional tourism approach to Truth & Reconciliation. | Q2, Q3, Q4 | New |

| PRIORITY ACTION AREA 6: SECTOR ASSOCIATION ENGAGEMENT & COLLABORATION | | | | | |
|---|--|--|---|----------------|--------|
| Objective: To strengthen relationships with key tourism sector associations and enhance industry representation. | | | | | |
| Activity | | Output | Key Results and KPIs | Q | Status |
| A | Enhance strategic industry and sector association partnerships | Develop formal engagement protocols with TIAC, TIAO, Attractions Ontario, ITO, CTA, and other sector associations. | Improved communication channels and collaborative opportunities for regional industry representation. | Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 | New |

| PRIORITY ACTION AREA 7: INCLUSIVITY, DIVERSITY, EQUITY & ACCESSIBILITY INDUSTRY INITIATIVES | | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|----------------|--------|
| Objective: To advance inclusivity, diversity, equity, and accessibility within the region's tourism ecosystem. | | | | | |
| Activity | | Output | Key Results and KPIs | Q | Status |
| A | Develop and implement strategy initiatives to engage and support underrepresented groups in tourism. | A collaborative inclusion strategy developed with diverse equity-focused organizations, encompassing BIPOC, LGBTQ+, disability advocacy, youth, and other marginalized communities. | Enhanced organizational commitment to fostering a welcoming, inclusive, and representative tourism environment, with increased representation, support, and meaningful participation of underrepresented groups in the regional tourism sector. | Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4 | New |

RISK MANAGEMENT

HHBRTA maintains a comprehensive approach to risk management that addresses operational, financial, and strategic risks while ensuring the organization's long-term sustainability.

Operational Risk Management: The organization maintains comprehensive insurance coverage including:

- Insurance for head office and home office operations
- Directors & Officers Liability Insurance

Legal expertise is engaged as needed, with appropriate budget allocations maintained for such services. In 2024-25, this included contracting specialized legal support for our ONCA compliance review.

Financial Risk Management: As an organization primarily funded through the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming, HHBRTA carefully aligns its business plan priorities and activities with allocated funding. We maintain strict financial oversight and planning to ensure:

- Responsible allocation of resources to current tourism business needs
- Strategic investment in future destination competitiveness
- Balanced support for both immediate operator needs and long-term regional development

Strategic Risk Mitigation: HHBRTA recognizes several key strategic risks:

- Potential funding fluctuations affecting program delivery
- Balancing immediate industry needs with long-term destination development
- Maintaining regional competitiveness

To mitigate these risks, we:

- Maintain flexible programming that can adapt to funding levels
- Prioritize initiatives that deliver both immediate and long-term benefits
- Focus on efficiency and maximizing impact of available resources
- Regularly assess and adjust strategic priorities based on industry needs and available resources

FINANCIAL PLAN

HHBRTA is funded by the Ministry of Tourism, Culture & Gaming. Regional Tourism Organizations receive a core allocation consisting of a base amount based on performance compared to provincial fixed roof accommodation tourism receipts. There is also a partnership allocation that matches partner contributions from non-Provincial government sources.

The following budget is structured to reflect the five mandated pillars of the Ministry's Regional Tourism Program according to the priority action areas and activities and timelines identified in this 2025-26 Business Plan.

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RTO3 2025-26 Budget

| BUDGET ITEMS | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 | TOTAL | Budget |
|--|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| | | | | | | |
| GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION | | | | | | |
| Salaries and Benefits | \$ 55,500.00 | \$ 55,500.00 | \$ 55,500.00 | \$ 55,500.00 | \$ 222,000.00 | \$ 222,000 |
| Contract Support - Finance and HR | \$ 8,750.00 | \$ 8,750.00 | \$ 8,750.00 | \$ 8,750.00 | \$ 35,000.00 | \$ 35,000 |
| Staff Training and Professional Development | | | \$ 1,500.00 | \$ 1,000.00 | \$ 2,500.00 | \$ 2,500 |
| Governance | \$ 2,000.00 | \$ 1,000.00 | \$ 1,000.00 | \$ 1,000.00 | \$ 5,000.00 | \$ 5,000 |
| Overhead and Facilities | \$ 10,500.00 | \$ 10,500.00 | \$ 10,500.00 | \$ 10,500.00 | \$ 42,000.00 | \$ 42,000 |
| Professional Fees - Accounting, Audit, Legal | \$ 9,950.00 | \$ 1,680.00 | \$ 1,685.00 | \$ 1,685.00 | \$ 15,000.00 | \$ 15,000 |
| Travel | \$ 2,500.00 | \$ 2,500.00 | \$ 2,500.00 | \$ 2,500.00 | \$ 10,000.00 | \$ 10,000 |
| Stakeholder Engagement Initiatives | \$ 250.00 | \$ 250.00 | \$ 250.00 | \$ 250.00 | \$ 1,000.00 | \$ 1,000 |
| Information Technology | \$ 6,250.00 | \$ 6,250.00 | \$ 6,250.00 | \$ 6,250.00 | \$ 25,000.00 | \$ 25,000 |
| Memberships and Conferences | \$ 2,000.00 | \$ 2,000.00 | \$ 5,000.00 | \$ 1,000.00 | \$ 10,000.00 | \$ 10,000 |
| | | | | | | |
| Governance & Administration Subtotal | \$ 97,700.00 | \$ 88,430.00 | \$ 92,935.00 | \$ 88,435.00 | \$ 367,500.00 | \$ 367,500 |
| | | | | | | |
| PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT | | | | | | |
| Salaries and Benefits | \$ 20,250.00 | \$ 20,250.00 | \$ 20,250.00 | \$ 20,250.00 | \$ 81,000.00 | \$ 81,000 |
| Regional Product Development Framework and Action Plan | \$ 11,700.00 | \$ 11,700.00 | \$ 11,700.00 | \$ 11,700.00 | \$ 46,800.00 | \$ 46,800 |
| Travel Trade Development Framework and Action Plan | \$ 5,200.00 | \$ 5,200.00 | \$ 5,200.00 | \$ 5,200.00 | \$ 20,800.00 | \$ 20,800 |
| Priority Development Enhancements | \$ 500.00 | \$ 2,500.00 | \$ 2,500.00 | \$ 344.00 | \$ 5,844.00 | \$ 5,844 |
| | | | | | | |
| Product Development Subtotal | \$ 37,650.00 | \$ 39,650.00 | \$ 39,650.00 | \$ 37,494.00 | \$ 154,444.00 | \$ 154,444 |
| | | | | | | |
| INVESTMENT ATTRACTION | | | | | | |
| Salaries and Benefits | \$ 1,625.00 | \$ 1,625.00 | \$ 1,625.00 | \$ 1,625.00 | \$ 6,500.00 | \$ 6,500 |
| Primary Research | | | | \$ 2,000.00 | \$ 2,000.00 | \$ - |
| Secondary Research | | \$ 15,000.00 | | | \$ 15,000.00 | \$ 15,000 |
| Contract Support: Investment Attraction Research | \$ 1,000.00 | \$ 1,000.00 | \$ 1,000.00 | \$ 1,000.00 | \$ 4,000.00 | \$ 6,000 |
| | | | | | | |
| Investment Attraction Subtotal | \$ 2,625.00 | \$ 17,625.00 | \$ 2,625.00 | \$ 4,625.00 | \$ 27,500.00 | \$ 27,500 |
| | | | | | | |
| WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT & INDUSTRY TRAINING | | | | | | |
| Salaries and Benefits | \$ 17,750.00 | \$ 17,750.00 | \$ 17,750.00 | \$ 17,750.00 | \$ 71,000.00 | \$ 71,000 |
| Annual Conference and Industry Exchanges | | \$ 3,500.00 | | \$ 18,500.00 | \$ 22,000.00 | \$ 22,000 |
| Industry Training Initiatives | \$ 1,500.00 | \$ 1,500.00 | \$ 1,500.00 | \$ 500.00 | \$ 5,000.00 | \$ 5,000 |
| Contract Support: Workforce Development & Industry Training Research | \$ 1,250.00 | \$ 1,250.00 | \$ 1,250.00 | \$ 1,250.00 | \$ 5,000.00 | \$ 5,000 |
| | | | | | | |
| Workforce Development & Industry Training Subtotal | \$ 20,500.00 | \$ 24,000.00 | \$ 20,500.00 | \$ 38,000.00 | \$ 103,000.00 | \$ 103,000 |
| | | | | | | |
| MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS | | | | | | |
| Salaries and Benefits | \$ 34,125.00 | \$ 34,125.00 | \$ 34,125.00 | \$ 34,125.00 | \$ 136,500.00 | \$ 136,500 |
| Consumer Marketing: | | | | | | |
| Marketing Infrastructure | \$ 1,250.00 | \$ 1,250.00 | \$ 1,250.00 | \$ 1,250.00 | \$ 5,000.00 | \$ 5,000 |
| Content Development | \$ 3,750.00 | \$ 3,750.00 | \$ 3,750.00 | \$ 3,750.00 | \$ 15,000.00 | \$ 15,000 |
| Visual Assets | \$ 22,560.00 | | | | \$ 22,560.00 | \$ 22,560 |
| Marketing Campaigns | \$ 12,500.00 | \$ 12,500.00 | \$ 12,500.00 | \$ 12,500.00 | \$ 50,000.00 | \$ 50,000 |
| Industry Communications: | | | | | | |
| Industry Communications Infrastructure | \$ 625.00 | \$ 625.00 | \$ 625.00 | \$ 625.00 | \$ 2,500.00 | \$ 2,500 |
| Industry Communications Campaigns | \$ 250.00 | \$ 250.00 | \$ 250.00 | \$ 250.00 | \$ 1,000.00 | \$ 1,000 |
| Contract Senior Marketing Support | \$ 5,000.00 | \$ 5,000.00 | \$ 5,000.00 | \$ 5,000.00 | \$ 20,000.00 | \$ 20,000 |
| | | | | | | |
| Marketing & Communications Subtotal | \$ 80,060.00 | \$ 57,500.00 | \$ 57,500.00 | \$ 57,500.00 | \$ 252,560.00 | \$ 252,560 |
| | | | | | | |
| PARTNERSHIPS | | | | | | |
| Product Development | | \$ 10,000.00 | \$ 10,000.00 | \$ 10,000.00 | \$ 30,000.00 | \$ 30,000 |
| Investment Attraction | | \$ 3,335.00 | \$ 3,335.00 | \$ 3,330.00 | \$ 10,000.00 | \$ 10,000 |
| Workforce Development & Industry Training | | | | \$ 20,000.00 | \$ 20,000.00 | \$ 20,000 |
| Marketing & Communications | \$ 10,000.00 | \$ 35,000.00 | \$ 10,000.00 | \$ 10,000.00 | \$ 65,000.00 | \$ 65,000 |
| Unallocated | \$ 5,000.00 | \$ 5,000.00 | \$ 5,000.00 | \$ 5,000.00 | \$ 20,000.00 | \$ 20,000 |
| | | | | | | |
| PARTNERSHIPS SUBTOTAL | \$ 15,000.00 | \$ 53,335.00 | \$ 28,335.00 | \$ 48,330.00 | \$ 145,000.00 | \$ 145,000 |
| | | | | | | |
| TOTAL 2025-2026 BUDGET | \$ 253,535.00 | \$ 280,540.00 | \$ 241,545.00 | \$ 274,384.00 | \$ 1,050,004.00 | \$ 1,050,004 |
| | | | | | | |

EXHIBITS

Hamilton Halton Brant Regional Tourism Association 2025-26 Business and Operational Plan



EXHIBIT 1: Hamilton Halton Brant Regional Tourism Association BIOGRAPHIES: 2024-25 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

BOARD CHAIR – Julian Kingston

Director, Cultural Services, Planning and Legislative Services, Region of Waterloo

He has extensive work and volunteer experience in the culture, heritage, and arts sector. During his 10-year tenure as Director of Education and Programs at the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) in Toronto, he oversaw both formal and informal education programs, and large-scale public offerings. In his position as the Program Manager, Arts, Media, and Culture, he directed the development of courses in transmedia, web development, game design and digital storytelling for Sheridan College. For the Town of Oakville, he oversaw Oakville Museum's evolution in storytelling priorities before moving to the Region of Waterloo Museums where he explored as many ways as possible to tell the stories of Waterloo's places, people, and communities. Julian continues to reside in Oakville, Ontario which is in the geographic regional boundaries of RTO 3.

BOARD VICE CHAIR – Sara Munroe

Manager, Museum & Archives, Region of Waterloo

Brantford Community Member

Sara's 20 years of experience working in tourism and community economic development, along with her extensive cultural and heritage background contributes to her Director role to support the strategic priorities related to regional tourism development. Most recently, Sara worked with the City of Brantford and has recently changed positions but continues to reside in Brantford, Ontario which is in the geographic regional boundaries of RTO 3. Sara is a graduate of the University of Toronto's Master of Museum Studies program and earned an Honours Bachelor of Arts from the University of Guelph. She also holds an Executive Diploma in Municipal Management and is pursuing her Ec.D. certification through the University of Waterloo. Sara is an active volunteer who loves to spend her spare time in the kitchen, checking out new local restaurants and festivals, and collecting art.

BOARD SECRETARY/TREASURER – Marilyn Butkovic

Regional Sales Manager, Vrancor Hospitality

Marilyn is supporting award winning hotels and venues in Ontario as the Regional Sales Manager for Vrancor Hospitality. With over 25 years of experience in the hotel industry she brings to the board her knowledge of sales and revenue management, business development and leadership skills. Marilyn is a former Past President of the Stoney Creek Chamber of Commerce and the Grimsby & District Chamber of Commerce and enjoys spending time outdoors with her family.

BOARD PAST CHAIR – Kelly Harris

Director of Marketing & Stakeholder Relations, Greater Toronto Hotel Association

Kelly's experience includes positions as Marketing Manager at a DMO and at a local craft brewery. Kelly is a great communicator and relationship builder and enjoys working with tourism partners to develop partnerships. Kelly graduated from the University of Guelph with an Honours degree in Criminology and then went on to work in the insurance industry for 12 years. Kelly was the President of the Toronto Insurance Women's Association and sat on the Board of Directors for that association for 5 years. Kelly enjoys spending time with her family and friends and reading in her down time. She is involved in the community and has sat on school council committees and can often be found at a curling club or hockey rink cheering her kids on.

BOARD DIRECTOR – Rebecca Edgar

Executive Director, Visit Oakville

At Visit Oakville, Rebecca leads a small but mighty team in building partnerships, supporting product development and marketing Oakville as a unique destination in the Heart of Ontario. Rebecca has over 20 years of management experience, with an emphasis on public relations, sales and marketing. She has a B.A. in political science from Laurier, a postgraduate certificate in Public Relations from Humber and a Master's degree in Communications Management from McMaster. Rebecca is an avid reader, sports fan & Cheer Mom.

BOARD DIRECTOR – Jillian Fisher

Business Development Manager, VIA Rail Canada

Jill works with the commercial team and focuses on nurturing and growing partnerships with travel agencies, corporate TMCs and trade partners and works with third parties to support VIA's distribution strategy. She also works with the Strategic Team to further VIA's objectives related to integrated mobility. In this capacity, she acts as an internal resource and forges external partnerships with a network of local, regional and national transportation partners. Prior to joining VIA, Jill worked within the DMO/RDMO network in British Columbia focusing on Norther BC where she was responsible for international sales, community development, tourism planning and industry relations. Jill is a graduate of the University of Guelph and holds an Honours Degree in European Business Studies and an MBA in Hospitality and Tourism Management. She has also obtained her PMP designation from the Project Management Institute. Jill loves contributing her skills to tourism development, particularly at the regional level, and she is delighted to be part of the Board.

BOARD DIRECTOR – Trish Gerth

General Manager, African Lion Safari

With a demonstrated history of working in the leisure, travel and tourism industry, Trish brings her skills of operations management, customer service, marketing strategy, hospital industry, and tourism management to the board. Trish graduated with an Honours Business Administration focused on Human Resources Management from Wilfrid Laurier University.

BOARD DIRECTOR - Jaquie Jamieson

Tourism Manager, Six Nations Tourism

Jaquie started off her career in tourism as a summer student at Chiefswood National Historic Site in 2011. Since then, she has worked with historic and cultural sites throughout Six Nations of the Grand River. Jaquie graduated from Wilfrid Laurier University in 2015 with an Organizational Leadership degree with Honours. She has been working full-time with Six Nations full-time since 2015 and has recently moved into the Tourism Manager position. Throughout her career, Jaquie has found a passion for tourism and culture. She has gained knowledge in Indigenous Tourism that is specific to the people of Six Nations. Growing Indigenous tourism in her region and sharing the knowledge with visitors is a strength and goal that she continues to strive towards.

BOARD DIRECTOR - Lisa LaRocca

Director of Operations, Sonic Unyon Records

Lisa is currently Director of Operations at a local independent record label, Sonic Unyon Records, which includes working with local musicians, as well as producing Hamilton's Supercrawl Festival and many other live music and cultural events year-round. Lisa serves as a board member of the Downtown Hamilton BIA and is a member of the Hamilton Arts Advisory Commission, as well as the Hamilton Music Advisory Team. She is also a part-time PhD student in the Communication and Culture program at York University and she holds an M.A. in Communications and New Media from McMaster University.

BOARD DIRECTOR - Angela Paparizo*Burlington Community Member*

Angela brings to the board 20 years of experience in Public Administration. She is an accomplished professional who has completed the Executive Municipal Leadership Program at Ivey School of Business and holds a Cultural Planning Certificate from the University of British Columbia. With a Master's degree in History and a Bachelor's degree in Journalism, Angela has held several director positions with the City of Tirana, Albania as well as Manager of Arts and Culture with the City of Burlington in Ontario. Her expertise and passion for arts and culture and extensive experience have equipped Angela with the ability to successfully manage and implement various strategies, policies, plans, programs and events during her leadership of the City of Burlington's Arts and Culture team. Angela's understanding of the industry has contributed to the team's accomplishments and continuous growth. Additionally, she has served on the board of directors for organizations such as Burlington Performing Arts Centre, Tourism Burlington, Albanian Canadian Development Alternative, and Co-chaired Halton Newcomer Strategy Steering Committee – Local Immigration Partnership.

BOARD DIRECTOR - Garth Pottruff*Owner, Grand River Rafting Company*

Garth Pottruff's passion is introducing people to the outdoors. He comes from a background of farming, forestry, with years of experience in outdoor and indigenous tourism. He and his son founded the Grand River Rafting Company near Paris Ontario which hosts over 50,000 visitors yearly. Garth is a firm believer in using his success to help others start up outdoor businesses. Getting big was never the goal...but doing it right was.

BOARD DIRECTOR - Hildegard Snelgrove, CMC*Business Development Consultant, Tourism Hamilton*

Hildegard works with Hamilton's tourism businesses to build vibrant tourism districts and develop authentic tourism products, as well as attracting new tourism investment to Hamilton. She has over 10 years of tourism experience ranging from operations in hotels, events, and food and beverage, to consulting on tourism strategies, masterplans, investment attraction, feasibility studies, and revenue management analytics. She is passionate about destinations, data, and building relationships. When she's not collaborating with tourism colleagues, you can find her dancing, in a restaurant, engrossed in a good book, or out in nature.

BOARD DIRECTOR - Kimberley Viney*Chief Operating Officer, Royal Botanical Gardens*

Kim joined Royal Botanical Gardens as their new COO in January 2023 to assist the CEO with bringing RBG's renewed vision to life. With her extensive entrepreneurial background, Kim is excited to be involved with RBG's new strategic twenty-five-year master plan along with overseeing RBG's daily multi-faceted operations. In her previous role as Senior Director, Business Development with Niagara Parks, Kim's focus has been on building and delivering exception guest experiences. Kim's previous projects have taken her across North America where she combined her design training and business background to build and operationalize several start-up businesses for her clients.

EXHIBIT 2: Hamilton Halton Brant Regional Tourism Association BIOGRAPHIES: CURRENT FULL TIME STAFF MEMBERS

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, Maria Fortunato

Maria is an award-winning public sector leader with over 20 years of experience advancing tourism growth in Ontario. As the founding Executive Director of RTO3, she has been instrumental in developing and operationalizing a regional tourism strategy that serves the Hamilton, Halton, Brant regions, Six Nations of the Grand River, and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. Under her leadership, RTO3 has delivered impactful results, including the implementation of over 210 new or enhanced tourism products, leveraging 500+ partnerships, and cultivating a vibrant tourism economy that generates nearly one million business referrals annually.

With a career spanning destination development, marketing, and community engagement, Maria has demonstrated expertise in building strategic alliances, navigating complex stakeholder relationships, and creating innovative programs that amplify tourism's economic and cultural impact. Her leadership has driven the adoption of sustainability initiatives, earning the region Destination Sustainability Certification and fostering a commitment to responsible tourism practices.

Maria's diverse background includes roles in municipal tourism, education, and the non-profit sector, where she championed initiatives in placemaking, cultural heritage, and Indigenous tourism. A graduate of McMaster University and Humber College, she continues to lead with vision and passion, ensuring RTO3's ongoing success as a regional leader in tourism innovation and collaboration.

MANAGER, BUSINESS AND VISITOR EXPERIENCES DEVELOPMENT, Bev Scott

With a career spanning multiple sectors of tourism and transportation, Bev brings exceptional expertise in strategic planning, partnership development, and destination management to RTO3. Her leadership has been pivotal in enhancing visitor experiences, equipping tourism businesses with actionable tools, and fostering sustainable growth. Key achievements include authoring the Visitor Readiness Manual to elevate service standards, spearheading the region's sustainability certification, and developing targeted trade experience guides that expand the region's appeal in domestic and international markets.

Drawing from extensive experience with global brands like British Airways and entrepreneurial ventures in transportation, Bev possesses a deep understanding of market dynamics, B2B sales strategies, and customer engagement. Her commitment to collaboration and innovation drives initiatives like the Transformational Travel Design Program and joint ventures that maximize tourism's economic impact while promoting environmental stewardship.

A graduate of Conestoga College's Business Administration program, Bev continues to lead with vision and impact, actively contributing to regional tourism sustainability through strategic committees and programs that position the region as a leader in responsible tourism.

MANAGER, INDUSTRY RELATIONS & PARTNERSHIPS, Angelica Seraj

Angelica Seraj brings over a decade of experience in tourism, workforce development, and event management to her role as Manager of Industry Relations and Partnerships. She oversees key initiatives, including the Annual Workforce Development and Training Series, the Southern Ontario Tourism Conference, and the Partnership Funding Program, which supports regional operators in expanding marketing reach and developing visitor experiences aligned with HHBRTA's strategic priorities.

Angelica excels in fostering relationships with tourism stakeholders, funding providers, and industry partners to identify opportunities for business growth, strategic alliances, and audience development. With a strong background in project management and event planning, she has successfully coordinated milestone events, facilitated educational programming for industry professionals, and managed funding programs benefiting dozens of regional tourism projects. Her expertise has impacted over 1,500 tourism operators through training sessions, workshops, and networking forums.

A graduate of Niagara College's Event Management program and Humber College's Project Management program, Angelica combines her academic foundation with practical experience as an instructor of event planning courses at Mohawk College. Her dedication to workforce development, partnership cultivation, and community engagement continues to strengthen the region's tourism industry and drive sustainable growth.

MARKETING & INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT OFFICER, Aiden Eng

Aiden Eng brings over 12 years of experience in hospitality, event coordination, and stakeholder engagement to his role at HHBRTA. Originally from Singapore, Aiden built a strong foundation in the industry with 10 years of experience in Singapore's dynamic hospitality sector, including his role as Assistant Front Desk Manager at Ascott Raffles Place, a 5-star heritage property in Singapore's Central Business District. At Ascott, he honed his expertise in operations and guest services, providing exceptional leadership in a globally recognized brand. Prior to this, Aiden worked as an Event Coordinator, managing end-to-end event coordination, including conceptualization, execution, and reporting.

In his role at HHBRTA, Aiden collaborates closely with Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) and industry partners on marketing partnerships that promote the region and its tourism offerings. He also works alongside regional stakeholders to strengthen relationships, support RTO3's Partnership Funding Program, and contribute to workforce development initiatives. Aiden is actively involved in the planning and execution of signature events such as the Southern Ontario Tourism Conference, fostering opportunities for collaboration and growth within the tourism industry.

Aiden holds a Master's degree in Global Management from Royal Roads University and a Bachelor's degree in Hotel Administration from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. With a passion for relationship building, innovative communication strategies, and sustainability in tourism, Aiden continues to advance HHBRTA's mission to promote the Hamilton Halton Brant region as a premier destination.

DESTINATION SUSTAINABILITY OFFICER, Hamid Dwyer

Hamid Dwyer is a sustainability professional with a strong foundation in environmental governance, sustainable tourism, and research. Currently serving as the Destination Sustainability Officer on a contract with the Hamilton Halton Brant Regional Tourism Association, Hamid collaborates with regional partners to promote sustainable tourism practices and advance the Destination Sustainability Action Plan. His work has included delivering educational programs through the Sustainable Tourism Learning Series and supporting stakeholders in integrating sustainability into their operations.

Hamid's background includes a Master's in Geography from the University of Guelph, where he specialized in environmental sustainability and sustainable business practices. His prior roles include conducting sustainability audits for the Greater Hamilton Health Network, where he identified opportunities for greener healthcare initiatives, and academic research focusing on climate change mitigation and compliance reporting. Hamid also has experience in training and stakeholder engagement through his leadership as a graduate teaching assistant and martial arts instructor.

With expertise in sustainability strategy, stakeholder collaboration, and environmental impact assessment, Hamid is committed to fostering regenerative tourism and helping businesses and communities balance economic, social, and environmental goals.

EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT, Maureen Beatty

Maureen brings over 40 years of experience in local government and administrative leadership to her role at the HHBRTA. Maureen provides high-level support to the Executive Director, Financial Manager, and Board of Directors, managing board communications, meeting coordination, and the day-to-day operations of the organization.

Maureen's extensive expertise includes delivering educational training on provincial legislation and programs to municipal staff, elected officials, and council candidates through her work with the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. She has chaired large municipal conferences in Southwestern Ontario and collaborated with municipal partners in Elgin County on initiatives to promote local attractions and identify routes for the TransCanada Trail. Her skill set spans inter-governmental relations, event planning, project management, and fostering collaboration between diverse stakeholders.

Certified through the Association of Municipal Managers Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario, Maureen combines her deep administrative expertise with a strong background in inter-governmental relations, event planning, and project management.

EXHIBIT 3: HAMILTON HALTON BRANT DESTINATION LEADERSHIP ALLIANCE - COLLABORATIVE FRAMEWORK



HHBRLA Collaboration Framework

Key Functions



DESTINATION SUSTAINABILITY

Balancing tourism's economic, social and environmental impacts, while addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and the community.



DESTINATION INSIGHTS

Gathering and utilizing research and insights (visitor and community focused) about the destination, the markets, and internal and external factors to inform strategic planning.



DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

Strategic planning for and advancement of tourism supply by providing compelling experiences, quality infrastructure and exceptional services to entice visitation.



DESTINATION MARKETING

Identifying visitor experiences and promoting the destination to attract visitors. Includes industry and other stakeholder communications.

Examples of Activities



DESTINATION SUSTAINABILITY

- Policy and Funding
- Visitor Commitment
- Community Commitment
- Crisis Management
- Economic Impact
- Environmental Stewardship
- Government Relations (Ministry, FedDev, etc.)
- More



DESTINATION INSIGHTS

- KPIs
- Research and Data
- Destination Profile
- Market Profiles
- Visitor Profiles
- Resident Sentiment
- More



DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT

- Product and Experience Development
- Industry Development
- Workforce Development
- Economic Development
- Market Development
- Assets & Infrastructure
- Industry & Assoc. Collaboration (eg. RTOs, DO, DC, TIAO, DEI, etc.)
- More



DESTINATION MARKETING

- Destination and Industry Brands
- Visitor Experience
- Visitor Marketing
- Visitor Digital Presence
- Resident & VFR Marketing
- Industry Communications

EXHIBIT 4A: RTO3 HAMILTON HALTON BRANT REGIONAL DATA (Source: MTCG)

| RTO3 MINISTRY DATA - TARGETED COMPARABLES - COMPILED JANUARY 10, 2025 | | | | | | |
|---|--|--------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Year | Total Household /Party Visits (Weighted) | Total Person Visits (Weighted) | Total Nights Accommodation | Total Visitor Spending | Total Establishments - All Industries | Total Tourism Related Industries |
| 2006 | 4,677,013 | 6,334,061 | 4,335,874 | 478,147,334 | | |
| 2007 | 5,577,418 | 7,437,115 | 5,439,983 | 555,754,698 | | |
| 2008 | 5,320,450 | 7,206,879 | 6,116,011 | 606,753,827 | | |
| 2009 | 5,595,282 | 7,394,015 | 5,602,295 | 570,322,297 | 71,108 | 4,202 |
| 2010 | 5,513,971 | 7,357,161 | 5,066,577 | 539,672,199 | 72,736 | 4,215 |
| 2011 | 7,314,806 | 10,072,958 | 6,063,730 | 760,548,992 | 72,071 | 4,169 |
| 2012 | 7,412,793 | 9,952,726 | 5,481,938 | 735,358,472 | 73,723 | 4,146 |
| 2013 | 7,529,552 | 9,786,778 | 6,050,768 | 722,807,746 | 88,870 | 4,510 |
| 2014 | 8,124,417 | 10,358,572 | 7,031,027 | 819,374,655 | 113,038 | 4,960 |
| 2015 | 8,438,557 | 10,714,674 | 7,009,407 | 899,199,065 | 117,486 | 5,160 |
| 2016 | 8,093,463 | 10,677,573 | 6,221,260 | 845,073,197 | 37,004 | 2,361 |
| 2017 | 7,881,198 | 10,803,732 | 6,470,473 | 813,294,619 | 128,694 | 5,693 |
| 2018 | 6,645,732 | 9,186,130 | 5,979,564 | 929,385,765 | 133,738 | 6,016 |
| 2019 | 6,685,797 | 9,243,882 | 7,598,600 | 983,564,188 | 133,472 | 6,373 |
| 2020 | 3,276,539 | 4,519,690 | 2,915,693 | 284,625,175 | 35,449 | 6,643 |
| 2021 | 4,477,272 | 6,166,034 | 3,540,214 | 487,334,998 | 138,094 | 5,917 |
| 2022 | 5,299,470 | 7,762,381 | 6,171,465 | 704,729,882 | 147,423 | 6,213 |
| 2023 | | | | | 158,328 | 7,090 |

(See next page for notes to data.)

EXHIBIT 4B: NOTES TO RTO3 HAMILTON HALTON BRANT REGIONAL DATA (Source: MTCG)

| NOTES | |
|--|---|
| Applicable to Years 2006 to 2022 | Notes: This analysis is based on Statistics Canada microdata which contain anonymized data collected in the Travel Survey of Residents of Canada and the International Travel Survey. All computations on these microdata were prepared by the Ontario Ministry of Tourism and Culture and the responsibility for the use and interpretation of these data is entirely that of the authors. |
| 2012 | Note: due to changes in 2012 survey methodology, domestic data is not comparable to prior years. |
| Applicable to Years 2018 to 2022 | Note: The age US and Overseas visitors has been modified to exclude children, so that these results can align with the Canadian figures. As a result, the sum of US and Overseas visitors by age doesn't match the visitor totals. Note: For sample sized less than 100, extreme caution should be exercised due to the potential of large variations in the data. Note: In order to bring Ontario's definition of Visitors in line with federal and other provincial definitions, US and international students who visited 75 days or more and commuters are now included in Ontario results. As a result, 2018 international results are not comparable to prior years. Note: Due to changes in Statistics Canada's methodology, 2018 domestic data is not comparable to prior years. Note: The quality of the data describing the characteristics of US visitors to Ontario is particularly low and as such the ministry will only be releasing spending information at the sub-provincial level beginning with 2018. Note: Visitor spending includes origin spending when the origin of the visit is Ontario and the destination of the visit is Ontario. Note: Ontario's definition of Tourism-related establishments is now in line with federal definitions. As a result, 2020 establishment reports are not comparable to prior years. Note: Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Statistics Canada's suspended the International Travel Survey. As a result, US and overseas visits and visitor spending at the sub-provincial level is not available for 2021. |
| 2019 | Note: The age US and Overseas visitors has been modified to exclude children, so that these results can align with the Canadian figures. As a result, the sum of US and Overseas visitors by age doesn't match the visitor totals. Note: For sample sized less than 100, extreme caution should be exercised due to the potential of large variations in the data. Note: In order to bring Ontario's definition of Visitors in line with federal and other provincial definitions, US and international students who visited 75 days or more and commuters are now included in Ontario results. As a result, 2018 international results are not comparable to prior years. Note: Due to changes in Statistics Canada's methodology, 2018 domestic data is not comparable to prior years. Note: The quality of the data describing the characteristics of US visitors to Ontario is particularly low and as such the ministry will only be releasing spending information at the sub-provincial level beginning with 2018. Note: Visitor spending includes origin spending when the origin of the visit is Ontario and the destination of the visit is Ontario. |
| 2020 | Note: Ontario's definition of Tourism-related establishments is now in line with federal definitions. As a result, 2020 establishment reports are not comparable to prior years. |
| 2022 | Note: Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Statistics Canada's suspended the International Travel Survey. As a result, US and overseas visits and visitor spending at the sub-provincial level is not available for 2021. Note: The quality of the data describing US visits to Ontario is particularly low and as such the ministry has not released US data at the sub-provincial level since 2014. However, due to methodological improvements by Statistics Canada, US spending information is available at the tourism region level beginning with 2018. Note: Regarding short-term rentals, the source is Lighthouse.com (formerly Transparent). Note: Average Daily Rate and revenues exclude any taxes or fees. Note: All dollar values are reported in US dollars. Note: Short-term rental data collection is a growing data space. Transparent Intelligence is continuously refining its methodology. Consequently, data updates within the same parameters may arise due to methodology updates. |
| 2023 | Note: regarding Establishments, Ontario's definition of Tourism-related establishments is now in line with federal definitions. As a result, 2020 establishment reports are not comparable to prior years. |