

GOING PLACES

NOVEMBER 2023

Chef Jenni Lessard creates
the recipe for a rewarding
culinary career

Annie Charles brings
arts and business
experience to
Indigenous Destinations
Saskatchewan

Refreshed Service Best
empowers staff, elevates
customer experiences

Niche market research
helps understand and
attract snowmobilers

EDITOR
Susan Parkin
Tourism Saskatchewan
189 – 1621 Albert Street
Regina, SK S4P 2S5

Email: susan.parkin@tourismsask.com

Material subject to change.
Articles may be reprinted with permission.

COVER IMAGE
Chef Jenni Lessard

Past issues of *Going Places* are available on Business.TourismSaskatchewan.com/going-places.

Saskatchewan comprises lands covered by Treaties 2, 4, 5, 6, 8 and 10, the traditional lands of the Cree, Dakota, Dene, Lakota, Nakota and Saulteaux peoples, and the traditional home of the Métis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Wanuskewin Heritage Park wins Canadian Tourism Award.....	2
Message from the CEO	
Paying tribute to people.....	3
Saskatchewan Fishing and Hunting Map promotes outdoor adventure.....	3
Board of Directors visits Nipawin and area	4
Meet Board Chair Trent Fraser	5
Tourism Saskatchewan welcomes three new board members.....	5
Chef Jenni Lessard creates the recipe for a rewarding culinary career	6
In Conversation	
Annie Charles brings arts and business experience to Indigenous Destinations Saskatchewan	8
ExploreSask Photo Contest winners announced.....	9
Research and Trends	
Niche market research helps understand and attract snowmobilers	10
Destination Canada reports on high-value travellers – what they want and how to attract them	11
Marketing Saskatchewan	
GoMedia Canada shines international spotlight on Saskatchewan	12
Free Export Toolkit enrolment extended throughout 2024.....	13
Destination and Workforce Development	
Refreshed Service Best empowers staff, elevates customer experiences	14
Saskatchewan tourism businesses expand Économusée® network	15
Hospitality Saskatchewan Awards presented at celebration in Saskatoon	16
Saskatchewan tourism businesses expand Économusée® network (continued).....	18
Destination Canada reports on high-value travellers – what they want and how to attract them (continued)	19
Federal Tourism Growth Strategy a roadmap for a sustainable, prosperous and inclusive industry	19

Wanuskewin Heritage Park wins Canadian Tourism Award



Wanuskewin Heritage Park, Han Wi Moon Dinner



Tunnels of Moose Jaw

The Tourism Industry Association of Canada (TIAC) presents the annual Canadian Tourism Awards to recognize success, leadership and innovation in Canada’s tourism industry.

Saskatchewan was well represented at the 2023 Canadian Tourism Awards celebration on November 22 in Ottawa. For the third time since 2016, Wanuskewin Heritage Park received the Indigenous Tourism Award. Contenders in that category were Chief Clarence Louie (Osoyoos, BC) and Klahoose Wilderness Resort (Victoria).

Wanuskewin’s Han Wi Moon Dinner series was a finalist for the Culinary Tourism Experience Award, which went to Tourism Lethbridge. The other finalist in that category was RGE RD (Edmonton).

Tunnels of Moose Jaw was in the running for the Business of the Year Award. Oak Bay Beach Hotel (Victoria) took that top honour in that category. CanaDream RV (nationwide) was also a finalist.

MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

Paying tribute to people

This issue of *Going Places* highlights the accomplishments of a number of people in our industry – from the hard-working operators and employees recently recognized at the Hospitality Saskatchewan Awards to the folks driving Saskatchewan's expanding Économusée® network.

Each has an interesting story – whether they are relatively new to the industry or have decades of involvement. I consider working with many of these people and hearing their stories among the fondest experiences of my tourism career.

Highlights of the Hospitality Saskatchewan Awards were moments honouring Tourism Builders – Bernard Shepherd, Morris and Sue McLachlan, and Hugh Vassos.

Bernard Shepherd is an industry legend who recognized the potential and value in developing Indigenous-led tourism experiences in Saskatchewan. Former Chief of the White Bear First Nations, he was a force behind the White Bear Lake Resort and the creation of Indigenous-led casinos in cities and communities across the province.

It was gratifying to see tribute paid to Morris and Sue McLachlan, who have put their hearts and souls, along with decades of hard work into Waskesiu Marina Adventure Centre – a flagship operation in Prince Albert National Park.

Hugh Vassos has made an indelible mark on sports tourism in Saskatchewan. He has been pivotal to bringing major sporting events and championships to Saskatoon. As one of the founders of the Tourism Industry Association of Saskatchewan (TISASK), he helped lay the groundwork for the future development of the province's tourism industry.

Tourism Saskatchewan turned the page on another chapter when changes in board leadership occurred in July. It was bittersweet to say farewell to long-standing Board Chair Norm Beug and Vice-Chair Cory Rideout. Both demonstrated unwavering commitment to the organization and industry since joining the board in 2012 and 2013, respectively. Their leadership helped guide Tourism Saskatchewan through change and during times of unprecedented industry challenges.

The duo of Trent Fraser, Chair, and Kevin Dureau, Vice-Chair, assured a smooth transition. They bring extensive energy and board governance experience to our organization.

I want to acknowledge another departing board member – Sandra Jensen, whose commitment to the organization and industry is admired and appreciated. There are new faces around the board table. Albert Derocher, Gary Hoffert and Tony Playter bring a mix of business skills and experience, and will add valuable insights to the board going forward.

It is a distinct pleasure to feature Jenni Lessard in the cover story of this issue. She wears many hats – chef, entrepreneur, mentor, advisor – and is recognized nationally and internationally for her expertise and accomplishments. She is undeniably a culinary celebrity who has continually created new and exciting ways for visitors to experience the province.

Jonathan Potts



Saskatchewan Fishing and Hunting Map promotes outdoor adventure

Tourism Saskatchewan is accepting orders for the *2024 Saskatchewan Fishing and Hunting Map*. The compact, 16-panel map is a popular resource to take to outdoor adventure marketplaces and tradeshow. It offers quick facts and information about the province's fishing and hunting experiences.

Colourful photos highlight Saskatchewan's pristine wilderness, along with its abundance of big game animals, waterfowl and upland game birds, and trophy-size fish. Informational copy includes season dates, species detail, licensing information, and regulations concerning border crossing and firearms import. Messages drive traffic to the website [FishHuntSask.com](https://fishhuntsask.com), where additional details and stories about fishing and hunting adventures are featured.

The map identifies the locations of 178 licensed Saskatchewan outfitters. A corresponding index categorizes fishing and hunting outfitters (some appear in both sections) and lists available species.

To order bulk quantities of the *2024 Saskatchewan Fishing and Hunting Map*, email bulkorders@tourismsask.com.



Board of Directors visit Nipawin and area



*Top: Learning about artisan knife-making at Grant Schiller Knives
Bottom: Exploring Tobin Lake with Aurora Houseboats*

Enjoying Nipawin area hospitality at Mabel Hill Farm Kitchen & Marketplace

Tourism Saskatchewan's board members recognize that tourism is an industry that revolves around people – their stories, the experiences they deliver, and the meaningful connections that are made.

Board Chair Trent Fraser acknowledged the value of face-to-face meetings and engaging directly with tourism operators and stakeholders. "These opportunities are where we see the real work that gets done by all the people involved in tourism throughout the province," he said.

In September, the Board of Directors met in Nipawin for a three-day retreat. The schedule offered a mix of formal board and committee meetings with visits to local attractions and nearby communities. The visit was a first to the area for several board members, who were struck by the beauty of the season and the surroundings. They were equally impressed by the work of operators who are transforming the tourism landscape with unique experiences that bring new visitors to the region.

"Saskatchewan has so much to offer and there's no limit to what visitors can do and enjoy here," Fraser said. "Making new discoveries here at home is important, not just for the board, but for anyone in Saskatchewan. It creates a population knowledgeable and excited about the great attractions that we have. That enthusiasm convinces others to visit, and helps buoy the industry."

Nipawin is recognized as a culinary destination, due to the work of Chef Michael Brownlee and his successful enterprise – Mabel Hill Farm Kitchen & Marketplace. Chef Brownlee and his team hosted the board for a multi-course meal made from locally sourced ingredients and produce grown on the property.

In Carrot River, board members saw how Grant Schiller Knives is positioning the town as a destination for people interested in learning an old world craft under the guidance of a master, second-generation knifemaker. The business is making headlines, not just through the workshops hosted but also for the

studio built specifically to share skills and techniques that enable participants to construct their own individually designed knife.

A meeting with Trails End Outfitters owner Barry Prall brought attention to challenges in the outfitting industry and the work required to make businesses resilient and sustainable. Trails End Outfitters, located along Tobin Lake, serves a wilderness area spanning 300,000 acres, where professionally guided hunts and fishing expeditions draw clients from across the U.S. and Canada.

A lunch and lake tour with Aurora Houseboats made for a relaxing afternoon admiring the boreal forest-framed shoreline and exploring some of the nooks and coves of Tobin Lake.

Tourism Saskatchewan extends thanks to operators in Carrot River, Nipawin and the surrounding area who shared their time, knowledge and stories with the visiting delegation.

Tourism Saskatchewan is a Treasury Board Crown Corporation, led by a nine-member, appointed Board of Directors. Members bring business acumen and experience to their role in providing broad policy direction to management. Current board members are Trent Fraser, Chair; Kevin Dureau, Vice-Chair; Albert Derocher, Brian Hoffart; Gary Hoffert; Jessica McNaughton; Shawna Nelson; Tony Playter; and Kim Wondrasek. View their profiles at [Business.TourismSaskatchewan.com/about/board-of-directors](https://business.tourismsaskatchewan.com/about/board-of-directors).

Meet Board Chair Trent Fraser

Trent Fraser is no stranger to Saskatchewan's tourism industry. He has a long list of accomplishments, including managing the Saskatchewan Pavilion at the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Vancouver, and re-energizing the Saskatchewan Roughriders brand. In 2017, he received the Tourism Builder Award for leadership and contributions that have advanced the province's tourism sector.

Fraser previously served on Tourism Saskatchewan's Board of Directors in 2004-2006. His second stint as a board member began two years ago. In July 2023, he embraced the responsibilities of Board Chair, succeeding Norm Beug.

Fraser has decades of experience in board governance, in addition to his work in marketing, sales, brand management and business development. He admits that his passion for the province and the tourism industry make his

current role extremely interesting and rewarding.

"It's an exciting position – one that I consider an honour to hold," Fraser said. "Our role at the board level involves oversight and foresight. We work closely with senior management, who are a very focused team. Their strategies are solid and fit with Saskatchewan's Growth Plan."

The concentration on niche marketing interests Fraser, who recognizes the value in fostering high-value markets seeking Saskatchewan's strongest offerings. "We have outstanding fishing and hunting, which has been a foundation of tourism in our province," he said. "But we know there's also great potential in supporting the development of birding experiences and in assisting the expansion of Indigenous tourism. Focusing on niche markets will bode well for Saskatchewan."



Tourism Saskatchewan extends appreciation to past Chair Norm Beug, who served on the Board of Directors since 2012. Sincere thanks also goes out to retiring board members Sandra Jensen, who also served since 2012, and Vice-Chair Cory Rideout, who was appointed in 2013.

Tourism Saskatchewan welcomes three new board members



Albert Derocher is a member of Flying Dust First Nation (FDFN) and has worked for the community for more than 25 years. A business administration graduate of Palliser Campus, Derocher has applied his skills and knowledge to advance FDFN and drive economic and job growth. He has served as General Manager of FDB Holdings (FDFN's corporate arm) for the past six years, and was Economic Development Officer for eight years prior.

Derocher has experience with various businesses, levels of government, non-profits and Indigenous institutions, and has shared his expertise with numerous projects representing First Nations and other groups nationwide. His experience and skills are often sought on projects seeking funding, development support and venture management advice.



Gary Hoffert has served as Regional Vice-President of Canalta Hotels since 2007. In this role, he guided a huge expansion for the hotel chain, which opened 11 Saskatchewan locations and two in Manitoba over the past 16 years. His career in hotel management includes terms with major Sheraton and Ramada properties. Hoffert holds strategic management and corporate entrepreneurship certificates, and is a certified hotel administrator. He completed

academic requirements for the Not for Profit (NFP) Governance Essentials Program.

He has extensive board experience and is currently Past Chair of Hospitality Saskatchewan. He was Vice-President of the Regina Hotel Association, Past President of Western Canadian Ramada Management Association, and held board positions with the Saskatoon Hotel Association and other organizations.



Tony Playter is CEO of the Regina & District Chamber of Commerce and owner of Outlaw Communications. He is an accredited business communicator with over 30 years of communications, media relations and marketing experience. High profile clients include Canadian Blood Services, City of Regina, Regina Airport Authority, Saskatchewan Special Olympics, Saskatchewan Roughriders Football Club and Saskatchewan Government Insurance, among

others. His strengths include strategic communications planning and execution, issues management, creative writing, media relations and training, branding and marketing.

Active in the community, Playter has volunteer and board experience with numerous organizations, including the Regina Chamber of Commerce, Canadian Red Cross – Saskatchewan branch, Regina Crime Stoppers, Reconciliation Regina, Regina Red Sox and Regina Thunder Football Club.

Chef Jenni Lessard creates the recipe for a rewarding culinary career



Chef Jenni Lessard always takes a piece of Saskatchewan with her when she travels. More specifically, she takes something edible, where permitted. Packing delicious treats, such as bison jerky, dried berries, wild rice, Boreal Heartland teas, pulses, and grains, comes as natural as packing a toothbrush and change of clothes.

She has a purpose behind it. “We are such a culturally and geographically diverse province, and it’s hard to explain that to people,” Lessard said, acknowledging that food speaks in a different, more convincing way.

Lessard juggles many plates as a chef, business owner and manager, caterer, instructor, and culinary consultant. She has been called a trailblazer for multiple reasons, including becoming the first female chef and first Métis executive chef at Wanuskewin Heritage Park; working as chef-in-residence at the Saskatoon Farmers’ Market; and, most recently, serving as interim executive director for a new national organization – the Indigenous Culinary of Associated Nations.

Such roles come with opportunities to prepare menus for large, upscale events; however, Lessard admits that some of the grassroots settings really stand out. “Although I enjoy preparing fancy dinners and I like cooking competitions, I really love cooking for people who are busy and working,” she said, citing examples such as volunteer crews and activities. “In these situations, the food isn’t the centrepiece – the food is the fuel. That’s my favourite type of event to cook for.”

Early influences

Whether she is recalling childhood influences or describing a dish that she is currently preparing, Lessard’s storytelling is wholehearted. Experiences growing up at a pulp camp near Besnard Lake forged connections to the land and forest, and introduced her to one of her earliest role models.

“I looked up to the camp cook, Nettie, and remember that she always wore a clean, white apron, and always took time to explain to me what she was making for dinner,” Lessard said. “Thursday night was steak night and if there weren’t too many workers, my family and I were often invited to the camp hall



Chef Jenni Lessard leads Field to Shield culinary tour in northern Saskatchewan

to eat. People would go up to Nettie after the meal and thank her for feeding them. I think it was that energy and feeling of gratitude for being given a good, healthy meal that transferred to me and I knew that's what I wanted to do."

Lessard enjoyed family support for her interest in food and was encouraged to experiment in the kitchen and prepare her first full meal by age eight. Style, presentation and atmosphere made an impression on her, as well.

"My grandmother's house in Prince Albert always smelled like food," she said. "You'd walk in and she would have a pedestal table draped in a blue and white checkered cloth. There would be bread baking, soup simmering on the stove and bannock in the oven. She would turn down the lights and have candles lit and a fire burning in the fireplace – setting the stage and providing beautiful little details that were part of the dining experience."

Career highlights

Lessard pauses when asked about career highlights. Talking about one brings up another and another, forming a pattern of inter-related connections. "When I sold my restaurant, New Ground Café, and moved from Birch Hills to Saskatoon, I envisioned working for the Saskatoon Public Library, Saskatoon Tribal Council and Wanuskewin Heritage Park," she said. "Those three became some of my closest clients and collaborators."

She acknowledges the privilege of feeding guests after the return of Plains bison to Wanuskewin in December 2019. "The kitchen team and I had the pleasure of cooking for people who had been working on the bison reintroduction project, some for as long as 40 years. Seeing the energy and gratitude in the room and being able to celebrate that historic moment with food – that was a career highlight for me."

More recently, Lessard led the planning of Saskatchewan Night – the wrap-up of the successful GoMedia Canada marketplace, held in Saskatoon in September (see page 12 for more details). Expectations were high for this pivotal event and opportunity to host nearly 200 acclaimed international travel media representatives. Lessard seized the chance to assemble a stellar team of chefs and deliver a treat for the senses.

"A goal for Saskatchewan Night was to delight our guests and leave them feeling nourished and absolutely thrilled with the culinary offerings. At the same time, I wanted to not only showcase Saskatchewan ingredients, but also showcase the people," she said.

"Our landscape is beautiful, and our culture and history are amazing; but we also work really well together. The Saskatchewan culinary scene is a good

indicator of that. From the time I started working in the industry, I've seen so much collaboration and received so much help from local vendors and fellow chefs. GoMedia was an opportunity to share that collaborative spirit and nature."

Mentoring the next generation

Ever grateful for the support and encouragement she has received during her career journey, Lessard is committed to "paying it forward" and helping others succeed. From operating a food trailer at the La Ronge airport when she was 14 to owning a successful restaurant and catering company, guiding the evolution of food services at Wanuskewin Heritage Park, and launching a culinary consulting business, Lessard sees the twists in her career path as gifts.

"My focus now is supporting other people interested in a culinary career," she said. "Every experience that I now deliver, I try to make sure that those folks can join in, see what it's like, get paid well, and then decide if it's a fit for them. I've had so much help along the way, from people who have written articles about me, who have invited me to events, or championed my cause whether it was local cuisine or Indigenous cooking. My goal for the next 15 years is to bring people along with me."

Anticipating the future

Lessard's enthusiasm for Saskatchewan food and talent comes through in her conversations, and in her cooking and menu planning. "I'm immersed in Saskatchewan's culinary scene – it's kind of my whole world," she said, acknowledging that she is not alone and that innovation and creativity in the industry is building the province's reputation with food travellers. "Every person who is doing something interesting and unique with local products, with traditional dishes, with Indigenous cuisine, is blazing the trail for the next person. We have a special scene here – one that has great potential."

Asked to describe her dream for the province's culinary landscape, Lessard shared her hope that people are "happy, healthy and well compensated," and have the basic ingredients – support, knowledge and coping skills – for a long and sustainable career in the industry.

"When I'm 90 and ready to take off my apron, I hope that I can look at the culinary scene and lose track of the number of Indigenous women, women of colour, new Canadians, settler Canadians and people overall who are part of the industry," she said. "I hope that the list will be expansive and inclusive, and continue to grow."

IN CONVERSATION

Annie Charles brings arts and business experience to Indigenous Destinations Saskatchewan



Annie Charles was named Executive Director of Indigenous Destinations Saskatchewan (IDSK) in June. In this position, Charles will lead the new organization in work to advance Indigenous tourism, develop sustainable market- and export-ready products, and make Saskatchewan a leading destination for authentic Indigenous experiences.

Charles was raised in La Ronge and later moved to Regina, where she completed a business degree at First Nations University of Canada (FNUUniv). Prior to joining IDSK, she worked with FHQ Development Ltd. as the Economic Development and Relationship Consultant. From her involvement in the arts, in business, and with non-profit and for-profit organizations, she brings a unique perspective to her role at IDSK.

In an interview with Tourism Saskatchewan, Charles discussed moving forward with IDSK and the value of creative, collaborative approaches and partnerships.

How have experiences in film, interest in art and design, and completing a business degree at FNUUniv helped you in your new role?

I come from a family of artists. It's interesting to grow up in that kind of dynamic, where art was just part of our lives. I was inspired by my mother, who explored different mediums and eventually become a teacher. The freedom to be creative and make mistakes, because no one is perfect, were values instilled in us. My sister, who is a documentary film maker, has been an inspiration, too. When she was taking film at university, it was natural for me to help her and be one of her subjects. Later, I was able to work with her on some film productions.

I always follow my heart. It led me down the business path, which, I discovered, aligned with my values. This is where I learned that community development is a passion of mine – being able to give back. I appreciate the link between community and economic development, which is what drives Indigenous tourism. Being able to harness both of those and share with people the opportunities in the industry is important to me. Most times, Indigenous tourism is not individually driven but about taking care of the people around you and in your community. It just grows from there.

How has working for non-profit organizations shaped your approach to business?

My sister and I operated an artist collective called Soulful of Mother Nature. We represented different artists, including family members, and brought them attention and sales. I feel that my role with IDSK will, in some ways, be similar to our entrepreneurial pursuits – being able to share others' work and promote them; representing Saskatchewan and growing Indigenous tourism to become a leading contender in the industry.

In the non-profit world, you're not in it just for yourself. It's not an individual person doing the work, but a group of people. IDSK has a volunteer board that represents different parts of Saskatchewan, different industries and areas of economic development. Saskatchewan has great potential – the various treaties, Métis regions, cultures, languages and all the different landscapes. There is so much opportunity for us to expand and highlight what we have here.

You've been involved with IDSK for a while, as a member of the original Saskatchewan Indigenous Tourism Working Group and inaugural IDSK Co-Chair before assuming responsibilities as Executive Director. What excites you most about the work ahead?

Supporting Indigenous businesses getting into the tourism industry excites me. Also, being part of an organization that operators see as a value – helping them grow and assisting with their needs, such as marketing, development, training, and providing meaningful programs. I look forward to supporting entrepreneurs, helping them see opportunities for growth and take ownership of the stories that they want to share. Seeing tourism grow from where it is now and into the future, being part of that narrative – that's exciting.

What will it mean for Saskatchewan's Indigenous tourism operators to have an organization representing their industry?

Sharing ideas, bringing Indigenous businesses to the forefront of tourism, being inclusive in those discussions, representing their stories, their cultures. Being able to engage meaningfully in the goals to reconciliation, sharing the stories of the Métis and First Nations, as well, and our relationship with non-Indigenous people. Connecting travellers to those experiences and businesses that are also collaborating and working together. Offering mentorship and having role models – helping people come up with their own ideas of what they want to do for their businesses and communities. Representing Indigenous businesses equally, so that it's not competitive but more collaborative. Again, it's about community – when one succeeds, we all succeed.

It means working collaboratively. IDSK's leading partners, the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada and Tourism Saskatchewan, have been so supportive, and I'm inspired by their work and encouragement. These partnerships are, in essence, the spirit of what we are trying to achieve – working collectively, bridging non-Indigenous and Indigenous groups, building Indigenous tourism, supporting Indigenous businesses, working together to eliminate barriers that Indigenous people face and enabling Saskatchewan to be competitive in the tourism industry.

What do you envision for Saskatchewan's Indigenous tourism industry over the next decade?

I hope to see more businesses come on board and look forward to highlighting those businesses and helping them with their marketing. Also, having a place to go, a destination corridor in every treaty territory in Saskatchewan. That would be most representative of the different cultures. Indigenous centres and conference centres across Saskatchewan that are widely supported through partnerships that help celebrate the growth of the industry. Really, I just want to see Saskatchewan become a leading destination spot for Indigenous tourism.

ExploreSask Photo Contest winners announced

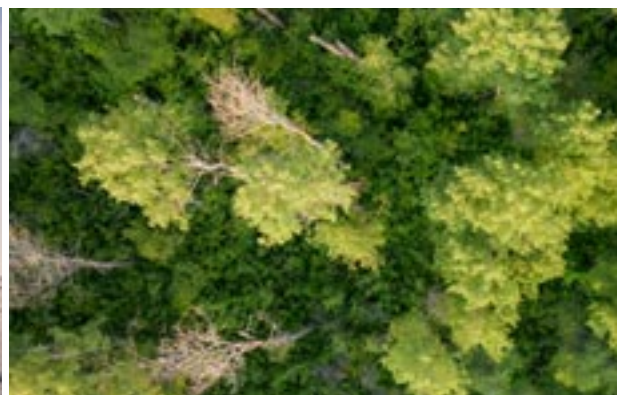


Photo credits, clockwise from top: Gilbert Katerynych (Grand Prize Winner/Prairie); Michael St Laurent, (People & Places); Aaron Thomson (Woods & Water); Danielle Bergen (Winter); Gabe Dipple (Video); Herry Himanshu (Wildlife)

Tourism Saskatchewan is pleased to announce the winning submissions in the 2023 ExploreSask Photo Contest. The competition, launched in June, received more than 4,200 entries.

An external panel of judges selected the winners and honourable mentions.

Grand Prize Winner
Gilbert Katerynych

Prairie
Winner: Gilbert Katerynych
Honourable Mention: Herry Himanshu (two images); Anthony Lomond; Bob Ferguson

People & Places
Winner: Michael St Laurent
Honourable Mention: Gokul Krishnan; Ciera Wolitski; Zack Martyn; Cathleen Mewis; Michael St Laurent

Wildlife
Winner: Herry Himanshu
Honourable Mention: Pat Martin; Chad Letain (two images); Michael St Laurent; Akash Christian

Winter
Winner: Danielle Bergen
Honourable Mention: Nicole Adair; Herry Himanshu; Milena Esser; Evan Olson; Brenda Peters

Woods & Water
Winner: Aaron Thomson
Honourable Mention: Thomas Pan; Andrew Court; Casey Marshall; Jeff Wizniak

Video
Winner: Gabe Dipple
Honourable Mention: Lee Miller; Ray Lagimodiere; Lheo Roden Untal; Herry Himanshu; Ryley Konechny

Visit TourismSaskatchewan.com/Photo-Contest-Winners to view the award-winning photographs and video.

RESEARCH AND TRENDS

Niche market research helps understand and attract snowmobilers



Nipawin area

Tourism Saskatchewan employs a precision-focused niche marketing strategy to match high-yield travellers with enticing Saskatchewan experiences. The organization's longstanding focus on angling and hunting is an example of how concentration on a niche area of strength helps build a lucrative industry and generate a solid stream of visitors.

Saskatchewan has strong potential in additional niche interests, particularly snowmobiling, birding and Indigenous tourism. Tourism Saskatchewan works with Environics Research to gain in-depth understanding of the characteristics and motivations of travellers seeking niche experiences. Concentration on these markets aligns strategies and efforts to grow the visitor economy, attract more long-haul visitors and position Saskatchewan as a destination of choice for discerning travellers.

Research activities in 2023 included interviews with snowmobilers from across Saskatchewan, elsewhere in Canada and in the United States. The information creates a clear picture of who they are, how they choose a snowmobiling destination, and what is important to them when travelling. Patterns of how they interact and participate in their respective communities were also studied.

Who snowmobilers?

Snowmobilers are passionate about the outdoors, nature and discovery. They enjoy the thrill of speed and seek hobbies that fulfil their desires. The social aspect of the sport appeals to them. It is something that can be shared and enjoyed with family and friends.

While snowmobilers share many of the same interests and values, there are two distinct personas:

The Adventurer (most snowmobilers)



For them, it is all about confidence. They are experienced riders, feel confident in their snowmobiling abilities, and are prepared for situations that can occur on a snowmobiling trip.

Their sense of preparedness comes from being familiar with the area or having researched it thoroughly. They have reliable specialized equipment, and use apps, maps and gear that helps them navigate trails safely.

Adventure and exploration are key for these snowmobilers. They enjoy trips that include

long distances and offer new experiences – adventures unattainable to most people.

The Cautious Rider (minority of snowmobilers)



This group is less adventurous, though they still enjoy exploration. They are less interested in taking trips that move from point to point and prefer to have a home base for their day trips.

Safety is top-of-mind. These cautious riders are more risk averse when it comes to exploring new places. They tend to stick to trails – off-trailing is less appealing for its risks (higher chance of getting lost or stuck).

What attracts them?

When it comes to trip-planning, recommendations from other snowmobilers are influential. The top three considerations for choosing a destination are:

1. Great snow (and the assurance that the location will have plenty).
2. Good trail conditions.
3. Different surroundings and experiences – Snowmobilers travel for adventures unlike

those offered close to home. Scenery is a very important aspect of a trip. Mountains, forests, waterfalls, lookout points, wildlife – these are features that appeal to them.

A destination's reputation spreads throughout the snowmobiling community. Word-of-mouth is fundamental to getting on the radar of potential visitors. In addition to consulting with online snowmobiling forums and groups, snowmobilers will check out regional tourism websites for up-to-date information on snow and trail conditions.

Infrastructure and trails make a difference

Snowmobilers seek locations that have ideal infrastructure. An ideal destination should include:

- Comfortable accommodations that cater to riders (e.g., located near trail exit, secure parking with space for trailers, etc.). The type of accommodation can range from hotels to chalets.
- Restaurants/bars open for dinner – Snowmobilers expect to find food options in the area. Many want to enjoy a nice meal after a day of sledding or relax with friends at a bar.

- Adequately stocked gas stations – This is a priority for snowmobilers. They want assurance that appropriate fuel and supplies are available during their trip.
- Friendly service – Snowmobilers are looking for a destination that has overall friendly service and where locals are welcoming. Towns and communities that cater to their needs gain positive profile in snowmobiling circles and see repeat visits.
- Equipment rentals – Rental options for snowmobiles, gear and warm clothing are key travel considerations for new and experienced riders alike. Snowmobile rentals appeal to new riders who want to test equipment and gain confidence before hitting the trails. Skilled enthusiasts who prefer to travel light or sled further away from home may also seek rentals.

For more detailed snowmobiling personas and additional niche market resources, visit business.tourismsaskatchewan.com/niche-market-research.

Destination Canada reports on high-value travellers – what they want and how to attract them



Twin Falls Lodge

"Satisfying high-value guests is less of a box-ticking exercise and more about understanding the needs and desires of each client. High-end does not necessarily mean extravagance – instead, it is about 'how you make someone feel.'"
Destination Canada

Destination Canada (DC) conducted research in late-2022 to gain insights into high-value travellers and understand their preferences, expectations and decision making. A survey was distributed to executive-level travel agents, tour operators and meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE) operators in ten different countries across Europe, North America and the Asia-Pacific region. In-depth interviews with travel experts in each area also contributed to the findings, shared in DC's report *The Laws of Attraction for High-Value Guests*.

Up front, the report explains a two-fold assessment of a lucrative travel market in terms of value and values. Simply put, value relates to spending. DC and marketing organizations across Canada want to entice long-haul visitors who have a higher-than-average income and travel frequently.

From a values perspective, these guests are important for more than how much they spend while vacationing. According to DC, they "immerse themselves in a destination, embrace heritage and culture, and genuinely seek to leave the destination better than they found it." Furthermore, they are conscious about how they travel, aware of their social responsibility and want to lower their environmental footprint.

The report provides tips on how to win over a visitor market that is expected to measure \$2.6 trillion (USD) by 2030. It also shares how high-value travellers perceive Canada as a destination. Clear tactics to appeal



Elk Ridge Resort

to these guests are categorized under the headings:

- Know what makes them tick;
- Match their wish lists; and
- Show off your best assets.

Select details are summarized below, including points that underscore Saskatchewan's advantages and the potential that exists here to elevate experiences and attract discerning, high-value travellers.

People want to travel where they are safe

Safety and security have the biggest influence on travel decision making, driven by geopolitical concerns, war, and civil unrest in parts of the world. Canada's nation brand is respected and trusted. Reinforcing this fact gives potential travellers confidence in the health and safety information provided. It is important to stress that Canada is viewed as an inclusive, welcoming destination – a nation of open hearts and minds.

Experiences and exclusivity drive choices

Exclusivity is deemed the second biggest factor influencing high-value guests. They are keen to make new discoveries and are prepared to pay for unique experiences and activities. Based on their interests and desires, there are advantages to exploring bold offerings that defy expectations. The report recommends considering Indigenous experiences, wildlife viewing, wellness retreats, outdoor adventures and culinary assets when promoting Canada – all are sources of enriching guest experiences and may provide opportunities for shoulder-season excursions.

Continued on page 19

MARKETING SASKATCHEWAN

GoMedia Canada shines international spotlight on Saskatchewan



Welcoming GoMedia Canada guests at the Remai Modern, Saskatoon. Image provided by Destination Canada, William Au Photography.

GoMedia Canada is a big deal. Provinces and cities across Canada are in fierce competition to host the annual marketplace that draws the “who’s who” of international travel media. Destinations awarded the privilege of hosting the event see long-term dividends in the relationships that are forged with popular world travel publications and top-ranking travel writers.

In September, the spotlight was on Saskatchewan when GoMedia Canada was held in the province for the first time. Nearly 200 select media delegates were welcomed to the three-day event in Saskatoon.

Months of collaboration and preparation by the host partners – Destination Canada, Tourism Saskatchewan and Discover Saskatoon – resulted in a showcase of Saskatchewan hospitality and the unparalleled travel experiences offered here.

Travel marketplaces, like GoMedia Canada, are where the art of networking and delivering a convincing sales pitch is put to the test in 12-minute, one-on-one appointments with visiting media from around the world. These brief sessions, where initial connections are made and ideas planted, can evolve into deeper conversations, follow-up invitations and stories that see widespread distribution and put Saskatchewan experiences in front of discerning travellers.

“There is general understanding that when a story about Saskatchewan appears in a publication like *National Geographic*, it brings significant

attention to the province,” Heidi Wesling, Tourism Saskatchewan Director of Global Markets, said. “But these stories happen because of the relationships that are established, the suggestions offered to editors and writers, and the investments made in bringing influential media to a destination. Participating in an event like GoMedia Canada – better yet, hosting the acclaimed travel media marketplace – presents valuable opportunities to meet face-to-face with decision makers and help them clearly see the passion and stories that make Saskatchewan stand out as a destination.”

Saskatchewan welcomed GoMedia Canada attendees from Australia, Canada, China, France, Germany, Japan, Mexico, South Korea, U.K. and U.S. The delegation was a mix of travel writers and senior editors of acclaimed publications, including *Condé Nast Traveller*, *Food & Wine*, and *Wanderlust Travel Magazine*. Pre- and post-GoMedia familiarization (FAM) tours were arranged in advance for guests interested in taking a deeper dive into Saskatchewan and exploring nature-based, cultural, Indigenous and culinary attractions.

Guests treated to Indigenous stories and experiences

Lyn Hughes, founding editor of *Wanderlust Travel Magazine*, was one of several distinguished media personalities in attendance. A fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, she is regularly listed among the top U.K. travel journalists and influencers.

Hughes admits that Saskatchewan was basically a mystery to her, but she was intrigued by the opportunity to see a different part of Canada and

make new discoveries. By the end of her visit, which included a three-day FAM tour exploring Indigenous sites and experiences, she was championing the province for its hospitality, food, natural beauty and cultural richness.

"I envisaged Saskatchewan as huge, flat expanses," Hughes said. "It was more scenically beautiful than I expected. For instance, Batoche National Historic Site and the river views there are stunning. Wanuskewin Heritage Park is magical in so many respects and the various interpretation activities are excellent."

Listing a number of highlights of her trip, Hughes expressed her surprise and appreciation of opportunities to learn about Indigenous peoples through experiences at Wanuskewin Heritage Park, with Pêmisica Tourism and at Dakota Dunes Resort. "These are stories that need to be told. There is definitely potential to develop Indigenous tourism even further."

"Learning about Métis history at Batoche was a real highlight, too," she said. "A lot of Europeans are unaware of the Métis – I was until a few years ago. To learn more about them was fascinating."

Hughes shared her message to anyone considering a Saskatchewan vacation. "It's a relaxing destination – those big skies, wide horizons and relative lack of traffic are good for the soul. And do try some Indigenous experiences to enhance the trip."



Lyn Hughes (right) with FAM participants at Dakota Dunes Resort

Free Export Toolkit enrolment extended throughout 2024

Tourism Saskatchewan's online Export Toolkit is a program that helps tourism operators understand the effort and investment required to achieve export-readiness and work with the travel trade.

What is travel trade? It is the network of businesses that form the international travel distribution system – buyers and sellers of travel experiences who serve as valuable links between operators and key global travel markets.

Why are international markets important? Growing the number of international guests means growth in export revenue. Tourism is considered an export industry for the simple fact that visitors from beyond Canada's borders are paying for their experiences here with foreign currency. Furthermore, they plan ahead, take longer trips and spend more than domestic travellers.

In 2019, international travellers spent more than \$194 million in Saskatchewan. They accounted for 6 per cent of overnight visitation and 12 per cent of total overnight visitor spending in the province.

Nurturing travel trade relationships helps destinations and tourism businesses reach lucrative travel markets, appeal to their interests, and entice them to visit. First steps in the process include understanding the expectations and criteria for working with travel trade, and determining if

there is desire and potential for a business to become export-ready. The Export Toolkit answers fundamental questions and helps operators quickly determine if travel trade is a fit for them.

The online program consists of a series of seven short courses that explain travel trade distribution in basic terms. Each course takes 30-60 minutes to complete – a reasonable investment of time, and at an unbeatable cost. Tourism Saskatchewan is extending its free enrolment offer throughout 2024.

Courses translate the language of travel trade into digestible terms. A 60-page workbook is provided that explains roles, lists definitions, and provides helpful tips. With fundamental knowledge in hand, participants can fully absorb the content in modules that address packaging and pricing, digital marketing, marketing plans, and more.

To access the Export Toolkit, visit Business.TourismSaskatchewan.com/courses-and-workshops/export-toolkit. Use the discount code EXPORTNOW for free enrolment.

For more information about working with the travel trade, contact Alison Singharath at 306-787-2388, alison.singharath@tourismsask.com, or Patti Peesker at 306-787-2328, patti.peesker@tourismsask.com.

Key Travel Trade Roles Explained

These key players are central to the network linking tourism destinations and businesses/suppliers with discerning international travellers.

Receptive tour operators (RTOs) – A vital link in the chain, RTOs are experts on a specific location who purchase travel products (tours, accommodations, etc.) and sell to international tour operators and travel agents. Saskatchewan sees 90 per cent of overseas travel trade business come through receptive operators.

Tour operators – Group travel from one country to another is arranged by tour operators, who often work with RTOs to access tourism products and services. Tourism Saskatchewan has connections with international operators in key markets, including Germany and the U.K.

Travel agents – International travellers commonly use the services of retail agents to plan and book trips. Online travel agencies, such as Expedia, also carry products and can provide high exposure to suppliers.

DESTINATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Refreshed Service Best empowers staff, elevates customer experiences



Service Best training underway at The Atlas° Hotel

Tourism Saskatchewan's Service Best program has an esteemed reputation for elevating customer service, building loyalty and generating positive word-of-mouth. Enrolling management and staff in the training has consistently proven to be good for businesses.

Maintaining program success and relevancy requires evolving with the times and keeping a finger on the pulse of consumer trends, guest expectations, and workforce dynamics. After careful review, revision and testing, a new and improved Service Best was introduced in September. The program builds on the original foundation, with added focus on staff teamwork and empowerment. Participants are equipped with additional tools and knowledge to defuse difficult situations or take good service to the next level and simply "wow" their guests.

The revised program puts stronger emphasis on helping frontline employees understand the value and purpose of great customer service, and how it benefits both workers and guests. "Service Best participants appreciate leaving the workshop with tools and practical knowledge," Denise Hauta, Tourism Saskatchewan Director of Workforce Development, said. "Telling them why good service is important is one thing – providing them with actual steps and examples breaks it down further. Customer service may look different to one person than to another. Regardless, the ultimate purpose, to 'wow' the customer, stays the same."

An additional program enhancement is the focus on understanding a company's brand and approach to business. "There is no single way of doing business nowadays," Hauta said. "Companies brand themselves in certain ways and want that reflected in the work of employees. We stress, in the new Service Best, to know what the expectations are for your specific workplace. Living by the brand of who you work for keeps you on track to delivering good customer service."

Two options for completing Service Best

Service Best training is available in two formats. The online version is convenient for people who need flexibility in scheduling or are unable to attend an in-person workshop. It can also be an important part of the onboarding process for new employees – equipping them with valuable skills and ensuring consistent training among all staff.

The six-hour, in-person workshop is ideal for businesses with multiple staff. "If you have a team of people, the interactive setting enables them to see how their connections contribute to the customer experience," Hauta said.

As an example, Hauta cited the different challenges that front desk employees encounter versus staff who work in food and beverage roles. The workshop setting encourages shared problem-solving. "It helps people see that they are not alone. Supporting and relying on each other strengthens the team dynamic," she said.

Workshop testing with The Atlas° Hotel team

Product testing of both the workshop and online versions of Service Best helped to identify strengths and necessary improvements before the final product was made available to the public. Managers and employees of The Atlas° Hotel, in Regina, were one of the first groups to undertake the new in-person workshop.

"The training put people on a level playing field and provided an opportunity for different team members to have one-on-one conversations," Shayla Haas, General Manager, said. "The experience opened our eyes to how we can improve day-to-day interactions with our own team members – to amplify the value we provide not only to our staff but also our guests."

Haas stressed how the new Service Best helps tourism and hospitality businesses address changing trends and heightened expectations. "In the last 12 months, we've seen more guests looking for personalized experiences," she said. "They are taking time to plan out the ideal trip and

are looking forward to rewarding themselves or their family with some quality time and a flawless experience. These expectations put more pressure on employees. Service Best encourages my team to be proactive, but also gives them the tools to fix something that goes wrong. The training empowers staff to make decisions, take matters into their own hands, and engage a resolution that, I hope, is meaningful to the guest."

"Our staff are front and centre with customers on a day-to-day basis, and they have great ideas," Haas added. "For them to know that their managers are supportive and excited from them to try to do something that makes a lasting impact on visitors – that sets the right tone and aligns with the corporate culture we are building at The Atlas°."

For more information or to inquire about hosting a Service Best workshop, contact Tamica Small at 306-933-5900, toll-free 1-800-331-1529, or email training@tourismsask.com.

Three R Formula for service recovery

Service Best offers practical tools to help frontline employees assess, respond and resolve customer complaints. Workshop participants study the Three R Formula for service recovery. Developed by author Bill McFarlan, the method follows these steps:

- 1) Regret – Show genuine concern and empathy for the customer.
- 2) Reason – Determine the reason behind the situation and provide an explanation. This helps build trust.
- 3) Remedy – A sincere apology often comes with some offer of a remedy or compensation.

Saskatchewan tourism businesses expand Économusée® network

"The network artisans . . . are the heart, the soul and the founders of the business they brought to life, often through tireless effort, and they do not fear going off the beaten path to propel their business further. Their creativity, determination and boldness are reflected in their wares."

Artisans at Work Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan's growing Économusée® network reflects the vision and creativity behind immersive, enriching tourism experiences that showcase enduring traditions, artisan techniques and locally crafted products.

The Économusée® Society Network, founded in Quebec in 1992, has evolved into a league of designated artisans across Canada and in six other countries. For ten years, the Conseil économique et coopératif de la Saskatchewan (CÉCS) has led efforts to establish the Économusée® movement in Saskatchewan and help qualifying businesses earn the internationally recognized title.

Over the Hill Orchards and Winery, near Lumsden, became Saskatchewan's first Économusée® in 2019. The CÉCS received federal investment in 2022, through the Tourism Relief Fund, to assist expansion of the circuit. Two new Économusée® were announced in 2023 – Susan Robertson Pottery, in Broderick, and Black Fox Farm & Distillery, near Saskatoon.

"We are very pleased and proud of the work accomplished by every CÉCS team member and its partners," Kouamé N'Goandi, CÉCS Executive Director, said. "Our aim is to build a strong network of Économusée® in the province, offering authentic and unforgettable experiences to visitors. The CÉCS affirms its commitment to supporting Saskatchewan artisans seeking to transform their businesses into Économusée®. We call upon all our funders and partners to invest in the Économusée® development project in Saskatchewan."

A spotlight on the trio of Saskatchewan Économusée® reflects the commitment to craft, quality and authenticity, and to providing exceptional guest experiences.



Over the Hill Orchards and Winery

Over the Hill Orchards and Winery opened in 2000, with a focus on growing and selling organic fruit and related products. The agri-business rapidly evolved and expanded its offerings to showcase unique growing techniques and food production, welcome guests for onsite tours, and host events that highlight Saskatchewan ingredients and culinary expertise.

When owners Dean and Sylvia Kreutzer were officially awarded Économusée® designation four years ago, they shared their personal

Continued on page 18

Hospitality Saskatchewan Awards presented at celebration in Saskatoon

Hospitality Saskatchewan is the province's tourism industry association and advocates on behalf of the entire tourism sector. Formerly the Saskatchewan Hotel and Hospitality Association (SHHA), the organization builds on the previous work of the SHHA and pursues an expanded mandate to represent the broader interests of tourism operators and businesses in Saskatchewan. Its responsibilities include managing a tourism industry award program.

The Hospitality Saskatchewan Awards dinner and presentations were celebrated in Saskatoon on September 26. Tourism Saskatchewan extends congratulations to the award recipients and finalists, and acknowledges the newly named Tourism Builders – Bernard Shepherd, Morris and Sue McLachlan, and Hugh Vassos.



Business of the Year Award
(20 employees & over)
Adventure Destinations Inc., northern Saskatchewan
Additional finalists: Tunnels of Moose Jaw; Wanuskewin Heritage Park, Saskatoon

Megan Foster, Controller; Laura Hale, General Manager, Adventure Destinations Inc.



Rookie of the Year Award
Campbell's Racing Sled Dog Tours, Melfort
Additional finalists: CollabARTive Studios, Weyburn; Life Outside Gear Exchange, Saskatoon

Aaron and Charlene Campbell, owners, Campbell's Racing Sled Dog Tours



Business of the Year Award
(under 20 employees)
Over the Hill Orchards and Winery, Lumsden area
Additional finalists: Back2Nature Wellness & Adventures, Saskatoon; T&D Amisk Camp, Amisk Lake/Denare Beach

Sylvia and Dean Kreutzer, owners, Over the Hill Orchards and Winery

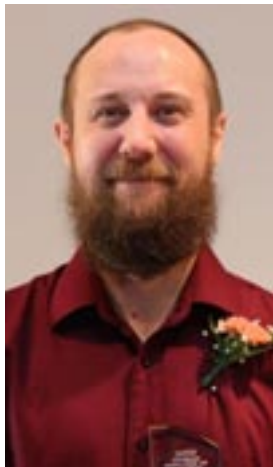


Dakota Dunes Resort representatives
Back row: Betty Chan, Angie Gessner, Chris Standing, Vijendra Singh, Allison Daniels, Darrell Balkwill, Tyrell Fiddler
Front row: Lisa Palmer, Wyatt Brown, Gail Chapalsky



Employer of the Year Award
Gold Eagle Casino, North Battleford
Additional finalist: Delta Hotels by Marriott Regina

Kelly Atcheynum, General Manager; Shane Adams, HR Officer, Gold Eagle Casino



Employee of the Year Award
Logan Farnell, Saskatchewan Science Centre, Regina
Additional finalists: Mona Hepper, Microtel Inns & Suites by Wyndham, Weyburn; Anita Makrodimitriou, Park Town Hotel, Saskatoon



Travel Media Professional of the Year Award

Jennifer Bain, *National Parks Traveler*

Additional finalists: Jane Canapini and Henk Guerts, grownuptravels.com; Yashy Selvadurai Murphy, parentingtogo.com

Tourism Builder Award

Presented by Tourism Saskatchewan, the Tourism Builder Award honours individuals who have made tourism an important part of their life's work. Their actions have helped shape the sector as a vibrant economic contributor and position Saskatchewan as a welcoming destination.



Bernard Shepherd, White Bear First Nations

Former chief and councillor of White Bear First Nations (WBFN), Bernard Shepherd has long been at the forefront of tourism and business developments in his community.

In the late 1980s and early 90s, he was active in a North America-wide dialogue about First Nations gaming operations. Chief Shepherd calmed tensions after the enforced closure of Bear Claw Casino in 1993. He rallied support beyond WBFN, bringing business leaders in southeast Saskatchewan to the defense of gaming activities that boosted tourism and strengthened local economies.

His leadership drove the establishment of a network of Indigenous-led casinos, regulated by the Saskatchewan Indian Gaming Authority (SIGA), that employ over 1,600 people.



Morris and Sue McLachlan, Waskesiu Marina Adventure Centre, Prince Albert National Park

Operation of Waskesiu Marina Adventure Centre in Prince Albert National Park (PANP) is truly a family affair. Morris and Sue McLachlan acquired the business in 1999. With the support of their daughters, grandchildren and other relatives, they have grown it to be the largest inland marina facility in Western Canada.

With more than 300 boat slips, state-of-the-art infrastructure and exceptional customer service, this business staple within the Waskesiu community is like no other in Saskatchewan. With ties to the national park for five generations, the McLachlan's connection to PANP runs deep. Sue worked for Parks Canada for 30 years and spent her childhood summers at the lake, while Morris' family has owned various enterprises in the park since 1946.



Hugh Vassos, Saskatoon

Hugh Vassos has been a pivotal figure in the tourism industry for almost 40 years. He was the first Vice-President and founding director of the Tourism Industry Association of Saskatchewan (TISASK). His involvement in events and sports tourism brought large-scale championships to the province that generated millions in economic activity.

Vassos helped attract the Vanier Cup championship to Saskatoon in 2006. The event was the first Vanier Cup played in western Canada. He assisted in bringing the 2010 IIHF World Junior Hockey Championship to Saskatchewan.

Since 1995, he has been the owner and president of the Vassos Marketing Group, which provides contract marketing and consulting to clients. He has also been the owner and president of VMC Sports & Entertainment Corporation since 2016.

Saskatchewan tourism businesses expand Économusée® network (*continued*)

interpretation of the concept. "It's all about stories – every person, every artist, every entrepreneur has an interesting story, but few opportunities to tell it," Dean said. "Being an Économusée® is like opening a book that allows you to peek inside and see the history of where we came from and how it has guided us to where we are now."

The Kreutzers are delighted by the additions to the province's Économusée® network and the opportunities for cross-promotion to local audiences and international travellers. "It's really impressive to see people coming on board and embracing tourism," Sylvia said. "Anything we can do to bring more people to Saskatchewan is beneficial."

She added that involvement in the network and with the CÉCS supports offering services in both official languages and having a bilingual staff member always on hand. "But Économusée® is global and exists not just for French-speaking travellers," she said. "It's primarily set up for artists and artisans to showcase what they do and how they do it – to be able to tell their story."



Susan Robertson Pottery

Susan Robertson celebrated two milestones in 2023 – her 40-year career as a ceramics artist and her official welcome into the international Économusée® movement. Her studio produces solely hand-built pottery and is one of two in Canada that uses this technique only. Designs are inspired by nature and reflect the colours, shapes and images of the surrounding landscape and environment.

She credits the Saskatchewan Craft Council for "planting the seed" that led to conversations with the CÉCS and the Économusée® Society Network. Her six-year journey involved an ambitious studio redesign to meet the requirements. Robertson's new studio in Broderick is fully accessible and includes workshop space for guests to learn traditional pottery techniques.

"For anyone considering the process, patience is needed – it can be a lengthy endeavour, but wonderful at the same time," Robertson said. "The partners want to support your vision – there is no cookie-cutter approach. They work with you to determine what is special and unique."

Robertson has a method for championing and explaining the Économusée® concept. Her tactics are to share the history of the movement and explain its Quebec origin and expansion across the globe. "You have to help people understand that it is an international network that is helping us to create a destination where people come for an experience," she said. "What we offer here, as craftspeople, is a glimpse into our lives. That's very much part of the

history of craft. I feel it is a responsibility, as a senior craftsperson, to share the knowledge and encourage another generation of participants and artists."



Black Fox Farm & Distillery

Black Fox Farm & Distillery has earned a stellar reputation for its exceptional hospitality, unique experiences and award-winning products. Owners John Cote and Barb Stefanyshyn-Cote are proud to add Économusée® to their list of distinctions. "It brings recognition to craftsmanship and to our commitment to traditional, authentic practices," Stefanyshyn-Cote said.

She emphasized that the operation is one of very few in the province that qualifies for a Type 1 distilling licence – granted to businesses that start with 100 per cent raw ingredients. "Black Fox takes it a step further by using raw ingredients that we've grown ourselves. That's what makes our products rare."

Stefanyshyn-Cote stressed the broad exposure that comes with involvement in a global movement. "Being an Économusée® has put our products and experiences in front of French-speaking and international audiences, and enabled us to offer bilingual services – something that's important and helps us be more accessible."

As the Économusée® network gains traction in Saskatchewan, Stefanyshyn-Cote has a clear message that will help foster understanding and cultivate interest. "I want people to know that when they visit an Économusée®, they are visiting true artisans who care about the quality and the experience people have with their products. The passion of craftsmanship goes deep. I want people to recognize that when they are at an Économusée®, they can see and feel that passion, the artistry, and purpose behind the businesses that were chosen to be part of this movement."

Three additional Saskatchewan businesses are working through the qualification process and on their way to earning Économusée® status: Prairie Bee Meadery (Moose Jaw), SS River Designs (St. Louis) and Crossmount Cider Company (Saskatoon).

Visit artisansaloeuvre.com (Artisans at Work) for more details about the people at the heart of Économusées® in Saskatchewan.

Destination Canada reports on high-value travellers – what they want and how to attract them (*continued*)

High-end accommodations redefined

High-value travellers appreciate something beyond five-star luxury. Win them over with a bespoke approach that caters to their individual needs and interests. Experience-led amenities, such as properties that provide guests with opportunities to explore nature, be immersed in local culture or participate in sustainability initiatives are gaining popularity. Canadian cities have the advantage of being “on the edge of nature” – guests can enjoy the comforts of top accommodations in close proximity to some of the world’s iconic natural attractions.

Expect unexpected, last minute requests

Most high-value guests favour last minute plans, and it is common for them to extend their stay while on a trip. It pays to be flexible and able to fulfil their needs on short notice. High satisfaction rates, reviews advising longer stays and 24/7 client support are persuasive factors. The quality of available activities also plays in decisions to postpone departure and enjoy more time at a destination.

Reviews matter

Reviews from other high-value travellers are influential at the booking stage, and can make or break vacation choices. Travel influencers and social media also play an important role in decision-making. The sweeping reach of social media can put lesser-known destinations in front of new audiences seeking the type of adventures or experiences offered.

Make the most of opportune moments

Research shows that a pivotal moment in the visitor journey is when guests arrive. How can you elevate the experience to make them feel special and welcome? Other key moments are at the completion of all intended pre-bookings or near the conclusion of a trip. What are you doing to create lasting memories, favourable reviews and positive word-of-mouth?

Canada seen as a winter destination

The report credits exceptional natural attractions as the top factor that high-value travellers associate with Canada (41 per cent). Family

friendliness and reputation as a winter destination follow (31 and 29 per cent, respectively). The nation’s welcoming and inclusive culture is also well known.

Across all regions surveyed, Canada is primarily seen as a winter destination. This widespread perception, along with abundant winter activities and adventures, are deemed reasons to recommend Canada to high-value travellers. European respondents, above other groups, shared that these high-yielding clients recognize Canada as offering outdoor sightseeing, though noted there is still general lack of awareness of the country’s key selling points.

A majority of North American and APAC respondents (58 per cent and 54 per cent, respectively) would urge high-value clients to put Canada on their travel shortlist for the upcoming year.

A quarter of all respondents said that Indigenous culture and history provides reason to recommend Canada as a destination. From DC’s perspective, “this reflects a wider trend of Indigenous experiences becoming one of the most enriching ways for travellers to immerse themselves in culture by sharing traditions, history and stories.”

Furthermore, experiencing Indigenous culture aligns with wider themes that attract high-value guests – conscious travel, exploring and appreciating nature, and accessing authentic, off-the-beaten-path experiences.

The Laws of Attraction for High-Value Guests is available at destinationcanada.com/en/lawsofattraction. An infographic is also posted that lists 10 tactics to appeal to high-spend travellers.

Federal Tourism Growth Strategy a roadmap for a sustainable, prosperous and inclusive industry

The Government of Canada introduced its new Federal Tourism Growth Strategy on July 4. Titled *Canada 365: Welcoming the World Every Day*, the strategy “sets a vision to harness the power of tourism to generate economic growth in communities across the country and drive the sector to the next level of international success.”

Up front, the document highlights solid figures indicating an encouraging rebound of Canada’s tourism sector. At the end of 2022:

- The number of tourism businesses recovered to 93 per cent of 2019 levels. Over 218,000 businesses supported the visitor economy in 2022, the vast majority being small- and medium-sized enterprises.
- Tourism jobs were back to 90 per cent of pre-pandemic levels. The sector reported 1.9 million jobs across Canada in 2022.
- Tourism revenue reached \$93.7 billion, 89 per cent of the \$105 billion recorded in 2019.
- GDP measured \$37.7 billion, 87 per cent of the 2019 figure (\$43.5 billion). The World Travel and Tourism Council predicts that tourism’s contribution to Canada’s GDP could double by 2033.
- Service exports measured 12.6 per cent in 2022, a difference of -6.1 from the 2019 figure (18.7 per cent). The visitor economy is recognized as one of Canada’s top service exports.

Prioritizing tourism growth

Pre-pandemic, tourism grew at an annual rate of five per cent, twice as fast as the national economy. Though a major player in the Canadian economy, tourism’s contributions and its growth potential are largely unrecognized. The strategy will advance the nation’s tourism industry and position Canada as a top global destination by focusing on five priorities:

- Investing in Canada’s tourism assets;
- Embracing recreation and the great outdoors;
- Partnering to grow Indigenous tourism;
- Attracting more international events; and
- Improving co-ordination through a federal ministerial council.

Canada 365: Welcoming the World Every Day is proclaimed a strategy for a modern Canada. It recognizes the role of the visitor economy in empowering and advancing equity-seeking and marginalized groups. Numerous points addressed in the document speak to Saskatchewan’s strengths as a destination that has “what the world wants” – experiences that global travellers are seeking. Among the list of assets highlighted, Saskatchewan has definite advantages and potential for greater development in specific areas, including the following:

- Iconic assets – geography, biodiversity and wilderness on the edge of cosmopolitan urban centres
- Parks and biosphere reserves
- Diversity of winter sports

Continued on page 20

Federal Tourism Growth Strategy a roadmap for a sustainable, prosperous and inclusive industry (*continued*)

- Trans Canada Trail connections
- UNESCO World Heritage Sites
- Museums, galleries, heritage institutions
- Culinary experiences – from farm-to-table dining to Indigenous cuisine, and more

Overall, the strategy focuses on segments of the tourism sector with immediate and strong growth potential. Guiding principles, summarized below, underscore Tourism Saskatchewan's focus on key niche experiences to attract high-yield visitors. This niche market focus centres on astrotourism, birding, nature-based wellness, Indigenous tourism, agri/culinary tourism and snowmobiling.

Equity, diversity and inclusion – *“The tourism sector cannot grow without having a mindset to promote accessibility for everyone.”* Persons with disabilities contribute greatly to the tourism workforce, and also account for a growing segment of international travellers. As barriers to travel and tourism are addressed, this market will continue to increase.

In order for tourism in Saskatchewan and Canada to grow and achieve its potential, the industry must be accessible, equitable and welcoming to all. The federal strategy states that last year, women and youth accounted for a higher percentage of the tourism labour force than in the overall workforce. Additionally, more majority owners of tourism business owners are women, racialized Canadians or newcomers to Canada.

Reconciliation in action – *“Authentic experiences led by Indigenous communities and enterprises are in high demand and represent a unique experience to the world.”* Greater investment and collaboration will elevate Canada to a top spot for authentic Indigenous tourism experiences. Focus on this strong growth segment advances reconciliation by increasing employment and supporting economic growth. *“By sharing their cultures and approaches to environmental stewardship, and extending their hospitality to the world, First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities and businesses can achieve increased prosperity, heritage preservation, and self-determination.”*

Sustainable and regenerative approaches – *“No matter the country of origin, the global traveller increasingly considers their footprint when making tourism decisions.”* Many tourism operators are adopting greener practices and there is a dramatic increase in activities founded on environmentally sustainable practices or regenerative approaches. Encouraging more visitors in the shoulder and winter seasons and to lesser-travelled areas will help reduce the impacts of over-tourism.

Focus on rural Canada – *“Tourism provides billions of dollars in revenue and 10 per cent of local jobs in rural areas.”* Tourism benefits communities by diversifying and strengthening the economic base and viability. It also helps to preserve local culture, language and heritage. Additionally, 62 per cent of Indigenous tourism businesses are in rural and remote areas. Tourism development and growing the visitor economy in rural areas can revitalize communities, create fulfilling jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities, signal infrastructure improvements, and more.

The following are additional highlights from the comprehensive strategy:

Leverage Canada's brand – The Canadian brand is associated with natural spaces, authentic Indigenous experiences, and environmental commitment and stewardship. Communities that celebrate and promote diverse cultural practices become a captive audience for art, film and music festivals. Leveraging the nation's strengths benefits other industries – culinary, craft breweries and wineries, etc.

Traditionally, the majority of travellers visit during peak summer months. In order to entice and welcome more guests, there must be an effort to expand into winter and shoulder seasons, and enhance Canada's brand and presence in target markets. Canada can also be more proactive in attracting events to communities large and small – business meetings and conferences, sports championships and cultural events.

Rebuild the workforce – A sustained, skilled workforce will propel tourism growth. The industry is largely an employer of youth, women, Indigenous peoples, new Canadians, and people of diverse backgrounds. Expanding the tourism workforce fosters and promotes inclusive economic growth. Communities that promote tourism as a career of first resort have experienced success in the face of changing industrial priorities and competitiveness that emerged during the pandemic. Collectively, governments, educational institutions and employers can change the narrative for the sector and the diverse skillset that powers it.

Promote sustainability – *“Every action, big and small, goes a long way to make the sector more resilient and contribute to the long-term prosperity of the sector and our planet.”* There is growing consensus among the tourism industry of the need to embrace low-carbon pathways. Tourism businesses are also showing greater commitment to reducing waste production and lowering water and energy consumption.

An industry composed of mostly small businesses, tourism can offer unique approaches to fulfilling sustainability goals while focusing on day-to-day operations. Assistance, co-ordination and partnerships are fundamental to efforts to adapt to climate change and improve infrastructure, sites and destinations.

Source: Government of Canada. *Canada 365: Welcoming the World. Every Day.*, 2022.

Return Undeliverable Canadian Addresses
to:

TOURISM SASKATCHEWAN
189 - 1621 Albert Street
Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada
S4P 2S5
E-mail: travel.info@tourismsask.com

TourismSaskatchewan.com
1-877-237-2273

