

GOING PLACES

NOVEMBER 2021

kâniyâsihk Culture Camps
– 20 years of sharing land-based
teachings and Cree knowledge

Tina Varughese gives
candid advice about
diversity and inclusion

Restart Marketing
Strategy and Place DNA®
guide tourism recovery

AWESome experience
development programs
inspire new tourism
offerings

SASKATCHEWAN'S TOURISM INDUSTRY NEWSLETTER

TOURISM
Saskatchewan
CANADA

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COVER IMAGE

Kevin Lewis, kâniyâsihk Culture Camps founder

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.

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Amy McInnis named Executive Director of Marketing and Communications



Tourism Saskatchewan is pleased to welcome Amy McInnis to the role of Executive Director of Marketing and Communications. McInnis joined the organization in 2009 and held positions in travel media, travel trade and industry development prior to becoming Marketing Manager in 2017, then Director of Marketing three years later. Throughout 2020-2021, she has been integral to planning and implementing actions for tourism recovery and rebuilding the visitor economy.

McInnis officially undertook her new role on September 1 after serving as Acting Executive Director of Marketing and Communications. She leads the teams responsible for marketing, communications and visitor services.

MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

Jonathan Potts sees new role as opportunity to make a difference



Hello! It is my pleasure to greet you with my first official *Going Places* message as CEO of Tourism Saskatchewan. Having worked in the industry for 25 years, including the last 15 at Tourism Saskatchewan, I have met thousands of great people, both inside and outside of tourism, and experienced some of the best that Saskatchewan has to offer. I am thrilled to work with you, our team, our board, and our government to grow the industry and share Saskatchewan's stories with the world.

In the short term, Tourism Saskatchewan's team is focused on helping to restart our industry, coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic. The impacts of the pandemic have been widespread and are ongoing. Among the worst hit industries are outfitting, business travel, events, hotels and hospitality, and our airports, which serve as the gateways to most of our international visitors. Many of the challenges we face are also opportunities to take positive action, go the extra mile to advance our operators and industry, and position Saskatchewan for a strong recovery.

Saskatchewan's ten-year Growth Plan targets annual visitor expenditures to increase by 50 per cent to \$3.6 billion in 2030. The COVID-19 pandemic set visitor spending back to under \$1.2 billion in 2020, but due to the hard work and perseverance of the industry, expenditures in 2021 are on track to reach \$1.8 billion. Reaching our 2030 target means using market research to identify new markets, working with industry to plan and develop new experiences, and adapting quickly to develop and maintain competitive positions in these markets.

Tourism Saskatchewan's work focuses primarily on three strategic priorities:

- Market Saskatchewan tourism experiences and stories
- Strengthen Saskatchewan tourism experiences
- Improve destination competitiveness

Pre-pandemic, Tourism Saskatchewan introduced a ten-year Destination Development Strategy – a framework for strengthening Saskatchewan's appeal through the creation of innovative products and compelling

experiences. In 2020, we unveiled a comprehensive Restart Marketing Strategy to guide recovery of the visitor economy and build a stronger, more resilient industry. Both documents form a playbook to guide our industry through the current upheaval and to take advantage of new opportunities, post-pandemic.

COVID-19 has reinforced the value of staying connected. Tourism Saskatchewan needs to hear the concerns and see the opportunities that the industry is experiencing in order to make the best business decisions. In the past, we have largely relied on in-person meetings and electronic surveys to acquire your feedback. Advancements in technology enable us to add virtual meetings to this list. Plans are underway to create more opportunities to connect with industry and hear from operators. Please stay tuned for more information.

It is a pleasure to welcome new team members at Tourism Saskatchewan: Mark England, who recently rejoined us as Director of Destination Development, and Brooke Lochbaum, who is fresh to the role of Director of Marketing. Amy McInnis, who was previously in this position, transitioned to Executive Director of Marketing and Communications in September. With our new management team fully in place, we are ready to head towards our \$3.6 billion goal.

These have been a difficult couple of years for everyone, but most experts agree that we are starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel. As Saskatchewan's tourism industry looks to grow again, I am confident that the creative, entrepreneurial, and hard-working people in our sector will drive our visitor economy to new heights. Please know that our talented team at Tourism Saskatchewan is grateful to work alongside you and help you achieve your goals. Thank you for all that you do.

Jonathan Potts

About Jonathan ...

Jonathan Potts was born and raised in Swift Current, SK. After graduating from the University of Saskatchewan, he spent a decade as an industry consultant in Saskatoon before joining Tourism Saskatchewan in 2006 as Director of Industry Development. He transitioned to the role of Director of Marketing in 2010 and was appointed Executive Director of Marketing and Communications in 2014. On July 1, 2021, he began his tenure as CEO.

Potts's leadership and expertise are recognized by colleagues across Canada. He has contributed to national committees and helped forge solid relationships with provincial and national partners. In 2020, he led the development of strategies for recovery of Saskatchewan's tourism industry and a re-start of the visitor economy, post COVID-19.

Board of Directors visits Meadow Lake area



Top: Board of Directors tours Meadow Lake Provincial Park
Bottom: Visiting Buck Country Outfitters, near Goodsoil

A Treasury Board Crown Corporation, Tourism Saskatchewan is led by an eight-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 Norm Beug, Chair; Cory Rideout, Vice-Chair; Kevin Dureau; Brian Hoffart; Sandra LeBarre; Jessica McNaughton; Shawna Nelson; and Kim Wondrasek.

Pre-COVID-19, annual board retreats were scheduled in various parts of the province. These assemblies presented opportunities to meet operators, visit local tourism businesses and gain firsthand knowledge about the products and experiences offered.

Virtual meetings replaced in-person sessions throughout much of 2020 and 2021. In September, the first board retreat in two years was held. Health and safety precautions were considered at every step in the planning process. The visit to the Meadow Lake area enabled board members to see how tourism businesses in the region have adapted to the challenges posed by COVID-19.

Waters Edge Eco-Lodge in Meadow Lake Provincial Park was home base and proved an ideal setting for board and committee meetings. Owner Shelly Pikowicz treated her guests to remarkable hospitality and kept them well nourished.

Board members toured Buck Country Outfitters with owners Dean and Jana Kuypers, and gained understanding of some of the challenges facing the outfitting industry. A meet-and-greet lunch with a small group of operators was held at Northern Meadows Golf Course, Goodsoil. Owners Ken and Louise Olan went above and beyond to help organize the event.

A full afternoon was spent touring Meadow Lake Provincial Park with park manager Trevor Finlay. The itinerary took the group through the Greig Lake Visitor Centre and to several campgrounds. There was time for a short hike along the Wolf Bay Trail on Lac des Isles before heading back to the lodge.

Tourism Saskatchewan extends thanks to the host operators and to everyone who shared their time and insights.

Mark England rejoins Tourism Saskatchewan as Director of Destination Development



Tourism Saskatchewan recently welcomed the return of Mark England, who assumed the role of Director of Destination Development on October 18. He spent a decade with the organization as Industry Development Consultant before accepting a position as Director of Marketing at Saskatchewan Polytechnic in 2019. Earlier in his career, he was Marketing Manager of the West Central Tourism Association.

England leads the team responsible for industry development initiatives and for implementing recommendations in the ten-year Destination Development Strategy for Saskatchewan. He follows Kwame Neba, who accepted a position in Iqaluit as Vice-President of Operations for the Workers' Safety and Compensation Commission.

Brooke Lochbaum welcomed as Director of Marketing



Tourism Saskatchewan is pleased to welcome Brooke Lochbaum, who stepped into the role of Director of Marketing on October 25. She spent the past five years with the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport, most recently in the position of Executive Director of Marketing and Communications. At the ministry, she oversaw campaigns promoting Saskatchewan provincial parks, the Status of Women Office and the Royal Saskatchewan Museum.

Lochbaum was an account planner with Phoenix Group for six years, where she managed Tourism Saskatchewan's portfolio and those of other clients, including Access Communications and Sask Sport. In her new role, she is responsible for campaigns and activities that promote Saskatchewan as a destination. She takes over from Amy McInnis, who is now Executive Director of Marketing and Communications.

kâniyâsihk Culture Camps marks 20 years of sharing land-based teachings and Cree knowledge



kâniyâsihk Culture Camps, Ministikwan Lake Cree Nation, offers immersive land-based learning experiences year round

Dr. Kevin Lewis wears many hats – educator, guide, knowledge and language keeper, scholar, researcher and founder of kâniyâsihk Culture Camps. When asked if there is a comparable term in Cree, he replied, “oskâpêwis – a person who is a server, who serves the community and helps the Elders. That person might develop into one of the best hunters, berry pickers or medicine gatherers. You are making sure that everybody is fed, everybody is looked after, but also looking out for yourself and staying healthy so you can continue the work.”

Lewis is celebrating 20 years of offering immersive, land-based learning experiences that welcome Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants and bridge generations, cultures and disciplines. Like its founder, kâniyâsihk Culture Camps is multi-faceted. Programming shifts and evolves to address challenges, adapt to changing times, and continue to serve and make positive change.

The program started on the Ministikwan Lake Cree Nation, on Treaty 6 territory, where the main camp has grown to be a year-round operation. As an educator, Lewis challenged the confines of standard curriculum and developed courses outside of school boundaries. Students explored subjects – science, social studies, language, arts – by experiencing nature and reconnecting to their origins, to the wisdom of past generations.

“From the beginning to where we are now, we’ve expanded,” Lewis said, noting participants from

First Nations, public, private and religious schools, universities, colleges, social work and education programs, as well as professionals in a range of fields. “We’re certifying paddlers and hikers, certifying teachers on how to take students out into nature in a safe manner, where you can challenge them without ‘bubble wrapping.’ We work with partners, such as Outdoor Council of Canada, Outward Bound Canada, Paddle Canada, the Red Cross and others, following the programming that’s required for each certificate and enhancing it with Indigenous knowledge and traditions.”

Lewis acknowledged the positive, reciprocal experiencing of welcoming and hosting guests. “We’ve made devout friends over 20 years and continue to make more. When people visit, they bring health, they bring friendship. It’s not just us delivering a program or saying, ‘we’re going to certify you in this, we’re going to show you that.’ They, as equals, bring their teachings, as well.”

The COVID-19 pandemic demanded some adjustment to program delivery to ensure the safety of guests and team members. At the same time, the reality of a global pandemic inspired some fresh changes and new offerings, such as hide-tanning camps.

Interest in kâniyâsihk Culture Camps grew along with increased demand for outdoor experiences; however, visitor numbers were kept to a minimum to protect people and curtail the spread of

COVID-19. Greater focus was placed on taking the camp model and showing others how to introduce it in their communities.

Lewis’ influence has inspired several land-based learning projects in Saskatchewan. “We need more places like this – places where you feel safe and free to be yourself,” he said. “When you become confident in who you are, you’re not afraid to share and open yourself up to other cultures, to other friends. That’s when long-lasting relationships and bonds are created.”

Looking ahead, Lewis recognizes opportunities to welcome more guests and help grow the local visitor economy post-pandemic. A recipient of stimulus funding from the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC), kâniyâsihk Culture Camps has added four new, winterized cabins with solar panels.

The new cabins complement three smaller, existing cabins on the property. Work is also proceeding on a camp kitchen area, along with other upgrades. Lewis acknowledges the valuable partnership with ITAC, calling the investment a “godsend” that will expand winter offerings and keep people working.

Discover more about kâniyâsihk Culture Camps at kaniyasihkculturecamps.com.

#bringourchildrenhome

Lewis and his team have developed a land-based therapeutic program specifically for children in care and families at risk. The program will be a model for other First Nations and help them keep families together. “We call it pê-kiwêk!,” Lewis said, recalling a story from an Elder. “He spoke from his vision, in which he saw each person choosing a single canoe. The Elder said, ‘An individual cannot live in two canoes and yet know who they are.’”

The kâniyâsihk Healing /Therapeutic Centre pê-kiwêk! will bring healing to people by investing in youth at risk and their families. The program welcomes participants from near and far. “They will stay in this peaceful place called FireSong Resort, and have access to all the support they need and to Elders,” Lewis said. “They will find their way by being amongst those who paddle alongside them, personally and professionally.”

RESEARCH AND TRENDS

New fishing and hunting website scores high with users

Due to border closures and travel restrictions in 2020 and 2021, Tourism Saskatchewan pivoted from actively promoting the province to devising strategies for industry recovery. This shift in focus included identifying opportunities to expand Saskatchewan's presence in the U.S. market and strengthen its position as a premier angling and hunting destination.

A key output of the work is the new stand-alone website, FishHunt.TourismSaskatchewan.com, launched in July. The site will play an essential role in travel planning by providing easy access to desired information and a seamless user experience. It features travel and licensing information, outfitter listings, blog articles, travel offers and more. Dedicated entirely to Saskatchewan fishing and hunting adventures, the new website is a call to action for all of Tourism Saskatchewan's outdoor campaigns.

A stand-alone website helps anglers and hunters find engaging content and planning information to move them down the path to purchase. These potential customers require a richer, more personalized content experience than the more general audience that accesses the consumer website TourismSaskatchewan.com.

Hosting influential outdoor media from across North America is a key tactic for marketing outfitting. A dedicated site is essential to leveraging that influential content and bringing attention to Saskatchewan outfitters.

Tourism Saskatchewan and Environics Research conducted user testing throughout August and September to determine if the website meets the needs of the U.S. angling and hunting market. The project involved 35 online interviews with a mix of past visitors familiar with Saskatchewan fishing and hunting experiences and potential new visitors.

How do destination websites factor in the customer journey?

Early in the trip-planning process, anglers and hunters tend to find inspiration from talking to their peers and consuming content from YouTube shows, podcasts and forums that allow them to interact with like-minded people.

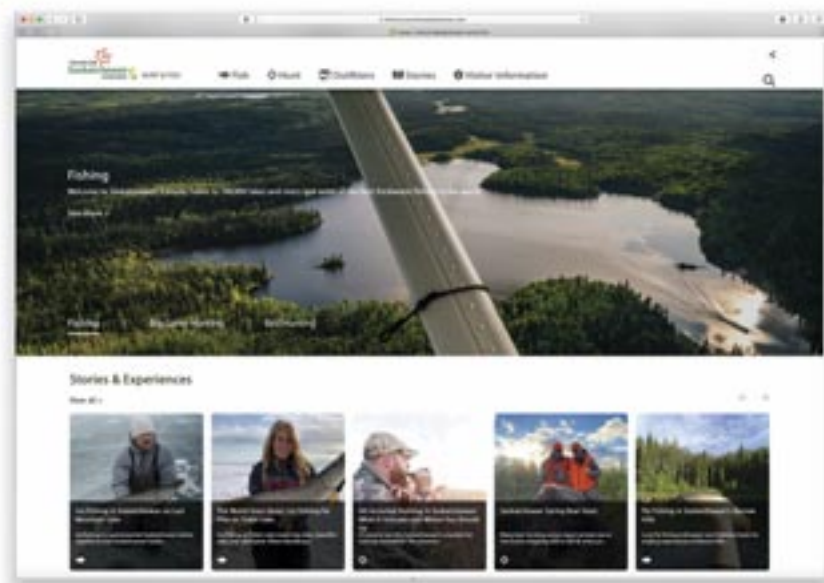
While official destination websites are generally used in later stages of vacation planning, Tourism Saskatchewan determined opportunity for early engagement. Research participants considered the new website to be particularly effective as a source of inspiration and generally seen as superior to other official sites. Overall impressions and feedback on the design and content, including use, navigation and specific content pages, were very positive and the study identified areas to enhance for optimal effectiveness.

Adding and organizing resources that support trip planning can turn a website into a one-stop shop for anglers and hunters. Based on this feedback, additional content and features, such as weather information, maps and improved filter options, are priorities for further enrichment.

Entice visitors with relatable stories and testimonials

Survey participants generally appreciated blogs featured in the Stories and Experiences section; however, some felt the content focused too heavily on selling and missed the human element that could help them relate to experiences.

There was a common desire for stories and testimonials from "people like me." Participants expressed clear demand for written or filmed accounts of anglers and hunters who have travelled to Saskatchewan. They appreciate firsthand stories that highlight experiences both good and bad. This aligns with their tendency to trust word-of-mouth above messages that are promotional in nature and emphasize only positive aspects of a destination.



Include ratings with your outfitter listing

Most survey participants rely on word-of-mouth or testimonials/references from other hunters to vet an outfitter. The website's outfitter listing surprised them by how well it is organized and by the number of outfitters included. While most said they would use the site to narrow down choices, their next step would be to start looking for references and testimonials.

Participants liked the TripAdvisor Rating scale; however not all outfitters provide this information. Price, map location and the ability to add peer reviews are the key features to take the outfitter listings page to the next level of service and efficiency.

Insights from this research will shape improvements to FishHunt.TourismSaskatchewan.com and enable Tourism Saskatchewan to adapt to user needs and expectations.

TOP FIVE TIPS FOR ENHANCING OUTFITTING WEBSITES

- 1) Include recent images and testimonials from previous clients.** Potential clients want to see images taken by other anglers and hunters and know when the pictures were taken.
- 2) Include landscape and aerial photos.** Images that show off pristine water, terrain and the remoteness of your region grab attention and are considered as important as pictures of game.
- 3) Consider extra features like terrain maps, field cameras and migration routes.** These tools can differentiate your business website from competitors.
- 4) Highlight your unique selling proposition.** A clear, compelling message front and centre will push inspiration to actual consideration. Show potential clients adventures available only in Saskatchewan.
- 5) Highlight the importance of conservation.** Most hunters who participated in the website testing emphasized the importance of conservation. They welcome content about responsible outfitters and conservation efforts in Saskatchewan.

Summer travel shows modest rebound in visitation and employment

Saskatchewan's tourism industry showed some signs of recovery this summer, particularly in visitation and labour market figures.

Vaccine uptake and the removal of COVID-19 health orders and restrictions had some bearing on the increase in travel to and within the province. At the same time, the abundance of parks and nature-based activities made the province favourable with people wishing to stay close to home and vacation in spacious, outdoor settings.

Travel to/within Saskatchewan up this summer

In June-August 2021, 1.84 million Canadians (including Saskatchewan residents) made an overnight trip to/within the province, up 11 per cent from the same period in 2020 (Figure 1). Interestingly, it is only a 5 per cent decrease from figures recorded in 2019, before the outbreak of COVID-19.

Visitors this summer accounted for 3.04 million trips to/within the province, up 8 per cent from last year.¹ The total number of overnight stays in Saskatchewan was 7.6 million, an increase of 14 per cent from 2020 and 9 per cent higher than the same period in 2019.

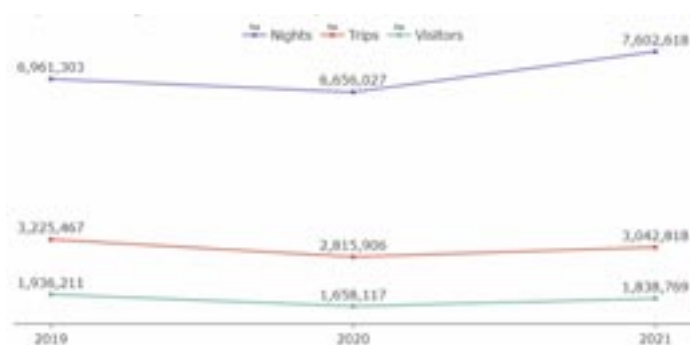


Figure 1. Overnight travel to/within Saskatchewan in summer

The number of domestic overnight visitors to Saskatchewan rose this summer across all seven tourism regions in the province. Figure 2 shows increases above 2020 figures ranging from 5.8 per cent in northern Saskatchewan to 23.8 per cent in Saskatoon. The number of visitors to Regina and the west central region was up by approximately 20 per cent.

Compared to 2019, visitation to Regina and Saskatoon trailed considerably. The cancellation or downsizing of major summer festivals and events, due to COVID-19, may factor in slower recovery for these areas. Southeast, east central, west central and northern Saskatchewan surpassed 2019 summer levels, underscoring a preference for rural, less crowded destinations.

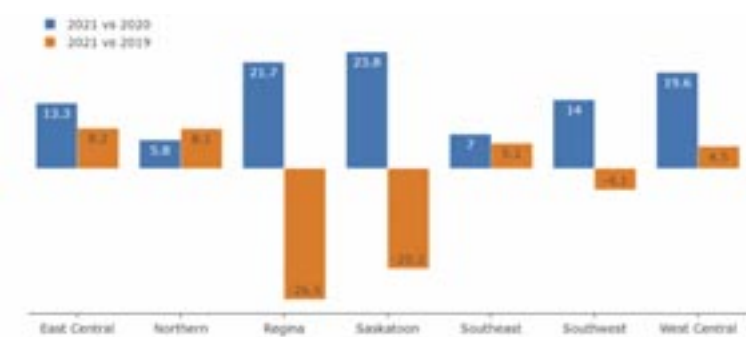


Figure 2. Year over year change of domestic overnight visitors to Saskatchewan, June-August (%)

Tourism labour market sees modest recovery

In August, 57,200 people were employed in the tourism industry in Saskatchewan. This is a 14.4 per cent increase from 2020, but still 18 per cent below the pre-pandemic peak in August 2019.

Figure 3 highlights the year over year change in hiring figures. The recreation and entertainment industry had the strongest recovery this summer in terms of employment, with a 31 per cent increase over 2020. Similarly, travel services reported strong recovery, with jobs numbering 30 per cent higher than a year ago. The food and beverage industry also made job gains in August, measuring 15 per cent higher. On the contrary, the accommodation and transportation industries saw lower employment figures.

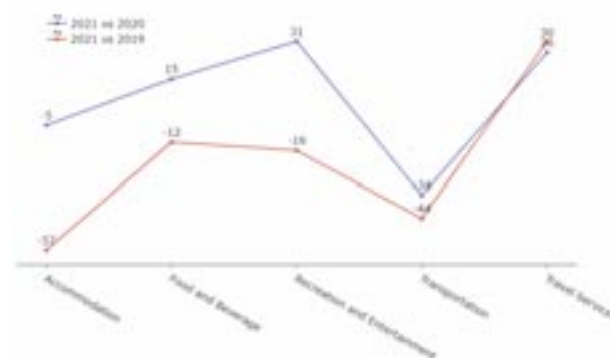


Figure 3. Year over year change of tourism employment in Saskatchewan in August (%)

Compared with employment levels in August 2019, the travel services industry showed robust recovery at 26 per cent higher than before the outbreak of COVID-19. All other tourism industries still trail pre-pandemic employment figures.

Record visitation in provincial parks

According to the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport, Saskatchewan provincial parks recorded more than one million entry permit days by October, breaking the record of 834,244 set in 2020. Campers have spent more than 400,000 nights in the parks, surpassing the previous record of 383,902 reached in 2016.

Ups and downs for hotels

Saskatchewan's average hotel occupancy rate showed a rebound in August, measuring 59 per cent versus 38 per cent the previous summer. Some cities, like Prince Albert, recorded higher than pre-COVID-19 occupancy rates. Aligning with visitation patterns mentioned earlier, many Regina and Saskatoon properties struggled to fill rooms during the summer and continue to face setbacks from a fourth wave of COVID-19. Waning consumer confidence and a downturn in business travel, events and conferences are all factors causing concern.

¹ Number of visitors = number of persons who visited a region during a period.
Number of trips = number of overnight trips made by visitors to a region during a period.
Number of nights = number of nights visitors stayed in a region during a trip in a period.

If a person travelled from Ontario to Saskatoon and stopped by Regina, the measurement is one visitor to Saskatchewan, one visitor to Regina and one visitor to Saskatoon. Trip figures are counted likewise – one trip to Saskatchewan, one trip to Regina and one trip to Saskatoon.

Tourism Saskatchewan welcomes winter travel offers

Staycation packages and travel offers can help increase visits during shoulder season and winter. Properties and businesses can list their experiences for free on [TourismSaskatchewan.com](https://www.tourismsaskatchewan.com). The website features a popular Travel Offers section where potential visitors can shop for packages and exclusive offerings.

Tourism Saskatchewan encourages businesses to design and list Travel Offers for the upcoming season. These offers will be an important component of Tourism Saskatchewan's winter marketing campaign.

Advice about creating and posting travel offers is available at [Business.TourismSaskatchewan.com](https://www.business.tourismsaskatchewan.com).

Email information.updates@tourismsask.com to inquire about posting offers.

Measuring Net Promoter Score® identifies destination ambassadors

Saskatchewan's Growth Plan includes a goal of a 50 per cent increase in annual tourism expenditures by 2030. High satisfaction with travel experiences is critical to boosting visitor spending, encouraging longer stays and ensuring repeat visits. Word-of-mouth advocacy, either through face-to-face or online conversations, is fundamental to attracting visitors to Saskatchewan.

Net Promoter Score® (NPS), developed by Frederick Reichheld and Bain & Company in 2002, is a metric that can be used to measure the intention to recommend a travel destination to friends and family. It is also an indicator of overall satisfaction with travel or customer experiences.

How does it work?

Measuring NPS starts with one simple question: "Based on your overall travel experience in Saskatchewan, how likely are you to recommend Saskatchewan as a travel destination to friends and family?"

Visitors answer on a scale from zero (not at all likely) to 10 (extremely likely). People who score nine or 10 are considered promoters – they are your ambassadors. Detractors measure six or lower. In between are passives, who give a grade of seven or eight.

To calculate NPS, subtract the percentage of detractors from the percentage of promoters. The score can range from -100 (very poor) to 100 (world class).

Tourism Saskatchewan began measuring NPS in June 2021 to accomplish three key objectives:

1. Identify Saskatchewan's best promoters
2. Track satisfaction with Saskatchewan as a destination over time
3. Shift priorities towards giving people a more satisfying visitor experience



These are unhappy visitors who will actively recommend against Saskatchewan and may be spreading negative word-of-mouth.

These are indifferent visitors who are just as likely to visit or recommend Saskatchewan as they are our competitors.

These are happy, satisfied visitors who are loyal and committed to Saskatchewan and are likely to recommend visiting Saskatchewan to others.

How was information collected?

Tourism Saskatchewan and the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport launched a short visitor survey in June. The survey was distributed via email to people who stayed at a provincial campsite. Select hotels throughout the province also participated by circulating the survey link through email and placing tent cards with a quick response (QR) code in highly visible locations. Hotel guests could scan the code with their smart phone and then access the survey in the phone's web browser.

What are people saying about Saskatchewan?

Tourism Saskatchewan collected over 3,600 responses within the first three months of the survey. Saskatchewan residents who visited other parts of the province accounted for 87 per cent of responses. Most out-of-province respondents were from Alberta and Manitoba. There were few international participants, given border closures and travel restrictions.

As of September 1, Saskatchewan's NPS amongst non-resident travellers is 59. Although considered an excellent score, it falls short of competitor destinations like British Columbia (66) and Yukon (81). Lack of dining options in parts of the province, transportation (specifically poor road conditions and lack of rest stops) and ease of booking were cited by out-of-province visitors as issues that diminished their travel experience in Saskatchewan.

Tourism Saskatchewan has a goal to increase the province's non-resident NPS by 0.5 points annually

Non-resident Net Promoter Score 65% Promoters – 6% Detractors = 59



Working with Net Promoter Score®

Identifying ambassadors through measuring NPS benefits businesses, attractions, communities and destinations. Satisfied guests who are eager to recommend a destination are more likely to be return visitors. They spend more money while vacationing and influence new visits through their referrals.

Tourism Saskatchewan encourages participation in the NPS initiative. If you are interested in introducing the NPS survey at your business, contact Jeannette Lye at jeannette.lye@tourismsask.com.

IN CONVERSATION

Tina Varughese gives candid advice about diversity and inclusion

Tina Varughese is one of Canada's leading speakers on the topic of workplace diversity and inclusion. She is applauded for her ability to transform businesses and create environments where employees and customers are seen, heard and acknowledged. Her tagline is *Lead. Laugh. Inspire.*, and she has a gift for blending humour and candour to help businesses address difficult issues.

Raised and educated in Saskatchewan, Varughese values the province's wealth of travel experiences and fully understands the potential for tourism growth. In an interview with Tourism Saskatchewan, she shared advice that can elevate workplaces and improve business.

Why is it important for tourism businesses, of all sizes, to take diversity and inclusion seriously?

It comes down to two perspectives: 1) Who are you trying to employ? and 2) Who are you trying to attract? From a recruitment perspective, Saskatchewan is becoming much more culturally diverse. In Saskatoon, almost 23 per cent of the population is foreign born. There are a lot of benefits to understanding some of the cultural nuances and miscommunication that can occur during "water cooler" conversations, in performance feedback, and in how office hierarchy is viewed, depending on where people come from. From a tourism perspective, I think Saskatchewan has so much that would interest international travellers. Just understanding certain things when it comes to diet and foods that can be served and even the non-verbal communication is important.

What is important for tourism businesses to consider in order to be welcoming places to work and visit?

Companies need to look inward – you can have diversity, but that doesn't necessarily go hand-in-hand with inclusion. If you have a diverse work environment where there are a number of people who are culturally different, whose sexual orientation is different or generationally there's a lot of diversity, that's fantastic. But if the inclusion piece isn't there, then it doesn't really matter what your metrics are. I believe – when you see it, you can be it. People need to see that they are represented when it comes to leadership, when it comes to board members. I've heard companies say, "We have great diversity," and point to the IT or accounting departments. It really needs to be company wide, particularly in leadership.

Sometimes it's a matter of giving people opportunities to become visible at work, which can happen in a number of ways. Is it mentoring? Is it during onboarding? Does your company have an onboarding manual for new employees? Are there opportunities to partner new and veteran team members? There are a lot of things companies can do to ensure a welcoming environment.

How do you start difficult conversations about embracing change and empowering staff?

One of the key mistakes that people make is shaming and blaming and calling people out on their behaviour. I'm a big believer of calling people into the conversation, whether it's a courageous or uncomfortable one. Key things to recognize are: What is the intention? What is the impact? For the most part, people's objective is not to be racist or discriminatory in any manner, but the impact can be the opposite. Very good intentioned people can sometimes cause unintentional harm. So, just coming from a place of compassion, awareness and trying to understand someone else's point of view is really important when it comes to having these difficult conversations. But I think the worst thing we can do is not have the conversation at all.



What advice do you have for tourism businesses that are worried about "getting it wrong"?

Mistakes happen. But how are you going to deal with the fallout? It benefits companies to provide diversity equity and inclusion training to staff – not just to avoid unfortunate situations but to understand the opportunities that exist both internally and externally. Business of all sizes need to have some type of respectful workplace policies in place. If you are a small business and may have reservations, consider your goal. If it's to grow, then you should be having these policies in place and a response for difficult situations. There are many things companies can do to safeguard themselves if something does go really wrong.

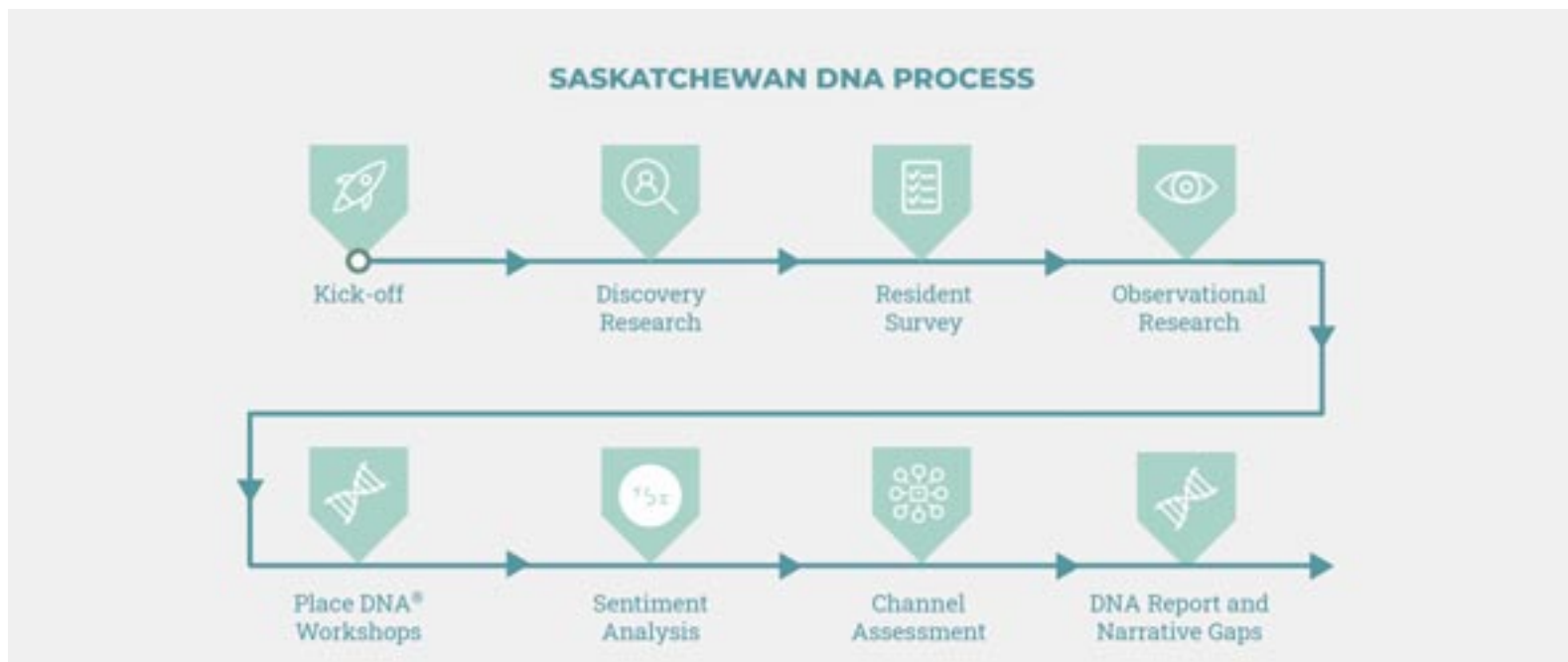
How is embracing diversity and inclusion fundamental to rebuilding a vibrant, resilient tourism sector?

I truly believe that if we are not growing, we are not changing. If companies are not seeing diversity and inclusion as part of their business objectives, growth will be difficult. It's a big part of recruitment. Most Millennials, Gen Ys and Gen Z are looking for socially conscious companies. To be sustainable, you have to understand what the people who you want in your organization are starting to value. There are statistics showing the more resilient and positive the culture, the more profitable, as well. According to the Pierre Elliot Trudeau Foundation, when you increase the ethnic diversity of an organization, you'll see an increase in profits by 35 per cent.

Check out [tworksforyou.ca](https://www.worksforyou.ca) for more insights from Tina Varughese. Sign up for monthly messages and advice on workplace diversity and inclusion.

MARKETING SASKATCHEWAN

Restart Marketing Strategy and Place DNA® guide tourism recovery



Tourism Saskatchewan's partnership with the global firm Destination Think! produced a forward-thinking Restart Marketing Strategy for the province's tourism sector. The strategy's goal far exceeds pre-COVID-19 status quo. It will lead industry through recovery from the pandemic to a position stronger and better than ever.

The Restart Marketing Strategy will build a solid marketing foundation to establish a value-driven future for tourism that engages new high-yield markets and is supported by residents. Over the next two years, work will focus on:

- Evolving and refreshing the province's tourism brand
- Distinguishing regional brands
- Refining target market segments
- Identifying strong niche markets and enhancing Saskatchewan's appeal
- Developing and launching an industry competitiveness program

"At the ground level, Tourism Saskatchewan is constantly assessing opportunities with the greatest potential and that will yield the highest return," Amy McInnis, Executive Director of Marketing and Communications said. "We're updating market segment characteristics, researching new niche and export markets, and refreshing the tourism brand to resonate with potential visitors. A foundational piece is the Place DNA® study that Destination Think! completed this year. Consultation was fundamental and insights were gathered from tourism organizations, businesses and residents across Saskatchewan."

Place DNA® explained

Place DNA® is built on the theory that residents are best positioned to define how a destination can truly deliver on its identity. Locals can be the best (or worst) advocates and notably influence the visitor experience.

According to Destination Think!, "a brand should be authentic and truthful, and it should align with residents and businesses so that it can serve as a catalyst for storytelling rather than an obstruction."

The approach of Destination Think! is to engage the people who live there, find out why they are proud of their home and pinpoint why people should visit. Place DNA® projects typically involve spending time in a community and engaging directly with tourism operators, local leaders and a cross-section of stakeholders. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person meetings gave way to virtual gatherings and conversations.

Collecting Saskatchewan's DNA

A resident survey conducted in 2020 received feedback from 1,200 people. Virtual workshops were held in January and March 2021. The sessions involved nearly 200 Saskatchewan residents and tourism industry representatives from 100 locations – cities, towns, rural areas and Indigenous communities. Lively discussion and a range of sentiments revealed how Saskatchewan is viewed from within, what makes the place tick, and which regional characteristics stand out.

The Place DNA® findings for Saskatchewan are central to the Restart Marketing Strategy and will play a large part in refreshing the province's tourism brand and defining regional brands.

"Place DNA® helps Tourism Saskatchewan better understand the province from the perspective of residents and dig deeper into the regional nuances and unique selling points," McInnis added. "The details uncovered will greatly assist tourism marketing and product development efforts to sharpen Saskatchewan's competitive edge."

Planning next steps

Saskatchewan's Place DNA® will be used extensively to:

- Articulate attributes of the brand at the provincial and regional level
- Establish Saskatchewan's competitive advantage
- Craft a brand promise and identify stories and themes
- Develop a brand strategy
- Gather insights to improve the quality of tourism products and visitor experiences
- Identify and address gaps in how Tourism Saskatchewan and industry stakeholders communicate to target audiences

For more information about Place DNA® and the Restart Marketing Strategy, contact Amy McInnis at 306-787-2313, amy.mcinnis@tourismsask.com.

National Angling Program showcases ice fishing in Saskatchewan



Pre-COVID-19, Tourism Saskatchewan was active in the National Angling Program – a partnership with Destination Canada and several provinces and territories. The coalition of marketing organizations led a pan-Canadian initiative to establish Canada as the premier destination for freshwater fishing among U.S. anglers. Their efforts had buying power for advertising in key markets and acquiring outdoor media exposure.

Pandemic border closures and travel restrictions put the program on hold in 2020. The re-opening of the Canada/U.S. border to fully vaccinated Americans in August 2021 signalled a revival of the National Angling Program and activities to attract high-yield travel markets.

The program aligns with Tourism Saskatchewan's Restart Marketing Strategy. It reinforces immediate actions to support sectors of concern, such as outfitted fishing, and augments long-term plans for a strong, resilient visitor economy.

Current National Angling Program partners include Tourism Saskatchewan, Destination Canada and Travel Manitoba.

Tourism Saskatchewan launched a new campaign this fall to plant ideas about ice fishing. The campaign targets Saskatchewan residents and nearby markets in Alberta, North Dakota and Montana.

Digital advertising, publisher partnerships and activities on social media channels will push viewers towards the new website FishHunt.TourismSaskatchewan.com and to travel offers listed on the site.

Post outdoor travel offers on FishHunt.TourismSaskatchewan.com

Travel offers are an important component of many of Tourism Saskatchewan's campaigns that showcase outdoor adventure. Operators and businesses can list their offers for free on Tourism Saskatchewan's consumer websites.

The new FishHunt.TourismSaskatchewan.com has an exclusive section for packages created by Saskatchewan outfitters. They can be easily searched by location or category – Fishing, Big Game and Game Bird.

Offers on this site are also listed on the main consumer website, TourismSaskatchewan.com, which is a definitive resource for planning a Saskatchewan vacation. The service is available year round, and options are flexible and varied.

A travel offer can include a packaged deal (accommodation, transportation, meals, etc.); value-added incentives, such as equipment rental or meals included in the price; or discounts for a specific amount or percentage.

Advice about creating and posting travel offers is available at Business.TourismSaskatchewan.com.

Email information.updates@tourismsask.com to inquire about posting offers.

Tourism Saskatchewan demystifies approaches to content marketing and social media

Tourism Saskatchewan appreciated the opportunity to participate in the Hospitality Saskatchewan conference and trade show, held in Saskatoon in September. Management and staff led sessions that addressed the current state of tourism and strategies for recovery, details about niche markets, programs to build business and more.

In a presentation on content marketing and social media, Mitch Serbu, Digital Marketing Consultant, and Andrew Hiltz, Content Creation Specialist, provided delegates with valuable takeaways to enhance their online presence and activities. The session demystified some of the concepts that marketing professionals take for granted and offered down-to-earth advice.

Here are a few of the insights shared:

- Tourism Saskatchewan employs a digital-first, consumer-focused, influence-driven approach to content marketing. This means focusing efforts on digital channels and online activities for greater consumer reach and engagement at less cost; understanding target audiences to appeal to their interests and needs; and creating meaningful content (stories, videos, blogs, photo essays, podcasts) that influences travel and buying decisions.
- Up-to-date market research is essential to knowing who are potential visitors to Saskatchewan, where they live and what motivates them to travel.
- The three stages of the customer journey (discovery, consideration/commit, travel/advocate) require different content and types of engagement.
 - Inspire and entice consumers at the point of discovery.
 - Give them more concrete details in the consideration stage and make it easy for them to commit.
 - Engage them as advocates during or shortly after their trip.
- *Donkeys and Unicorns* is an actual concept to identify and enhance content. There are a lot of donkeys – pieces that rate average performance or below. Unicorns are the rare stories that perform well and get great engagement. It is important to recognize unicorns, analyze them and apply the formula elsewhere.
- Social media has the ability to entertain, educate and inform people. How can content be tailored to these themes?
 - Evocative images (photographs and videos) and meaningful stories entertain.
 - How-to videos can be educational (i.e. demonstrating how to dress properly in winter, what to pack for a road trip or where to go to enjoy certain experiences). With a bit of creativity, they can be entertaining, too.
 - Sharing a post about nearby businesses or a blog listing of upcoming events informs people about all that is happening in a community or destination.
- Photography tips – Use natural light, keep the horizon level and include people. Representation matters (gender, age, ethnicity, sexuality, size, etc.). Do people see themselves in your content and feel welcome?
- Video tips – Platforms like Instagram and TikTok favour homemade, authentic videos over professionally produced content. Cell phone videos perform well. Great videos hook the viewer, evoke emotion and tell a compelling story that has a beginning, middle and end.

PowerPoint slides from this and other sessions are available at Business.TourismSaskatchewan.com/en/industry-events-and-presentations.

#1 tip for delicious food photography

Cell phones can be used to capture high-quality photographs and videos. Natural light is ideal and achieves richness and clarity. Food photographs sizzle under natural light. Take plated menu items out of the kitchen and away from heat lamps. Place them near a window where the sunlight will naturally bring out colours, highlight textures and make an image scream “delicious.”



ExploreSask Photo Contest sets new record for entries

Tourism Saskatchewan is pleased to announce the winning submissions in the 2021 ExploreSask Photo Contest. The competition, launched in June, received a record 6,852 entries, over 3,000 more than last year.

One winning photo, together with a selection of honourable mentions, were chosen for each of the six categories. The striking photographs capture the province's natural beauty and dynamic spirit, and feature extraordinary landscapes, diverse experiences, magnificent wildlife and the unique character of Saskatchewan people.

Visit TourismSaskatchewan.com/photo-contest to view the award-winning images.

Grand Prize Winner

Herry Himanshu

People

Winner: Rae McLeod

Honourable Mention: Indrasish Banerjee; Lisa Barth; Jamilla Dela Cruz; Justin Hauber; Dionne Tatlow

Places

Winner: Nichole Huck

Honourable Mention: Naila Fawad; Cathleen Mewis; Lee Miller; Jeff Wizniak

Prairie

Winner: Herry Himanshu

Honourable Mention: Shannon Dunnington; Herry Himanshu (three images); Casey Marshall

Water

Winner: Herry Himanshu

Honourable Mention: Lee Miller (two images); Eduardo Morante; Rob Pacey; Lisa Rachul

Wildlife

Winner: Sharon Bryant

Honourable Mention: Jinpeng Chen; Herry Himanshu; Jeff Wizniak (two images)

Woods

Winner: Amanda Shalovelo

Honourable Mention: Herry Himanshu (two images); Michelle Horncastle; Lee Miller



Top row, left to right: Rae McLeod (People); Nichole Huck (Places); Herry Himanshu (Prairie)
Bottom row, left to right: Herry Himanshu (Grand Prize Winner/Water); Sharon Bryant (Wildlife); Amanda Shalovelo (Woods)

DESTINATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

AWEsome experience development programs inspire new tourism offerings



Dog Tale Ranch, Watrous



Little Manitou Art Gallery, Manitou Beach



Manitou Waters Centre for the Healing Arts, Manitou Beach

Tourism Saskatchewan continues to expand its selection of programs that encourage the development of authentic, experiential tourism products. Recommendations in the ten-year Destination Development Strategy for Saskatchewan emphasize the value of creating experiences that are sought by lucrative travel markets and enhance Saskatchewan's appeal as a destination.

In 2020, training opportunities transitioned to online delivery and provided operators a convenient way to work with Tourism Saskatchewan staff and industry professionals. Experiential tourism development programs resonated with operators seeking to diversify products and expand into new travel markets. Several businesses in other industries, such as agriculture, explored opportunities to branch into tourism.

Destinations that offer a range of experiential products are at a competitive advantage. They have what more and more travellers are seeking. Increasing the number of immersive, engaging experiences throughout Saskatchewan supports strategies for industry recovery and rebuilding a resilient tourism sector, post-pandemic.

The online AWEsome Experience Design Studio launched in December 2020. The eight-module course provides a step-by-step approach to creating a unique new tourism offer. Course content is based on the foundation of experiential tourism AWEshops, previously hosted by Tourism Saskatchewan in 2016-2019. AWEshop principles focus on the small details to create unexpected, memorable guest experiences.

Several Design Studio participants continued to refine their proposed projects in a subsequent online course – AWEsome Actions, led by Nancy Arsenault, co-founder of the Tourism Café. AWEsome Actions involved virtual one-on-one coaching and group discussions.

The following three businesses enrolled in the programs. Comments from the operators speak to the guidance and opportunities provided.

Dog Tale Ranch, Watrous

Arlette Seib brought an interesting perspective to the programs as a visual and fibre artist, photographer and co-owner of Dog Tale Ranch, a holistically managed sheep operation. She appreciated the opportunities to explore visitor experience concepts under the guidance of experts, as well as receive encouragement from other participants. "The group feedback and chance to stand up for, or alter, a proposed experience was quite valuable in making me think deeper – not just about what I wanted to do but what other people might perceive as really nifty and awesome," Seib said.

The courses brought her full circle, from initially pitching a simple concept to imagining something more complex and possibly too big for a starter, then back to simple again. By the completion of AWEsome Actions, Seib gained a solid understanding of the business requirements, costs and necessary steps to host visitors and treat them to a fulfilling, immersive experience at Dog Tale Ranch. The new offering, Wool from Hoof to Harvest to Handmade, involves a pasture walk to "meet the woollies" and learn about sustainable ranching, then time in the studio to partake in a felting bee and discover how harvested wool is turned into beautiful handmade crafts.

Little Manitou Art Gallery, Manitou Beach

Gallery owner Sarah McKen took advantage of the programs to refine her model for The Lounge at Little Manitou Art Gallery. Designed for small groups, such as family members or friends, The Lounge offers a relaxing social gathering complete with an artist's presentation and hands-on creative activity.

"It was good for me to work through the general concept and delve into planning and financial aspects," McKen said. "I appreciated working beside other tourism operators, both experienced and emerging, and hearing their challenges. We gave each other feedback and encouragement to move forward. Connecting with professionals was equally valuable. I received honest, insightful advice from folks I trusted."

McKen built on previous experience hosting events at the gallery. Plans moved swiftly by converting space to accommodate The Lounge. Participating in Tourism Saskatchewan's programs helped her determine a manageable transition, avoid costly building renovations and offer ARTivities in The Lounge as early as September. She celebrated its opening with a group exhibition titled *Women's Work*, featuring 30 female Saskatchewan artists.

Manitou Waters Centre for the Healing Arts, Manitou Beach

Participating in the programs helped Dr. Sussanna Czeranko, ND conceptualize and fine tune the expansion of her clinic at Manitou Beach into the Manitou Waters Naturopathic Clinic and Centre for the Healing Arts. Czeranko and her team offer a wide range of naturopathic treatments, including European healing practices. Their vision for the centre is to blend the experiences of specialized period (mud) baths and other spa therapies with hands-on creative activities. Visitors enjoy the benefits of treatments and take home a beautiful piece of art that they have made.

Czeranko appreciated connecting with other entrepreneurs who have similar goals for developing unique experiences that showcase the Manitou Beach area and other Saskatchewan communities. She found the pricing model exceedingly helpful and also gained valuable lessons from testing her concept during a day-long event in August. "We learned so much and now have much more clarity on who we want to work with and the conditions for success," Czeranko said. "Going forward, there must be: 1) fair exchange between artists and ourselves; 2) mutual benefits for both sides; and 3) respect for our vision and space."

Experiential tourism offerings enrich Saskatchewan's tourism resources and make communities throughout the province inviting places to visit. Tourism Saskatchewan recently launched its Achieving AWESome pilot program to accelerate growth in experiential products. The program will move ten new Saskatchewan experiences through the development process to becoming export ready.

To inquire about experiential tourism programs, contact Denise Stroeder at 306-787-2825, denise.stroeder@tourismsask.com.

Clean It Right program valued by Saskatchewan businesses

Clean It Right is an online program that promptly responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by providing businesses a convenient way to train staff in urgently needed health and safety practices.

The initial program was developed by the Manitoba Tourism Education Council in May 2020 and quickly adapted by several other provinces. Tourism Saskatchewan tailored the program and launched it province-wide in July 2020. The enrolment cost was waived, providing incentive over and above the fact that Clean It Right businesses demonstrate a commitment to keeping customers and employees safe.

Uptake was strong for the course customized for three key tourism industries: accommodations, retail businesses and restaurants/food services. To date, over 100 Saskatchewan businesses have registered for the program and more than 500 people have taken the training. A number of operators earned Clean It Right business certification – awarded when all cleaning staff complete the training. Designated businesses are authorized to display the Clean It Right logo to reassure the public of a clean and safe environment.

Grotto Gardens Family Fun Farm, near Maple Creek, offers a variety of outdoor experiences, such as a petting zoo, goat yoga classes and alpaca walks. The business also operates an onsite gift shop and restaurant and bakery. Co-owner Dana Hassett shared that it was critical to assure visitors of a clean and safe environment prior to the season opening. "Building consumer confidence and trust is fundamental during these uncertain times," she said. "All of our staff are involved in cleaning the various areas, so Clean It Right was an ideal fit for us. It was convenient to take the online training, and we were able to get the full staff certified within a month – just in time for our season opening in 2020."

Gary Hoffert, Regional Vice-President of Canalta Hotels, recognized numerous benefits in certifying all Canalta locations in the province. "Clean It Right was an excellent vehicle to be able to tell our customers that we are safe. Although we had a lot of internal cleaning procedures in place, adding that stamp of approval from a certified program sealed it for us," Hoffert said. "As Clean It Right properties, we could confidently say to people, 'Stay with us and feel comfortable that we are doing everything possible to make sure that you are safe while you are here.'"

Hoffert is also past-chair of Hospitality Saskatchewan, the province's tourism industry association, and emphasizes the benefits of a unified front – participating in certification programs, supporting staff professional development and raising the bar on quality. "The more that we can do to make people feel comfortable in our hotels, and get them out on the road and travelling, the better off we are going to be," he said. "This is how we make our living – it is our bread and butter. In this industry, it is paramount that people feel safe. That's the only way we are going to get everything back to the way it was."

Fluctuations in consumer confidence accompany the various waves of the pandemic and new threats that arise, such as the Delta variant. Overall, people want assurance that businesses take health and safety seriously. Tourism Saskatchewan collected data in June through a Resident Sentiment Survey, which showed that 81 per cent of Saskatchewan residents were likely to seek businesses that employed COVID-19 safety practices.

Clean It Right offered FREE until December 31

Fighting COVID-19 demands greater attention to sanitation. Businesses that lead by example are more likely to earn customer trust, positive reviews and repeat visitors.

Take advantage of free Clean It Right training for the remainder of 2021. To enrol employees, visit Business.TourismSaskatchewan.com/en/courses-and-workshops/clean-it-right. For more information, email Kari Burgess at kari.burgess@tourismsask.com.

Wheatland Express seizes partnerships to expand programming and infrastructure



Western town-front under construction



Wheatland Express Excursion Train

The Wheatland Express Excursion Train has been on a rapid upward trajectory since it launched in 2018. A successful first season captured the Rookie of the Year Award at the Saskatchewan Tourism Awards of Excellence. Plans for expansion came naturally from the visionaries operating Wheatland Express Inc., who saw partnerships as key to bringing bold ideas to fruition.

The train takes passengers on fun-filled, three-hour excursions between Cudworth and Wakaw, showcasing Saskatchewan history, culture, food and artistic talent along the way. Themed tours highlight entertaining scenarios, such as train heists and murder mystery cases. Holiday favourites include the Halloween Ghost Train and Christmas Express.

From the start, Wheatland Express staff have participated in training and certification programs delivered by Tourism Saskatchewan, including Heritage Interpreter, Event Co-ordinator and Manager, and other courses designed to elevate customer service and experiences. In 2020, employees completed Clean It Right training, which augmented health and safety measures in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Wheatland Express was a successful applicant to the Diversification and New Market Program in 2020, qualifying under the New Experiential Development stream. Program applicants come to the table prepared to contribute 30 per cent of the total project cost. A detailed outline of plans to add a new sleeper car and offer overnight accommodations, plus build a western town-front was a convincing pitch.

“Our goal is to create a first-of-its-kind premier railway experience in Canada,” Ashlyn Weninger, Wheatland Express Executive Director said. “We had a dream of hosting visitors overnight, as there are limited accommodations in the surrounding areas. Guests are eager to spend the night after travelling some distance to ride aboard Wheatland Express. Developing boxcar accommodations seemed an appropriate solution, and partnering with Tourism Saskatchewan helped fulfil our plans.”

In 2021, Wheatland Express was able to offer a full season of programming, with some adjustments to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic and ensure guest comfort and safety. Work proceeded on refurbishing some of the cars and constructing the western town-front. At the same time, plans were underway for another exciting project.

“For some time, Wheatland Express has been exploring the concept of a hands-on workplace education and training centre to boost employment and build a robust, skilled tourism workforce,” Weninger said. “The centre is one part of our expansion efforts that will elevate tourism experiences and increase the local visitor economy.”

As for the Wheatland Express Excursion Train 2022 season, guests will be able to book overnight packages in the comfort of the new Walnut Grove sleeper car. New tours will be added that speak to reconciliation and explore the impact that railways had on Indigenous communities in Treaty 6 territory.

Meewasin enlisted in National Urban Park Program



Naughty by Nature tours took an unconventional approach to exploring the Meewasin Valley

In August, the Government of Canada launched a National Urban Park program led by Parks Canada. The program will support the creation of an urban park network across the country.

More than 70 per cent of Canada's population lives in urban centres, where access to nature can be limited. The COVID-19 pandemic brought the importance of green spaces to the forefront as city dwellers increasingly sought outdoor activities that enabled social distancing and supported physical and mental health.

In addition to benefitting health and well-being, protecting pockets of nature within cities helps restore biodiversity and is a critical part of global climate change solutions.

The National Urban Park program announcement marked the signing of a statement of collaboration between Parks Canada and Meewasin Valley Authority to explore the potential for a national urban park in Saskatoon. The collaboration involves a comprehensive feasibility study that will be conducted throughout 2021-2022 and engage Meewasin partners, local organizations, community stakeholders and the public. The study will present opportunities to explore possibilities, envision a successful urban park model and advance Meewasin's long-term vision and planning.

For over 40 years, Meewasin has been dedicated to preserving and nurturing the cultural beauty and assets of the South Saskatchewan River Valley, and ensuring free public access to the riverfront and its 90-km network of trails.

Meewasin's governance structure is split between the Government of Saskatchewan, City of Saskatoon and University of Saskatchewan. Public opinion polling in 2021 showed that 89 per cent of Saskatoon residents recognize the Meewasin Valley corridor as Saskatoon's most important attribute; see Meewasin support as good use of tax dollars; and think all levels of government should be invested in this valuable and unique asset.

Federal investment in Meewasin has traditionally targeted research, land management and specific projects, and involved agencies such as Climate Change Canada and Western Economic Diversification Canada. A more robust federal partnership, through the National Urban Park program, will enable broader goal setting and fulfilment, and bring national and international attention to Saskatoon and Saskatchewan.

There are compelling reasons for positioning Meewasin as a National Urban Park. "No Canadian city has anything comparable in terms of scale, scope and 42-year legacy," Andrea Lafond, Meewasin CEO, said. "Meewasin stewards Canada's largest urban conservation zone and ecological corridor that covers 67 sq. km, with hundreds of acres of protected habitat, a mix of green space and an impressive trail system that stretches from Wanuskewin to the R.M. of Corman Park. Its 100-year plan is unique, and the efforts of staff, partners, donors and volunteers over the years have enabled the valley corridor to maintain a respectful balance between conservation and development efforts."

One-third of Saskatchewan's population lives within 15 km of the Meewasin Valley, making it a destination that is highly accessed by locals, as well as enjoyed by visitors. Like many outdoor locations and experiences, Meewasin saw renewed appreciation throughout 2020 and 2021.

"People have really made use of the trail for recreation and experiences that enable social distancing and benefit physical and mental health," Lafond said, adding that the demand for outdoor activities inspired a creative approach to developing new initiatives. "We sold out and had to extend the Naughty by Nature pilot program, which offered after-hours, adult-only tours of Beaver Creek. It was definitely an unconventional approach, but people enjoyed learning about the intimate lives of the area's species, topped off with enjoying a selection of local foods and beverages."

A highlight in 2021 was being recognized for exceptional sustainability achievements at the Regional Centre of Expertise Saskatchewan awards celebration. Meewasin, along with partners – Saskatoon Public Schools and Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools – received the Lyle Benko Future Generations Award for expanding digital learning resources that support nature-based education.

Meewasin received support from Western Economic Diversification Canada to expand Indigenous interpretive content and make it digitally accessible. The project involved extensive consultation with First Nations and Métis communities and Elders to gather stories and perspectives. The content is hosted on an app platform and supplements details on corresponding onsite interpretive panels. The Meewasin app launched in June 2021, timed with the observance of National Indigenous Peoples Day. It is a welcome and convenient resource for navigating the area, understanding the history and connecting to other tourism experiences and attractions. Use the QR code to connect with Meewasin.



Métis Cultural Days nominated for Canadian Tourism Award



Nominees for the 2021 Canadian Tourism Awards were announced on October 1. Congratulations is extended to Métis Cultural Days (Saskatoon), which is in the running for the Indigenous Tourism Award. Additional category nominees include Feast Café Bistro (Winnipeg, MB) and Squamish Lilwat Cultural Centre (Whistler, BC).

Métis Cultural Days is a three-day celebration, held each year at the Western Development Museum Saskatoon. The festival was held virtually in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was back in full swing as a live event in September 2021, with Year of the Elder as its theme.

In the spirit of reconciliation, the event promotes the sharing of culture and cultural practices and bridges Métis and non-Métis communities.

Three fun-filled days showcase artistic and musical talent, traditional Métis goods, games, a jigging competition and Elder storytelling.

In 2018, the Tourism Industry Association of Canada presented Métis Cultural Days with the Saskatchewan Indigenous Artist/Event Award.

The Canadian Tourism Awards are presented annually by the Tourism Industry Association of Canada (TIAC) to recognize success, leadership and innovation in Canada's tourism industry. The 2021 Canadian Tourism Awards will be presented on December 1, as part of TIAC's 2021 Tourism Congress.

Indigenous tourism corridor branded Kichiota Indigenous Destinations



Saskatchewan's first Indigenous tourism corridor has been officially named Kichiota Indigenous Destinations. A partnership between Whitecap Dakota First Nation, Wanuskewin and Beardy's & Okemasis' Cree Nation, the corridor is the first of its kind in Canada. It will offer visitors multi-cultural/multi-day experiences that highlight the history and traditions of Northern Plains Indigenous cultures.

The name Kichiota has roots in both Cree and Dakota languages and is described as "a coming together of Indigenous languages, creating a whole greater than the sum of its parts." Applied to this unique partnership, the meaning of the name becomes "special places for many peoples."

The following are snapshots of some of the experiences along the corridor:

Beardy's & Okemasis' Cree Nation – Overnight glamping, cultural cuisine and theatrical performances are just some of the offerings. Guests will enjoy horseback riding, mountain biking and ATV adventures along the Trans Canada Trail. Experience Cree culture and hospitality, and hear untold stories of Saskatchewan's past while visiting the area.

Wanuskewin – A gathering place for all nations of the Northern Plains for over 6,400 years, Wanuskewin is a flagship attraction and the longest running archaeological dig site in Canada. It is a two-time Canadian Tourism Award winner and on its way to UNESCO World Heritage Designation. Wanuskewin features bison jumps, tipi rings and the world's most northerly medicine wheel. A newly renovated interpretive centre houses galleries, hands-on educational spaces, a gift shop and top-rated restaurant. The site is now home to 18 Plains bison, all descendants of the last 1,000 bison on the prairies before their near-extinction in the 1870s.

Whitecap Dakota First Nation – The Dakota Dunes Casino and PGA-rated Golf Links are integral parts of Saskatchewan's tourism landscape. With the addition of a 155-room hotel and Dakota Adventures tourism offering, Whitecap Dakota First Nation is taking hospitality to the next level. Guest experiences include horseback riding, canoeing, kayaking and paddleboarding, along with culinary delights – all nestled in the rolling hills of central Saskatchewan.

The Kichiota Indigenous Destinations partnership will ultimately expand to include more Indigenous tourism operators and will be an important marketing hub that brings profile to Saskatchewan and attracts visitors. As more product offerings become available, full details will be posted on kichiota.ca.

Tara Robinson appointed RCMP Heritage Centre CEO

In July, the RCMP Heritage Centre announced the appointment of Tara Robinson to the CEO position. Robinson was born and raised in Saskatchewan and is well known for her esteemed journalism career. She was the first female co-anchor at CTV News Regina and spent more than a decade in the role. Robinson moved to Calgary in 2007, where she held a number of leadership roles.

As Executive Director of YouthLink Calgary Police Interpretive Centre, she led the design and construction of the facility that houses the Calgary Police Museum. She led the Calgary Police Foundation, which brings law enforcement and community partners together to build safer neighbourhoods. In these positions, Robinson developed a passion for showcasing the history and role of policing in Canada.

Her responsibilities with the RCMP Heritage Centre include overseeing preparations for the 150th anniversary of the police force in 2023 and transition of the Centre to a national museum. At the announcement of her new role, Robinson acknowledged the need for straightforward and respectful storytelling to address Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action. "The RCMP Heritage Centre is committed to sharing the stories of the Force from a variety of perspectives in ways that allow healing and learning to happen. It will be an honour to help share these stories," she said.



Alberta MP Randy Boissonnault sworn in as Minister of Tourism and Associate Minister of Finance

The Honourable Randy Boissonnault, Member of Parliament for Edmonton Centre, is Canada's new Minister of Tourism. Boissonnault and 37 other cabinet colleagues were sworn in on October 26 during a ceremony at Rideau Hall. He was also named Associate Minister of Finance.

Boissonnault previously represented the citizens of Edmonton Centre from 2015-2019. During this period, he served as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, as well as Special Advisor to the Prime Minister on LGBTQ2 issues. He was re-elected to the Government of Canada on September 20, 2021.



Sign up for Tourism Saskatchewan resources

Industry Update – Tourism Saskatchewan's e-newsletter highlights important announcements about funding programs, industry development resources, marketing opportunities, training initiatives, webinars and more. Email information.updates@tourismsask.com to subscribe to *Industry Update*.

Free listings on TourismSaskatchewan.com – Tourism businesses, attractions, events, accommodations, etc., are urged to take advantage of FREE listings on [TourismSaskatchewan.com](https://www.tourismsaskatchewan.com). Update your Tourism Profile to ensure that details about your tourism business are current and accurate. If the key tourism contact has recently changed, notify Tourism Saskatchewan. Email information.updates@tourismsask.com with updates to your listings and contact details.

Business.TourismSaskatchewan.com – The online Business Hub is one-stop source for advice, information and tools to benefit tourism operators. It offers quick access to a wide range of programs and opportunities.

World Travel & Tourism Council issues guidelines for inclusive and accessible travel

In May, the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) released guidelines for making tourism experiences more inclusive and accessible. The guidelines focus on elevating experiences for travellers with disabilities. They are a resource to aid recovery of the tourism sector and create more welcoming, inclusive tourism businesses and destinations.

The WTTC asserts that “providing accessible travel is both a social imperative and a business opportunity,” citing studies that underscore how accommodating diverse needs improves the bottom line.

Two interesting points are highlighted in the document’s introduction:

- Travellers with disabilities are accompanied by an average of 1.9 people. By welcoming and serving the needs of that one customer with a disability, a business averages nearly three customers.
- Travellers with disabilities may increase their budget, either through more frequent or longer trips, by as much as 34 per cent if accessibility barriers are eliminated.

The guidelines apply to tourism businesses of all sizes and can be scaled and adapted to suit individual demands. They are categorized under four pillars: 1) Developing an Inclusive and Accessible System; 2) Creating Safe Spaces; 3) Designing an Engaging and Relevant System; and (4) Exemplifying Inclusion and Accessibility. Use them as a checklist to gauge progress on business practices or set goals for improvement.

The following are just a few of the WTTC’s recommendations:

- Develop a long-term accessibility vision and short-term targets, including metrics to monitor progress.
- Offer travel products, services and facilities without accessibility barriers for those with physical, cognitive, intellectual or sensory needs. Adhere to international accessibility standards for the built environment and for information and communications technology, where possible.
- Avoid making assumptions about a traveller’s disability or needs. Build for accessibility as much as possible and let travellers determine what works for them or meets their needs. Provide opportunities for feedback.
- Provide clear, detailed and accurate information for travellers and share the information in a consistent manner.
- Collaborate with other businesses in areas where there are gaps in accessibility knowledge, experience and services. Partner with organizations that have like-minded approaches to accessible travel.
- Develop online services that follow digital accessibility standards so that travellers with disabilities can browse services, make a booking, modify a booking and/or contact your business seamlessly.

- Provide training to staff on disability awareness and how to support travellers. Enhance the training with guidance, resources and ongoing support.
- Foster a respectful environment at all locations and for all activities. Remind staff that attitudes towards people with disabilities play an integral role in making that customer feel welcome and included. Train staff to resolve quickly and efficiently any potential issues at any point in the traveller journey.
- Provide clear signage that addresses various physical, cognitive, intellectual and sensory abilities. Include text, braille, photos and audio, where possible.
- Make accessibility decisions using feedback and information obtained from travellers with disabilities.
- Consider flexibility in itineraries for travellers with disabilities. If itineraries cannot be changed, notify customers prior to booking and suggest other options, if available.
- Champion accessibility within the tourism sector.
- Develop inclusive marketing, media and communication standards to dignify and authentically represent people.

View the WTTC *Inclusive & Accessible Travel Guidelines* in full at wttc.org.

Seeing disability through a social model lens

A 2020 study by Expedia Group, in partnership with the charity Leonard Cheshire, explains the social model approach – a best practice to understanding and serving people with disabilities. This model recognizes that an individual may have a condition but is disabled by the barriers within society. Their disability is a “social consequence of having a condition when

faced with a barrier.” The report states: “Barriers are not just physical. Barriers exist in the ways we communicate, in the environments we create, in the technology we use and the attitudes we act upon. The social model helps us to recognize what barriers have been created and consider how we can best remove them to create more inclusive opportunities.”

The full report, titled *Breaking Down Barriers to Travel: Championing Disability Inclusive and Accessible Travel*, features interesting case studies and recommendations for achieving greater accessibility and more inclusive tourism products and services.

Sources:

World Travel & Tourism Council. *Inclusive & Accessible Travel Guidelines*, 2021.

Expedia Group. *Breaking Down Barriers to Travel: Championing Disability Inclusive and Accessible Travel*, 2020.

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