

Create winter tourism experiences and offerings for key travel markets



Prince Albert National Park



Tobin Lake

Canada is recognized worldwide for its snowy winters, and there is huge potential to expand and grow winter tourism. According to a 2018 Destination Canada report, only one per cent of the nation's visitor activities are winter based. For tourism operators interested in diversifying their offerings and welcoming new visitor markets, winter and shoulder season (weeks or months preceding or following peak season) are periods to consider.

In January 2021, Tourism Saskatchewan worked with Environics Research to gather travel insights from Saskatchewan and Alberta residents through an online survey and discussion board. Four different winter experiences were tested – winter getaways; cross-country skiing; wilderness and hiking; and ice fishing. The following summary of findings is helpful to designing appealing winter packages and offerings.

Winter getaways offer a break from routine

Among the four winter concepts tested, winter getaways had the greatest appeal and highest relevance. People are looking for either fun/excitement or escape/relaxation in getaway trips. Closeness to home is an asset – most people do not wish to drive long distances in winter. The variety of accommodation types and experiences offered in this theme appealed to various types of families with different budgets. Among Saskatchewan residents, winter getaways elicit excitement, nostalgia and a desire to explore. Additionally, winter getaways usually allow for a mix of outdoor and indoor experiences that make the trip more of a vacation.

Cross-country skiing is accessible and family-friendly

Survey participants with children related most to the cross-country skiing theme. Saskatchewan offers abundant trails and rental equipment for skiers of all levels, and has a strong ski community. Skiing was considered an ideal family activity and seen as a budget-conscious option for day trips. It is an activity that can also be turned into a getaway trip for people with more flexible income.



Duck Mountain Provincial Park



Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park

Wilderness experiences appeal to some but not all

Wilderness and hiking had niche appeal. Experiences in the wilderness create excitement and fuel a desire for exploration among people who enjoy hiking and outdoor adventure. For those with mobility issues, have small children or are not outdoor enthusiasts, these types of experiences are limiting and less appealing.

Ice fishing viewed as a uniquely Saskatchewan experience

Ice fishing appealed to niche interests, generating excitement among enthusiasts for the sport. It was considered an experience unique to Saskatchewan. Some survey participants were surprised and curious to learn that there are places in the province that welcome beginners. The chance to try ice fishing without making a substantial investment in equipment is motivating. Enthusiasts perceive ice fishing to be a great activity to enjoy with family and friends. Albertans surveyed indicated that they would come to Saskatchewan for ice fishing only if a full vacation experience is available, including comfortable lodging and the option to eat some of their catch.

Consider these tips for optimizing winter tourism packages and activities:

- Offer a variety of accommodations that appeal to different budgets and preferences.
- Describe details in language that appeals to targeted interests and name packages accordingly (e.g. romantic getaways). Feature imagery that will resonate with the intended visitors.
- Include family friendly activities. Show images of families and children having fun. Family excursions should include details about available activities, equipment, etc., and offer indoor “snow day” options.
- Provide more specific descriptions about things to do and available experience – different activities, amenities, package details, available extras, and more. These details are particularly important to Albertans, who want a variety of activities to make the trip worthwhile. Packaging is key to attracting markets from further away.
- Highlight quality images of cabins, fireplaces and scenes that suggest a cozy atmosphere.