

RESEARCH BACKGROUND:

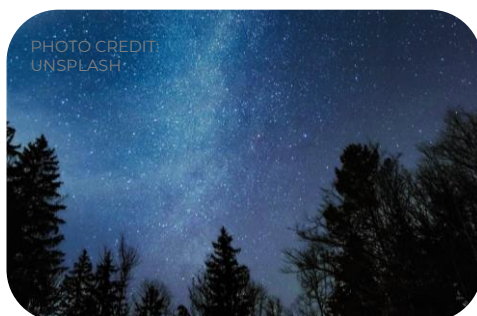
This summary report compiles topline findings from four research projects conducted by Environics Research in 2022 and 2023.

This report is intended to guide the establishment of Astro-tourism in Saskatchewan by informing target audiences, marketing communications, and infrastructure development.

There were four phases of research:

1. **Stakeholder interviews** with local tourism operators in Saskatchewan
2. **Expert interviews** with established tourism operators across Canada
3. **Online Astro-tourism communities** were examined through a social listening approach to identify key themes in conversations
4. **Consumer interviews** with with stargazers and aurora chasers from CAN, US, UK

Similar reports are available for Birding, Snowmobiling, and Outdoor Photography.



BUILD LOCAL ONLINE AND IN-PERSON ASTRO-TOURISM COMMUNITY TO DEVELOP INDUSTRY AND REPUTATION:

- **Sharing the passion:** eager to share their knowledge and experiences with family, friends, and the wider community
 - **Information & inspiration:** community groups are a trustworthy source of advice/inspiration about destinations and information on best locations for night sky viewing or photography
 - **Passive participation:** most are 'lurkers' who observe discussions in online community groups; experienced stargazers or aurora chasers are more engaged in local astronomy groups
- Support local astronomy groups and star parties to grow the local Astro-tourism community and to build a reputation for Saskatchewan as a travel destination. Learnings from more established communities in other niche areas like birding can be applied to Astro-tourism.

ENGAGING COMMUNICATION SHOULD SPEAK TO WHAT DRAWS IN ASTRO-TOURISTS:

- **Life-long learning:** motivated to keep learning about night skies, stay up-to-date on scientific news, monitor upcoming celestial events, and improve their photography techniques
- **Relaxing & intriguing:** night sky viewing is a peaceful and mesmerizing activity, a way to escape from day-to-day stresses, immerse into the unknown, and a connection to something greater
- **Unique & challenging:** night viewing is a unique experience every time (new goals for what they want to see or photograph). Continuously challenge them to take their skills and knowledge to the next level



- In marketing communications, highlight personal stories that appeal to the sense of tranquility and challenge associated with Astro-tourism, as travelers connect with relatable experiences shared by stargazers and aurora chasers.

HOW TO INSPIRE ASTRO-TOURISTS TO VISIT SASKATCHEWAN:

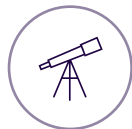


- **Strong visuals:** photos and videos are key motivators that inspire choice of destination
 - **Diversity of scenery:** Astro-photographers are interested in a diversity of landscapes (e.g., forests, wildlife, lakes, waterfalls, mountains, etc.) as foregrounds for night sky images
 - **Call-to-action:** inspirational marketing content should be accompanied by detailed trip planning information, including destination accessibility, availability of accommodations and complementary activities, and expectations around weather, visibility, and safety
- Marketing materials should prioritize a diversity of visuals for greater engagement. Showcase the breadth and beauty of dark skies, Northern Lights, and celestial objects visible from Saskatchewan.

HIGHLIGHT SASKATCHEWAN'S STRENGTHS AS AN ASTRO-TOURISM DESTINATION:



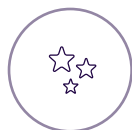
Saskatchewan's world-class dark sky preserves



Possibility to see the northern lights all year-round



Grasslands National Park: established reputation as one of the darkest skies in Canada



Cypress Hills Provincial Park: hosts a well-known & prominent star party that is filled every year

- Promote that Grasslands and Cypress Hills parks are ideally positioned in the south (where the Milky Way is higher in the sky) and accessible from Regina.
- Opportunities to expand infrastructure and programming at parks to attract new and experienced Astro-tourists alike.
- Build on "land of the living skies" by strengthening the province's identity as a dark sky destination.



ADDRESS ASTRO-TOURISTS' KEY TRAVEL CONSIDERATIONS:

- **Visibility:** astro-tourists extensively research ideal timing to travel for dark and clear skies (e.g., weather and sky conditions, best time of year)
 - Since visibility for northern lights and stargazing is unpredictable, encourage astro-tourists to plan longer trips and offer daytime complementary activities.
- **Infrastructure:** expectations of basic infrastructure like visitor centres and designated viewing spots
- **Accommodations:** budget friendly, simple, clean, and comfortable accommodations located close to night viewing spots and food options
- **Accessibility:** willing to travel longer distances but destination needs to be unique and offer a range of experiences; prefer to rent a car for flexibility
- **Guided tours:** knowledgeable tour guides to help tourists navigate the area and maximize chances of viewing the aurora
 - Infrastructure can differentiate Saskatchewan from other dark sky destinations, including dark sky programming (e.g., star parties, local guides, friendly park hours), astronomy facilities (e.g., observatories, telescopes), and signage (e.g., light pollution).

UNTAPPED OPPORTUNITIES FOR ATTRACTING ASTRO-TOURISTS TO SASKATCHEWAN:

- Northern lights is a bucket list attraction with broad appeal that can draw tourists to Saskatchewan. Complements dark sky programming, the "Canadiana" winter experience, and other niche activities.
 - Astrophotography is growing in popularity as cameras are more accessible and smartphones take better pictures.
 - Unique experiences motivate astro-tourists to "get the shot" and share on social media, which in turn inspires others to visit. Encourage tourists to share their night sky photos and geotag locations in Saskatchewan.
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- There is growing interest in Indigenous tourism from travelers eager to learn about local history and culture. Indigenous experiences fit naturally with night skies and the northern lights.
 - Educational experiences about Indigenous knowledge and traditions can be incorporated with dark sky programming and packaged in nature tours.

KEY CHALLENGES TO DEVELOPING AS AN ASTRO-TOURISM DESTINATION:



- While Saskatchewan has world-class dark skies, it currently lacks the reputation and infrastructure to compete with more established dark sky destinations.
 - Build reputation by increasing awareness of Saskatchewan as a dark sky destination, community building, and targeted marketing promoting what makes it unique.
- Efforts to preserve the province's dark skies are essential, as light pollution is a major concern for Astro-tourists.
 - Collaboration between public and private sectors to adopt policies for reducing light pollution, ensure access to land for night sky viewing, and educate tourists and locals about dark sky etiquette and the impact of light on the environment and wildlife.

Astro-Tourist Personas & Journey Summary



STARGAZER SAM The Laid-back Night Viewer



Likes Nature



Looking for Quiet/Solitude



Life-Long Learner

In a nutshell	Looking for a form of escapism and spiritual connection. Photography is also of interest.
About them	Across all ages, mix of men and women.
Motto	<i>I want to feel connected to the universe</i>
Motivations to travelling	Like to travel and include the stargazing element with travelling. Engaging in other activities is key.
What they have in common	Enjoy nature. Tend to seek/partake in more solitary activities; prefer smaller groups and intimacy. They are life-long learners, curious, and take pride in improving their skills and sharing with others. Enjoy quiet contemplation and feel a spiritual connectedness when viewing the night sky.
Shared Social Values	<i>Attraction to Nature, Need for Escape, Interest in the Unexplained, Social Intimacy</i>
Barriers for Saskatchewan	Showing that there's other activities to do besides stargazing/aurora viewing. Ensure travelers understand what differentiates Saskatchewan from other dark sky destinations. Assure infrastructure is there.
Opportunities for Saskatchewan	Wildlife viewing, nature-based activities – but also a variety of other activities such as museums, cultural activities, Indigenous tourism, etc. Family focused.
What they need to see and hear	<i>Information on other activities, landscapes (is it all prairies, are there forests?), general travel information.</i>



TRACKER TOM The Optimistic Hunter



Excited to Learn



Enjoys Research & Planning



Photography Perfectionist

In a nutshell	Thrill of the chase and love to research. Looking to perfect their 'shot'.
About them	Middle-aged to older, skews men
Motto	<i>If there's the possibility it's going to happen, I'm going to be there!</i>
Motivations to travelling	See the northern lights or other celestial events. Photography (of the night skies) also play a big role.
What they have in common	Enjoy nature. Tend to seek/partake in more solitary activities; prefer smaller groups and intimacy. They are life-long learners, curious, and take pride in improving their skills and sharing with others. Enjoy quiet contemplation and feel a spiritual connectedness when viewing the night sky.
Shared Social Values	<i>Attraction to Nature, Need for Escape, Interest in the Unexplained, Social Intimacy</i>
Barriers for Saskatchewan	Build perceptions: getting on people's radar that this is a destination for northern lights. Those already located in North America seeking something different than what they can see at home. Answer: what else is there to do in Saskatchewan, what makes it special for photography, why should I visit?
Opportunities for Saskatchewan	High chance to see northern lights (and chances all year round) and partake in other activities. Differentiate with infrastructure – have astronomer-focused facilities. Weather and visibility.
What they need to see and hear	<i>What's my probability of seeing the northern lights? Will I get good shots of the night sky? Are all the elements for a good shoot available?</i>

PHASES

GOALS

TOUCHPOINTS / RESOURCES

BARRIERS

	1 INSPIRATION / DISCOVERY	2 RESEARCH & CONSIDERATION	3 PURCHASE	4 PRE-TRIP	5 DURING TRIP	6 POST-TRIP
	Learning / hearing about new destinations	Researching a destination of interest	Planning & booking a trip centered around night-viewing	Studying for the trip	Enjoying the trip watching the skies	Sharing the trip
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discover new destinations to visit / add to your list Validate existing perceptions of well-known destinations for night-viewing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deciding if a destination of interest fits with their criteria for travelling Research and plan as many details as possible to feel prepared 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Book flights, accommodations, transportation, parks and preserves (if needed), guides (if relevant) and anything else that may need to be booked 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check weather conditions, apps / websites for upcoming celestial events Plan final details such as what to bring / pack 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To see / photograph a celestial event like the aurora Enjoy the local culture, food, nature and people To relax and feel at peace To challenge myself 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sharing the experience with other stargazers / aurora chasers in their circle – photos, tips, learned experiences, recommendations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online and in-person stargazing / aurora chasing / astrophotography communities and groups Online resources → Google searches, blogs, websites Books, magazines, travel guides Visuals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facebook, YouTube Influential members of the community Various weather / astronomy apps or websites Internet searches Ask advice and share experiences (particularly around timing) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internet searches (general Google searches) Online booking (Expedia, Trip Advisor, Airbnb, etc.) Guided trips 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internet searches (for regulations, weather, local wildlife, general conditions, important information) Monitoring weather apps or astronomy apps Connecting with others to get their experiences or analyzing traveler reviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guide (if using one) → getting the 'lay of the land' and advice for future solo exploration Local tourist information centers Online resources and apps: maps, Google searches, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stargazing and astrophotography groups (in-person and online) Social media
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distance Cost Work/family obligations Trip that accommodates partner's / family's wishes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring personal timelines align with optimal aurora borealis viewing season Distances within the destination Less familiarity with destination and its offerings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expensive flights, hotels Long distance to travel Unable to find the information they need to plan their travel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not finding enough information about the location, regulations, etc. Travelers not feeling well-prepared for the trip; have unanswered questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not being able to see celestial event Bad guides (inflexible, not social, not knowledgeable) Crowded locations Dark sky area is too far (2 hours+ driving) from base. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Negative experiences and destinations that don't deliver on expectations will gain a bad reputation