

SAUGEEN SHORES AND SAUGEEN FIRST NATION

Community Tourism Strategy

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BEYOND TRAVEL & TOURISM

Friends With One Another and We Are Connected

The Friendship Accord — Wiijkiwenydiwaad Miinwa Zgaabiignigan, meaning “Friends with one another and we are connected” — signed by Saugeen First Nation and Saugeen Shores in 2025, reflects a commitment to strengthen relationships through partnership, dialogue, and collaboration. Grounded in mutual respect and understanding, the Accord honours the past, supports community well-being, and creates opportunities for a prosperous future across the region.

The Saugeen First Nation and Saugeen Shores Community Tourism Strategy is a direct outcome of that commitment. As one of the key areas of mutual interest identified through the Friendship Accord, it establishes a common vision for tourism that celebrates the stories, cultures, landscapes, and experiences that make this area unique. Guided by respect for Saugeen First Nation and the Saugeen Ojibway Nation as the original caretakers of these lands and waters within the area covered by Treaty 72, the strategy recognizes tourism as an opportunity to foster learning, cultural appreciation, meaningful connections, and sustainable economic growth.



Shaped through engagement with residents, businesses, organizations, and community partners, this work reflects a collective desire to create authentic visitor experiences while generating long-term benefits across the area. It builds upon the unique strengths of Saugeen First Nation and Saugeen Shores and demonstrates the value of advancing common goals through cooperation.

This strategy represents an important milestone in an ongoing relationship. Guided by the spirit of Wiijkiwenydiwaad Miinwa Zgaabiignigan, tourism development will honour culture, support local enterprise, strengthen connections, and showcase the unique identity of both communities while creating a welcoming destination for visitors.

We respectfully acknowledge that this work takes place within the traditional territory of the Saugeen Ojibway Nation, within the lands and waters covered by Treaties 451/2 and 72.

We thank everyone who contributed their time, knowledge, and perspectives to this work, including Saugeen First Nation leadership, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and community members of Saugeen First Nation, along with municipal partners, residents of Saugeen Shores, tourism operators, and community contributors, for their valued input. This strategy reflects a shared commitment to collaboration, respect, and responsible tourism development.

We look forward to bringing this vision to life for the benefit of present and future generations.



August 2026

On behalf of Saugeen First Nation and the Town of Saugeen Shores, we are pleased to present this Community Tourism Strategy, reflecting a shared vision for the future of tourism across our communities.

This work has been guided by a commitment to respect, collaboration, and the recognition of the Saugeen Ojibway Nation as the original caretakers of these lands and waters, we respectfully acknowledge that this work takes place within the traditional territory of the Saugeen Ojibway Nation, within the lands and waters covered by Treaties 451/2 and 72.

Tourism presents an opportunity not only for economic development, but also for education, connection, and the sharing of culture in a way that honours Indigenous knowledge and traditions.

Through this process, we have heard from community members, local businesses, and partners who care deeply about the future of tourism in this region. Their insights have helped shape a strategy that prioritizes sustainability, meaningful visitor experiences, and benefits for our communities.

Together, we are committed to strengthening relationships, supporting local entrepreneurs, and creating opportunities that reflect both the unique identity of Saugeen First Nation and Saugeen Shores. This strategy represents an important step forward in working together in a good way, grounded in mutual respect and shared goals.

We thank all those who contributed their time, knowledge, and perspectives to this work. We look forward to implementing this strategy together and continuing to build a tourism destination that is welcoming, respectful, and reflective of the people and place we call home.

Sincerely,

Chief Conrad Ritchie
Saugeen First Nation

Mayor Luke Charbonneau
Town of Saugeen Shores

Key Terms

Across this report, several terms are frequently used. Definitions are provided below to ensure a shared understanding of what they mean.

1

Destination

The place or area experienced by visitors. In this strategy, “the destination” refers to Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation as a connected tourism area with distinct communities, shared landscapes, waterways, visitor flows, and tourism opportunities.

2

Destination Management

The intentional coordination of tourism growth, visitor movement, infrastructure, community impacts, environmental stewardship, and partner roles. Destination management focuses on making tourism work well for residents, visitors, businesses, and the environment over the long term.

3

Destination Marketing Organization (DMO)

An organization (usually at the municipal or subregional level) responsible for promoting a destination to visitors, through branding, campaigns, visitor information, market development, partnerships, etc. DMOs help shape how a destination is understood, discovered, and experienced. Increasingly, DMOs are becoming DMMOs and taking on tourism management duties as well.

4

Destination Stewardship

An approach to tourism that focuses on caring for the natural, cultural, social, and economic systems that make a destination special. It emphasizes long-term responsibility rather than short-term visitation growth.

5

Municipal Tourism Fund (MTF)

A fund created through grant programs, partner contributions, town budget, and fees paid by visitors under Ontario’s Municipal Accommodation Tax legislation that is applied to eligible accommodation stays. An MTF can help support tourism marketing, destination development, visitor services, infrastructure, and implementation priorities.

6

Regional Tourism Organization (RTO7)

The regional tourism organization for Bruce, Grey, and Simcoe counties. Funded and supported by Ontario's Ministry of Tourism Culture and Gaming, RTO7 supports tourism development, marketing, partnerships, business supports, wayfinding, and responsible visitation across the region.

7

Shoulder Season

The period between peak and off-peak tourism seasons. For many Ontario destinations, this is the spring and fall. Shoulder-season tourism can help reduce reliance on summer visitation and support year-round economic activity.

8

Visitor

A person who travels 40 kilometres or more from their usual place of residence to the destination or who stays overnight in the destination, regardless of distance travelled.

9

Visitor Economy

The broader economic activity generated by visitors, including spending on accommodations, food and beverage, retail, transportation, recreation, entertainment, events, and local services.

10

Wayfinding

Tools that help people navigate a destination, including signs, maps, digital tools, route markers, landmarks, interpretive features, and visitor information.

1. INTRODUCTION

Project Background

In the fall of 2021, Economic Development staff at Saugeen First Nation #29 and the Town of Saugeen Shores submitted a successful application to participate in the Community Economic Development Initiative's three-year program (2022-2025). The partnership identified opportunities for the two communities to work together to further economic development goals. Through this process, tourism was identified as an area with strong collaboration potential that can drive mutual benefit and wellbeing. In January 2025, the Town of Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation signed a Friendship Accord – Wiijkiwenydiwaad Miinwa Zgaabiignigan, meaning 'Friends with one another and we are connected'. It is a commitment to keep working together in partnership to foster economic development opportunities and build stronger relationships.

In line with the spirit of the Friendship Accord Partnership, the Town of Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation have co-developed a five-year, comprehensive Community Tourism Strategy informed by community feedback. The Community Tourism Strategy is founded on connection with a strong focus on sustainable tourism, including water stewardship. Bannikin, an Ontario-based tourism consultancy was engaged to facilitate the strategy development process.

Project Goal and Objectives

The overarching project goal is for the integrated Community Tourism Strategy to support year-round visitation while stewarding the destination's natural and cultural assets, balancing the needs of residents, visitors, tourism business owners, and the environment. At the onset of the project, six project objectives were set to guide our research and engagement processes. These objectives included:

01 To align research with work already underway, ensuring that the strategy development process builds on past efforts.

02 To strengthen relationships and collaboration between the Town of Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation.

03 To meaningfully engage and encourage connections amongst diverse interest groups, while growing awareness and appreciation for tourism as an opportunity.

04 To co-create an inspiring vision for tourism with clear, actionable steps to move towards this.

05 To foster a shared destination identity and identify opportunities to better connect visitors to place, through meaningful experiences and storytelling.

06 To build internal capacity to bring the tourism strategy to life through ongoing involvement in strategy decision-making and direction.



About This Document

This Community Tourism Strategy Document is divided into four parts. Introduction provides key context to the project and outlines the goal, objectives, and related methodology. Tourism Today sets the scene for tourism development in Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation, highlighting related challenges and opportunities. The Path Forward outlines foundational strategy elements such as the tourism vision and guiding principles. It also describes the main areas of opportunities and related goals, strategies and example actions that illustrate how these strategies can be brought to life. Finally, the report wraps up in Implementation with key considerations for how we will activate the strategy with an emphasis on the importance of collaboration.

OUR WORK SO FAR

In reflecting on the future of tourism in Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation, we – as a community – have a strong foundation to build off. Much work directly and indirectly related to tourism is already complete or underway. Leveraging past efforts and initiatives, including those initiated by partner organizations is essential to ensuring the efficient use of resources.

Saugeen First Nation

Over the last few years, Saugeen First Nation has focused on growing and strengthening tourism development, management, marketing, and water stewardship efforts by growing the annual Pow Wow, attracting sports tournaments, small-scale land-based learning experiences, small-scale community farming and agritourism initiatives, as well as hosting a vendor market. In addition, a Beach Advisory Committee was created to guide beach operations, stewardship, and future improvements, and the Saugeen Beach Revenue Activation Plan (2026) was developed focusing on ways to strengthen economic opportunity, support operations, and uplift community use of the beach. Saugeen First Nation also developed the Sauble Park Beach Operational Strategy (2019), which focuses on the operations of the beach, while noting existing challenges, stewardship principles, educational opportunities and tourism opportunities, including the aim to attract new visitor segments that are respectful of regulations and environmentally conscious, as well as the opportunity to offer Indigenous storytelling and cultural experiences like guided outdoor activities throughout the year.



Saugeen First Nation has focused on improving and expanding its trail network through the Trail Development Plan (2022). This plan identifies three (3) main trail areas: the Amphitheatre Trail, Health and Wellness Trail, and County Road 13 Corridor, with the Amphitheatre Trail having the most potential to be a tourism and educational trail experience, and County Road 13 being a desirable route to connect with the Town of Sauble Beach. The plan identifies tourism opportunities such as interpretive programming through guided tours that tell the stories of Anishinaabek people, as well as recommends a trail guardian program focused on trail development, maintenance, and programming. Other recommendations include developing a trail tourism strategy, and interpretive signage on traditional medicines, Indigenous history and stories, language learning (i.e., Anishinaabemowin, English, and French), and species at risk.

Saugeen First Nation is also completing the revitalization of an outdoor Amphitheatre near the Saugeen River. This place has a rich and deep history in the community as a place of military defence, cultural tradition, ancestral burials, and the signing of Treaty 72: Saugeen Peninsula Treaty (1854). Upon the completion of the revitalization, the site will connect with the trail network and be a space for hosting performances and events.

Town of Saugeen Shores

The Town of Saugeen Shores is growing and strengthening tourism development, management, marketing, and beach stewardship directly through the Economic Development Strategic Plan (2018), Destination Development Plan (2025), and Tourism Study (2025), as well as indirectly through initiatives like Southampton's Main Street revitalization, installation of public art, and its Port Elgin Toolkit (n.d.), and Southampton Toolkit (n.d.). However, other documents reviewed included the Town's 2026 Business Plan (2026), Strategic Plan 2023-2027 (2023), and Invest Saugeen Shores (n.d.)

The Tourism Study highlights key visitation data of Saugeen Shores in 2024, while the Economic Development Plan references tourism as a primary economic sector for the Town. Particularly, it mentions that tourism growth is linked to waterfront access, natural beauty, and walkable downtowns and recommends specific actions to grow the tourism sector. These include expanding experiences beyond passive beach use; developing niche markets like outdoor recreation, nature-based tourism, cycling and trail tourism, and agritourism; supporting year-round tourism development, including linking the beach to trails, downtowns, and rural assets; as well as supporting the development of higher-end accommodations. The plan also notes opportunities to invest in beautification, natural shoreline, public beach access, wayfinding, amenities, lighting and parking, as well as leveraging tools like Community Improvement Plans and partnerships with organizations like Bruce County, RTO7, and post-secondary institutions to support the tourism sector, including workforce development and innovation.

The Destination Development Plan focuses on strategic direction to grow Saugeen Shores as a four-season destination that can be enjoyed by both residents and visitors. Importantly, it makes the connection between resident attraction and return visitation over time. The plan identifies six goals: 1. Evaluate tourism resources, 2. Enhance shoulder season tourism, 3. Grow local tourism, 4. Enable vibrant communities year-round, 5. Create a community development collaboration plan with Saugeen First Nation, and 6. Develop a community art plan.

The Town also has the Southampton Toolkit and Port Elgin Toolkit focused on showcasing the unique characteristics and brands of the two sub-destinations within Saugeen Shores to create distinct places to visit. For example, in Port Elgin, it identifies its unique positioning along Highway 12 as an important asset, as well as its six beaches, sunset views, trail network, Point Provincial Park, and its annual 2-day Fall Pumpkinfest Festival. In Southampton, it identifies similar assets, such as Chantry Island lighthouse, Cape Cod-style architecture and marine archaeology. The toolkits provide insights into the sub-destinations' positioning with Port Elgin positioned as a waterfront destination with "the boardwalk vibe" known as a family-friendly place to create vibrant memories, see sunsets, and have casual beach boardwalks. Similarly, Southampton is positioned as a compact, vibrant, and cozy cottage-type community known for its relaxing and refined living, as well as nautical and coastal cruising with a commercial core stretching to the waterfront.



In 2026 the Town of Saugeen Shores also administered a Community Art Survey to gather perspective to inspire future public art initiatives. Residents, visitors, and community members were asked to share the places, stories, heritage features, and community qualities that feel most meaningful to them.

The survey collected ideas to draw from when planning future murals, sculptures, gathering spaces, and other community art projects. This work provides a foundation for future art initiatives that reflect the identity and character of the destination and contributes to tourism through placemaking.

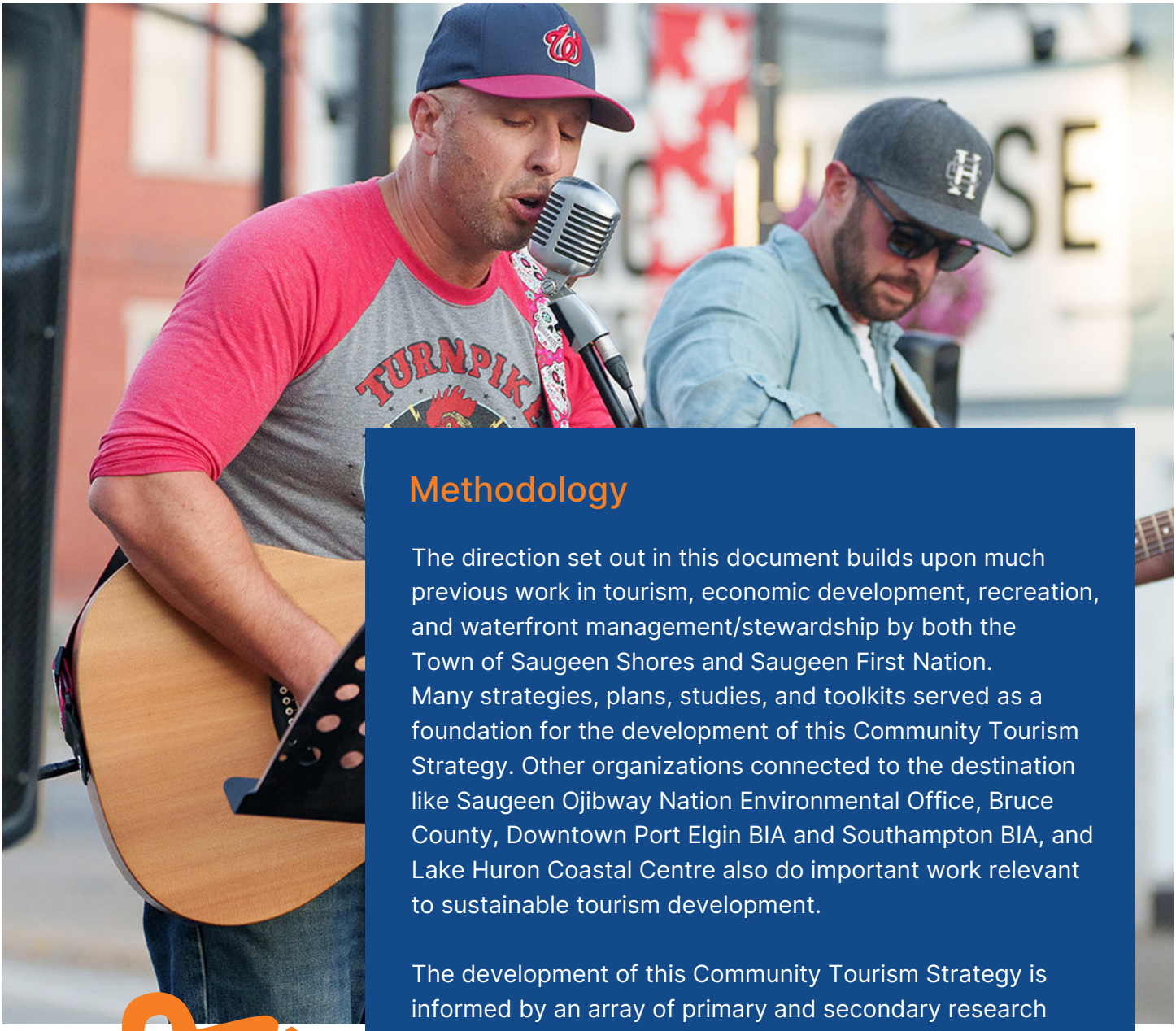
The Town of Saugeen Shores has also done work on beach management, including exploring collaborations with the piloted Municipal Innovation Council's Smart Beach Project (2025) that dissolved and concluded in March 2025, the Healthy Shoreline Healthy You! A Guide for Sustainable Shoreline Properties in the Town of Saugeen Shores (2019), and a Waterfront Master Plan (2013). The Waterfront Master Plan recognizes the waterfront as an economic driver. It notes suggestions to improve it as a key tourism destination by establishing named beach zones to improve navigation, marketing, and packaging.

It also notes the need to better connect the waterfront with other tourism assets like trails, rural and agricultural sectors, food and beverage establishments, cultural heritage assets, retailers, accommodations, and events and programming. It suggests investing in key infrastructure like washrooms, boardwalks, wayfinding and interpretive signage (e.g., coastal ecology, cultural heritage, etc.), visitor services, and beach maintenance scheduling.

The Smart Beach Project began in 2022 in collaboration with the Municipal Innovation Council (made up of eight Bruce County municipalities), the University of Windsor, and Georgian College, to promote beach safety at Station Beach in Kincardine. Phase 1-3 focused on making publicly available real-time wave and current hazards, using computer vision techniques to provide measures of the number of people on the beach and in the water, and surveys to examine beach user perceptions and behaviours. Phase 4-6 is focusing on evaluating the transferability of the Station Beach surf hazard model to three other beaches, merging user and surf models into a real-time warning system, such as available web and mobile apps, and launching the Smart Beach applications. Importantly, as part of Phase 4-6, Port Elgin participated through the installation of the Wave Buoy 1.2km offshore of the beach and camera at the Beach House Building.

The Healthy Shoreline Healthy You! A Guide for Sustainable Shoreline Properties in the Town of Saugeen Shores recognizes that tourism cannot thrive without maintaining the beach's aesthetics and cleanliness, including reducing erosion, algae blooms, and loss of sand. It emphasizes the importance of positioning Saugeen Shores as a place with "clean but living beaches", which means vegetated dunes, with native grasses and shrubs, as well as limited vehicle and foot traffic. It also notes the importance of ensuring short-term rentals, seasonal accommodations, and waterfront amenities follow the same environmental standards expected from permanent residents. Additionally, it notes the importance of key stewardship actions such as volunteering, stewardship events and programming, and interpretive signage, as well as dune planting and sand fencing, community clean-ups, invasive species removal, septic system maintenance, stormwater management infrastructure like rain barrels, permeable surfaces, and rain gardens.





Methodology

The direction set out in this document builds upon much previous work in tourism, economic development, recreation, and waterfront management/stewardship by both the Town of Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation. Many strategies, plans, studies, and toolkits served as a foundation for the development of this Community Tourism Strategy. Other organizations connected to the destination like Saugeen Ojibway Nation Environmental Office, Bruce County, Downtown Port Elgin BIA and Southampton BIA, and Lake Huron Coastal Centre also do important work relevant to sustainable tourism development.

The development of this Community Tourism Strategy is informed by an array of primary and secondary research methods, including a background document review, visitor impressions research, a visitation data and trends review, key informant interviews, best practice review in waterfront and beachfront destination management, competitor destination research, a business supports scan, a community tourism survey, community open houses (x2), and an industry focus group.

Meaningful community engagement was prioritized across both the research and strategy development processes. Approaches were adjusted in real-time to provide more opportunities for feedback to be collected. For example, the project timeline was extended to keep the community tourism survey open longer.

2. TOURISM TODAY

Our Destination

We, Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation, are well positioned to develop tourism in a way that will contribute to our long-term community wellbeing. We have easy access to key visitor markets, a strong natural asset base, and diverse activities for visitors do in our community. At the same time, there are challenges, like our short tourism season, that we will need to overcome to truly flourish as a destination.



KEY PARTNERS

> **Our tourism ecosystem is made up of many organizations that collectively support tourism development, management, marketing and water stewardship in Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation.**

Our tourism ecosystem is made up of many organizations that collectively support tourism development, management, marketing and water stewardship in Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation. They provide different types of resources and support to local businesses, entrepreneurs, and community organizations. Some focus on supporting the tourism sector, while others, provide resources to support economic, community, environmental, and recreational development more broadly. Direct tourism ecosystem actors include Bruce County, Regional Tourism Organization 7 (RTO7), Destination Ontario, Indigenous Tourism Ontario, and Destination Canada.

Examples of Ecosystem Actors

Our ecosystem actors include but are not limited to the Downtown Port Elgin BIA, Southampton BIA, Saugeen First Nation Independent Business Association, Saugeen Shores Chamber of Commerce, Saugeen Ojibway Nation Environmental Office, Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority, Lake Huron Coastal Centre, Bruce Community Futures Development Corporation, Saugeen Community Futures Development Corporation, Ontario Parks, and Parks Canada.

Regionally, Bruce County plays a tourism leadership role that focuses on promoting the region as a unified destination through its "Explorer the Bruce" brand. It provides direct business support through its economic development programs, as well as support for new tourism experiences through its mentorship and grants program. Additionally, Regional Tourism Organization 7 (RTO7) works collaboratively with tourism partners and other tourism ecosystem actors to grow and sustain responsible visitation, investment and visitor spending. RTO7's strategic marketing pillars include outdoor adventure, cultural immersion, sustainability, and culinary experiences. One of its priorities is improving visitor access to information via wayfinding, interpretive signage, and digital wayfinding tools.

Provincially, Destination Ontario focuses on generating increased visitation from domestic and international visitors, as well as increasing tourism expenditures in the province. The organization supports and assists marketing efforts through partnerships. Similarly, Indigenous Tourism Ontario is the first and only dedicated Indigenous tourism organization that focuses on uniting communities, organizations, and industry leaders in supporting the growth of Indigenous tourism in Ontario.

Nationally, Destination Canada provides intelligence, tools, resources and marketing campaigns that help the Canadian tourism industry reach domestic and international markets. Destination Canada is active in travel trade development, as well as the promotion and development of trade-ready tourism experiences.

Water Stewardship

> **Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation are shaped by water.**

Sitting along the shores of Lake Huron and at the mouth of the Saugeen River, Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation are shaped by water. These lands and waters that include our sandy beaches, shoreline bluffs, wetlands, woodlands, and agricultural landscapes, are not only the foundation of our natural beauty, but the very reason this place holds value for those who live and visit this place. These interconnected ecosystems sustain us since they provide clean water and air, buffer us from storms, support biodiversity, and offer countless opportunities to connect with the outdoors. Without the health of these natural systems, especially our water, there would be no destination.

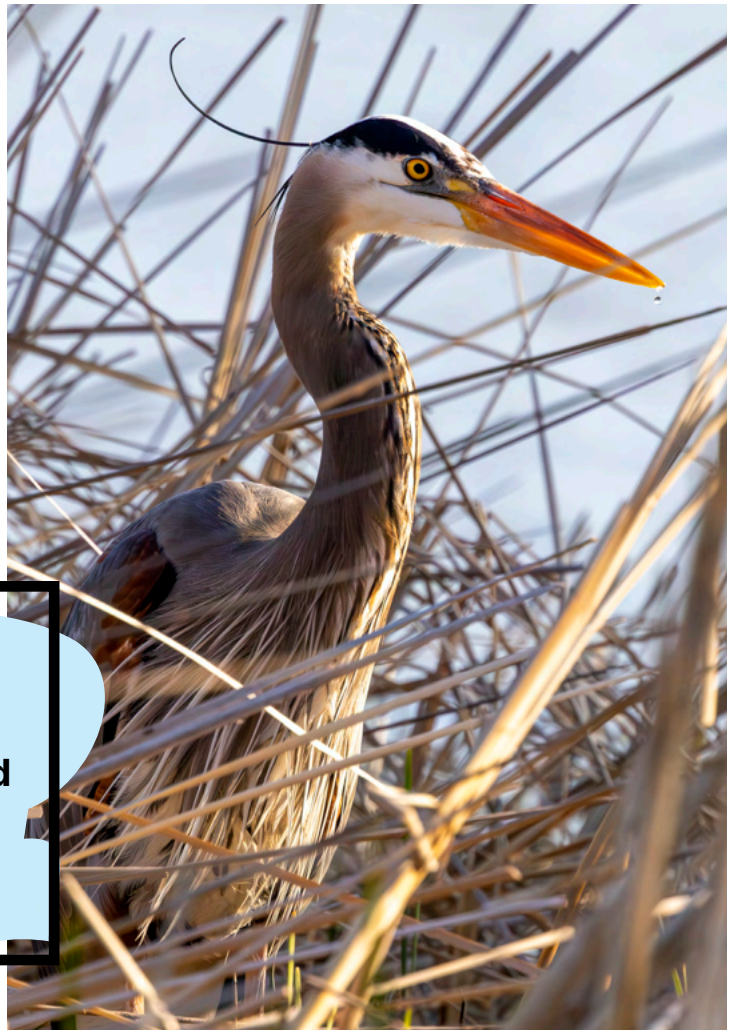
Water is central to how people experience our community. Visitors are drawn here for the beaches, the river, and the sense of rest and renewal that comes with being close to water. These experiences are not incidental. They are the core of our destination identity and our tourism sector. At the same time, this reliance creates a shared responsibility. The popularity of waterfront activities, including the emerging visibility of the Saugeen River for activities such as fly-fishing, reinforces the need to ensure that increased use does not come at the expense of reduced long-term ecological health. Protecting water quality, shoreline integrity, and surrounding habitats is essential not only environmentally, but to sustain the very experiences that attract visitors and allow us to have a tourism sector.

Importantly, through our engagement and research, we know that residents of Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation strongly value protecting waterways and the natural environment. Tourism management must go beyond minimizing tourism's ecological impacts and instead, actively contribute to stewardship. We need to approach tourism as a tool to care for the lands and waters that define Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation, while aligning with broader commitments to environmental stewardship and community wellbeing.

> **Protecting water quality, shoreline integrity, and surrounding habitats is essential not only environmentally, but to sustain the very experiences that attract visitors and allow us to have a tourism sector.**

At the same time, this approach responds to a growing shift in visitor expectations. Increasingly, visitors are seeking meaningful connections with the places they visit, including opportunities to learn, contribute, and engage with local culture and knowledge. For Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation, this presents a powerful opportunity that positions water stewardship as a core part of the visitor experience. This can be done through storytelling, cultural interpretation, and hands-on opportunities to give back. This approach also creates space to elevate Indigenous knowledge systems and deepen understanding of the relationship between people, land, and water over generations.

Ultimately, water stewardship is not a separate initiative, but foundational to the future of tourism in Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation. An integrated approach is how we protect what makes our home so special, ensure that visitation remains balanced and sustainable, and create richer, more meaningful experiences for visitors and residents alike. By embedding stewardship into how tourism is developed, managed, and experienced, we can move towards tourism development, management, and marketing that actively helps sustain local waterways.



> **An integrated approach is how we protect what makes our home so special, ensure that visitation remains balanced and sustainable, and create richer, more meaningful experiences for visitors and residents alike**

Tips for Designing a Water Stewardship Program

01 Make the program participatory, so people can engage and better understand why it's important to care for waterways.

02 Have a physical presence along waterways (e.g., ambassadors, guardians, etc.) in addition to other educational opportunities. This approach reduces inappropriate activities without heavy enforcement.

03 Collect data on the current and ever-changing state of local ecosystems to support decision-making. Leveraging the participation of residents and visitors through citizen science is a cost-effective way for ongoing monitoring efforts.

04 Strengthen stewardship initiatives with Indigenous-led programs that integrate cultural knowledge.

05 Develop partnerships with organizations that share similar goals to find alignments and synergies, amplify good work, and improve efficiencies.

THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Our destination is not a single place, but a collection of communities. Each community maintains its own identity, character, and way of welcoming visitors while also staying connected through shared lands and waters. Importantly, Saugeen River and the shores of Lake Huron shape the landscapes, experiences, memories, and a unique sense of place in our destination.

> **Our destination is not a single place, but a collection of communities.**

Saugeen First Nation offers a powerful connection to land, culture, and community that invites reflection and celebration through its beaches, trails, artisan markets, annual Pow Wow, and the soon-to-be revitalized amphitheatre. Southampton offers a softer, quieter experience, defined by its beaches, thriving arts scene, and charming downtown filled with independent businesses and local character. Port Elgin adds energy and scale, with its vibrant waterfront, strong accommodation base, municipal sports infrastructure, and key events like Pumpkinfest that continue to draw visitors year after year.

Woven between these places are shared experiences—Saugeen River, the Saugeen Rail Trail, and a network of trails that offer a physical and non-physical sense of connection. They invite visitors to slow down, explore, and discover the richness of the destination beyond a single shoreline or stop. Together, these elements create a collection of attractions along with a destination that encourages visitors to experience it fully and differently, with each visit.



Online Presence

How our destination shows up in the digital world matters as much as how it is experienced on the ground. In an increasingly competitive tourism landscape, Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation have an opportunity to step forward with a clearer, more compelling presence that reflects the full breadth of experiences that we offer.

> **A sronger online presence can reshape perception, broaden the narrative, and better align what visitors see online with what they experience on the ground.**

Today, Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation are often seen as a summer places defined by beaches. While this is a strength, it is only part of the story. The distinct identities of Saugeen First Nation, Southampton, and Port Elgin, along with the diversity of experiences they offer, are not yet fully reflected in how the destination presents itself online. Saugeen Shores does not consistently appear as a unified destination brand, while Saugeen First Nation remains underrepresented in search results despite the richness of its offerings. This is more than a branding challenge, since this is about staying visible and relevant in a changing digital environment. As visitors increasingly rely on AI-generated summaries, aggregated search results, and peer-driven content, destinations must ensure their story is heard, repeated, reinforced, and easy to access across platforms. Strong, high-quality digital content on official websites, partner platforms, blogs, and social media, etc. signals both credibility and relevance.

For Saugeen First Nation there is a major opportunity to expand tourism-related content that supports trip planning, such as clearly communicating when to visit, what to experience, and how to engage respectfully with the community. At the same time, building a presence across emerging platforms, including user-generated spaces like Reddit and travel blogs, can help ensure the destination appears where visitor decisions are being made.

Done well, a stronger online presence can do more than attract attention. It can reshape perception, broaden the narrative, and better align what visitors see online with what they will experience on the ground.





> **A strong destination is not only defined by what it offers, but by how easily those experiences can be brought together into a meaningful visit.**

Itinerary Development

A strong destination is not only defined by what it offers, but by how easily those experiences can be brought together into a meaningful visit.
Today, several challenges in Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation, make it difficult to plan a compelling itinerary, including limited hours of business operation and a lack of consistent, bookable experiences, particularly outside peak summer months.

There is untapped potential to move beyond passive visitation and into something more engaging, more memorable, and more aligned with the values of our destination. By developing signature experiences that invite participation through hands-on activities, guided experiences, cultural learning, storytelling, and opportunities to give back we can offer a more meaningful experience.

Importantly, these experiences can draw on what already makes Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation special, like the connection to water, the richness of Indigenous culture, the arts, the land, and the sense of community. At the same time, strengthening itinerary options, especially in the shoulder and winter seasons, will support more balanced, year-round visitation. Coordinated hours, bundled experiences, and clearly communicated offerings can make it easier for visitors to move across the destination and discover its full range of experiences.

Ultimately, itinerary development means simplifying visitor decision-making so that they say yes to visiting and then choose to return because of a great experience. It is also about creating a cohesive journey where each stop builds on the last, where each community contributes something meaningful, and where visitors leave with a deeper, more lasting connection to Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation.

Moving Visitors Around

The Saugeen Rail Trail is a linear route, making it difficult for visitors to return to their starting point without backtracking. This points to opportunities for a shuttle or better connecting the trail to other cycling routes to make a loop. Several online user reviews on blogs and social media noted difficulties with crossing major roads while cycling the trail. There are opportunities to better link the trails in Saugeen First Nation to those of Saugeen Shores. Shared trail signage and branding can create a sense of welcome and encourage visitor movement across the destination.

> **Tourism businesses in Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation are supported by a rich and layered ecosystem of organizations dedicated to entrepreneurship, destination development, workforce capacity, and business growth**



BUSINESS SUPPORTS

Tourism businesses in Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation are supported by a rich and layered ecosystem of organizations dedicated to entrepreneurship, destination development, workforce capacity, and business growth. This network offers a collection of supports that set the foundation for a stronger, more resilient tourism economy. To maximize the effectiveness of these supports it is essential to do so in a coordinated way that does not duplicate efforts.



Provincial and National Level

At the provincial and national levels, tourism businesses are supported by a broader network of organizations that provide strategic insights, industry standards, and opportunities for growth. Organizations such as the Tourism Industry Association of Ontario, Ontario Tourism Education Corporation, Indigenous Tourism Ontario, and Destination Ontario offer access to training, research, and market intelligence that help businesses stay competitive and responsive in a rapidly evolving global tourism landscape.

These supports are essential to strengthening the tourism ecosystem at a higher level since they help align local efforts with broader trends, priorities, and best practices. Resources focused on sustainability, accessibility, workforce development, and leadership enable businesses to adapt to shifting visitor expectations and deliver experiences that are not only high-quality but also inclusive, responsible, and forward-looking.

At the national level, organizations such as Destination Canada, Tourism HR Canada, the Tourism Industry Association of Canada, and the Canadian Council for Indigenous Business provide critical tools, funding pathways, and research that support long-term destination development. These organizations help position destinations like ours within the broader Canadian tourism landscape, opening doors to new markets, partnerships, and opportunities.

The Visitor

The Town of Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation are a highly seasonal destination That has seen an increase in visitation between 2023 (i.e., 240,000 daily visits, 36,000 unique visitors) and 2024 (i.e., 320,000 daily visits). The main tourism season is between May and October, with a significant decrease in visitation from November to April.

Most visitors in 2024 were between the ages of 35-44 years old and 65+, with an average income of $164,749. Notably, there is a growing number of visitors with culturally diverse backgrounds, which highlights the importance of fostering a diverse and inclusive destination. Visitors are coming from places like Toronto, Brockton, Guelph, Kitchener-Waterloo, Cambridge, Hamilton, London, Oakville, Mississauga, etc. In 2024, the destination saw 980,000 overnight stays with an average of 4.1 nights per visitor and 2.6 nights per trip. Most visitor spending was done on retail, followed by food and beverage, accommodations, and arts, recreation, and entertainment.

Moving forward, it will be important for Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation to invest in visitation data on a regular basis to inform tourism marketing efforts. This could be done in collaboration with other partners, such as Bruce County and/or Regional Tourism Organization 7.

Insights from 2025 Town of Saugeen Shores Visitor Survey

in Partnership with Bruce County

- **Most travel groups had two people; however, a significant number of travel groups were made up of six people or more. Many visitors travelled with pets.**
- **The majority had visited Bruce County before and most were planning to return.**
- **Most travelled for vacation followed by visiting friends and family.**
- **Top activities included: dining, beach, sightseeing, and hiking.**
- **All visitors went to other towns in Bruce County in addition to Saugeen Shores, such as Tobermory, Sauble Beach, Wiarton, Kincardine, and Lion's Head.**
- **Top overnight accommodations included campground, friends and family, rental cabin/ cottage, and hotel/motel.**
- **$999 is the average spend per travel group.**

VISITOR SEGMENTS

Visitor segmentation data provides a clear lens to understand who our destination is attracting today, and who it can attract in the future. For Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation, three core visitor segments stand out as highly aligned with the destination's existing strengths. These include 'Happy Medium', 'New Country', and 'Scenic Retirement'. Together, these segments reflect a visitor base that is practical, family-oriented, community-minded, and drawn to outdoor recreation, small-town character, and comfortable, easy-to-navigate experiences.

Across Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation, visitors are drawn to the beaches, the river, the trails, and the rhythm of small-town life. These are places where families gather, where people reconnect with nature, and where experiences feel grounded, authentic, and accessible. The alignment between these three core segments and the destination's current offerings is a direct reflection of what has made this place successful as a visitor destination.

For 'Happy Medium' and 'New Country' visitors, the destination's appeal lies in simplicity and reliability. These visitors are not seeking luxury or high-end experiences. Instead, they value affordability, familiarity, and access to outdoor recreation such as beaches, boating, fishing, trails, and casual activities. They are drawn to destinations that are easy to understand and navigate, where the experience feels approachable, and the value is clear. For Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation, this reinforces the importance of maintaining and enhancing these core experiences by ensuring they remain high-quality, accessible, and well-supported.



‘Scenic Retirement’ adds another important dimension to our destination. This segment is more focused on comfort, pace, and quality of life. They are drawn to scenic environments, walking trails, gardens, cultural experiences, community events, and opportunities for relaxation and wellness. For this group, a great destination is less about activity and more about feeling ease, calm, and connection. This creates a natural opportunity to extend visitation beyond peak summer months, positioning Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation as an appealing shoulder-season destination where visitors can slow down and engage more deeply.

At the same time, emerging segments such as ‘Modern Suburbia’ and ‘Family Mode’, signal where we can evolve. These visitors are younger, more digitally connected, and often have higher income. Their expectations shaped by convenience, accessibility, and seamless planning. They are looking for curated, family-friendly experiences that are easy to discover and book, with clear information, visible promotion, and easy to discover and book, with clear information, visible promotion, and opportunities for shared, memorable moments. While they do not represent the traditional visitor base, they highlight a growing opportunity to broaden our appeal—particularly among active families seeking well-packaged, experience-driven trips. For Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation, this indicates a need to better connect what already exists to visitor demand, make it easier to plan, book, and engage with the destination, and strengthen experience development and packaging, particularly for families and shoulder-season visitors.



> **There is an opportunity to make these strengths more visible, accessible, and cohesive from the first point of online inspiration through to the on-the-ground visitor experience.**



The strength of Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation lies in our authenticity, connection to land and water, and the diversity of experiences across our communities. There is an opportunity to make these strengths more visible, accessible, and cohesive from the first point of online inspiration through to the on-the-ground visitor experience. We can improve the visitor experience by making it more seamless, intentional, and connected, as well as aligning businesses, organizations, and communities around a shared understanding of who the destination is attracting. Segmentation data affirms that Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation are well-positioned as a destination. Our challenge is to bring greater clarity, cohesion, and purpose to how it is experienced.

Key Takeaways

In planning for the sustainable future of tourism in Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation eight key takeaways emerged from the research. These are outlined below and reflected in the strategic direction that follows.



1. Connection and integration will take us further.

Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation have already advanced tourism, waterfront stewardship, trail development, community art, visitor research, and experience development. There is also a strong network of regional, provincial, and national partners. The opportunity is to better align these efforts, clarify roles, and turn existing plans and resources into coordinated action.



2. We have more to offer than our current image suggests.

Beaches and summer recreation are central to the destination's appeal. However, the river, trails, arts, culture, heritage, events, downtowns, and Indigenous-led experiences provide a much broader foundation. The challenge is that many of these assets are not yet visible, connected, or easy for visitors to experience. We need to improve clarity and consistency in messaging, so visitors easily understand what the destination offers and how to experience it.



3. Seasonality brings both pressure and opportunity.

Summer visitation supports local businesses and brings energy to the communities. It also contributes to congestion, crowded public spaces, and pressure on beaches and infrastructure. Winter and the shoulder seasons are much quieter. Developing more year-round experiences can support local businesses while helping to spread visitation more evenly.



4. Moving around is not always simple.

The destination includes several communities and tourism areas connected by shared lands, waters, and visitor flows. However, gaps in signage, trail connections, road crossings, transportation options, and visitor information can make it difficult to move between them. Better connections can improve visitor experiences while encouraging people to explore beyond the busiest areas. Enhancing accessibility and ease of movement will visitors navigate between communities and experiences with confidence.

5. Our distinct identities are a strength.

Port Elgin, Southampton, and Saugeen First Nation each offer a different sense of place and visitor experience. These differences should not be flattened into a single identity. The opportunity is to connect the communities through shared stories, stewardship, and visitor information while allowing each place to remain distinct.

6. Saugeen First Nation can be better connected to the visitor experience.

There is strong potential for Indigenous-led storytelling, cultural programming, trail experiences, events, and land- and water-based tourism. This work must be led by Saugeen First Nation and developed at a pace that reflects community priorities, readiness, and capacity.

7. The right visitors are already aligned with many of our strengths.

Current and emerging visitor segments value outdoor recreation, family time, small-town character, comfort, accessibility, and authentic experiences. The destination does not need to reinvent itself to attract these visitors. It needs to make existing experiences easier to find, plan, book, and enjoy. There's also an opportunity to make sustainability and stewardship a stronger part of our value proposition to connect with aligned visitors.

8. Growth needs to be matched by stewardship and capacity.

Tourism depends on the health of the beaches, river, trails, communities, and public spaces that draw visitors. Future growth will require ongoing attention to infrastructure, business capacity, environmental protection, visitor behaviour, and community wellbeing. The opportunity is to position stewardship not as a limit on tourism, but as part of the destination's identity and value.



3. THE PATH FORWARD

Community Feedback

The direction set out in this Community Tourism Strategy is informed by a diversity of community engagement exercises that took place across the project.

We heard that there is a strong sense of pride in Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation. Our community values the beaches, waterways, trails, natural landscapes, events, cultural assets, and small-town character that define our area. It is clear that tourism is closely tied to everyday life. Residents enjoy and cherish the same beaches, trails, restaurants, cultural spaces, and community events that attract visitors.

At the same time, we heard that tourism needs to be better balanced. Summer brings energy and economic activity, but it is also associated with congestion, limited parking, crowded beaches, waste, and pressure on public spaces. Some residents said they avoid certain areas during peak periods. Others expressed concern that unmanaged growth could change the character of our communities and place more pressure on the natural environment. The community does not want tourism growth for its own sake. People want tourism to bring clear benefits to local businesses, workers, residents, and the environment. They want visitors to stay longer, spend locally, and engage more meaningfully with the destination. They also want growth to reflect the capacity of local infrastructure and the needs of people who live here year-round.

There was also a strong desire to see more activity outside the summer months. People described winter and the shoulder seasons as quiet, with fewer open businesses and limited things to do. They saw opportunities for winter recreation, arts and culture, food experiences, festivals, trails, indoor programming, and river-based activities. The overarching message was that tourism should be spread more evenly across the year.



Important feedback was that the destination has more to offer than visitors may realize. The beaches are important, but they are only part of the story. The river, trails, arts, heritage, food, events, and cultural experiences all have a role to play. Better signage, visitor information, event coordination, and cross-promotion could make it easier for visitors and residents to discover these experiences.

Water stewardship was referred to both directly and indirectly by the community as central to the future of tourism. Protecting the beaches, river, shorelines, and related ecosystems is a priority, making it important that tourism helps to build respect for these places rather than adding to existing pressures.

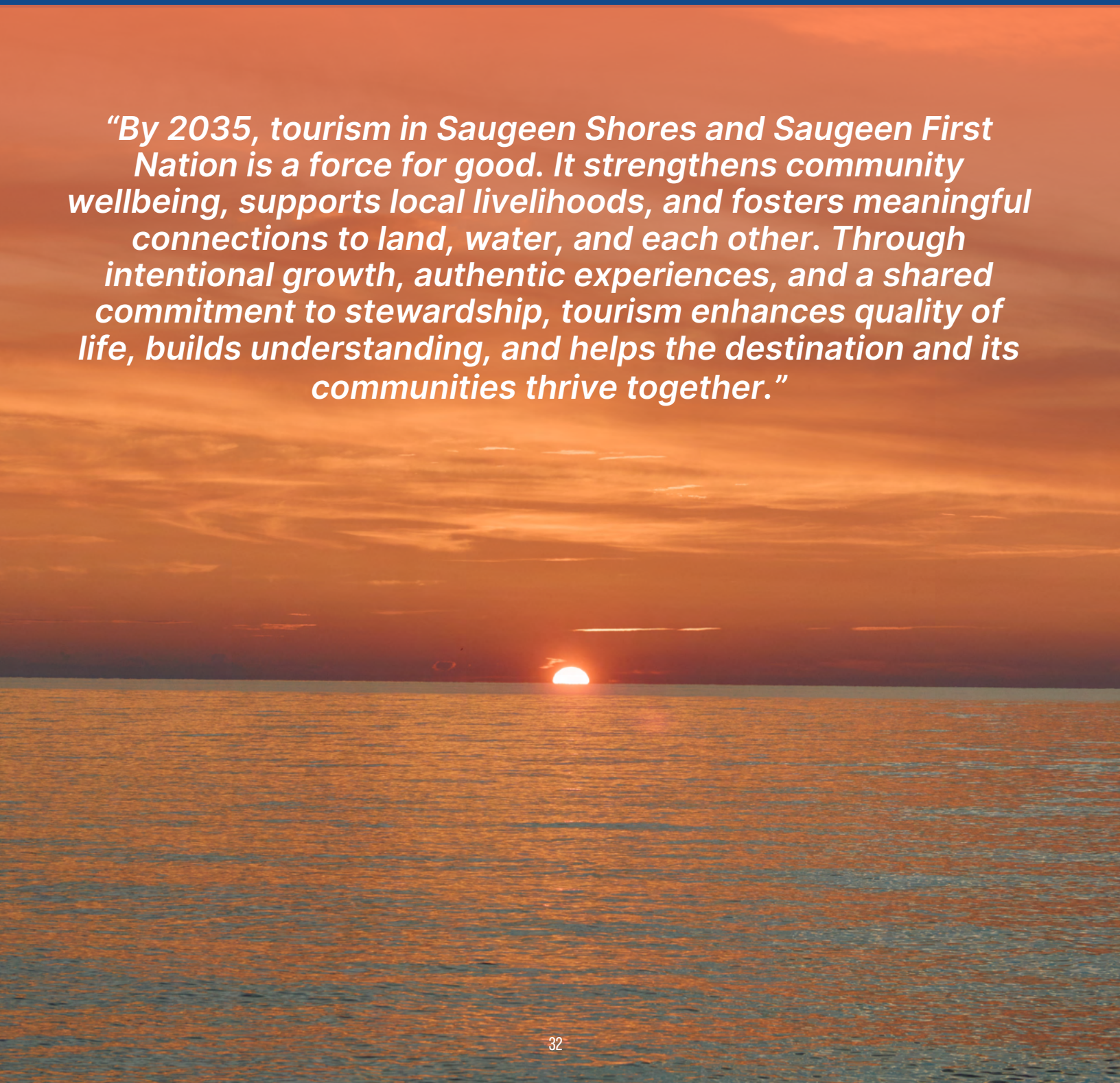
The visibility of Saugeen First Nation was another important theme. People want to see more Indigenous-led storytelling, cultural programming, as well as land- and water-based experiences. They also emphasized that this work must happen respectfully and on Indigenous terms. Building trust, strengthening relationships, and addressing issues of racism and exclusion are essential to this work.

Overall, the community wants tourism to strengthen what already makes the destination special. People want tourism to protect the lands and waters, support local livelihoods, improve quality of life, and create more opportunities for connection between Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation. They also want stronger coordination so that good ideas can move into action.



Tourism Vision

Establishing an inspiring tourism vision is essential to ensuring that the kind of tourism developed in Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation supports the needs and wellbeing of the community. Built from the perspectives and priorities of community members, the following vision statement served as the north star in developing this Community Tourism Strategy and will continue to guide tourism decision-making moving forward.

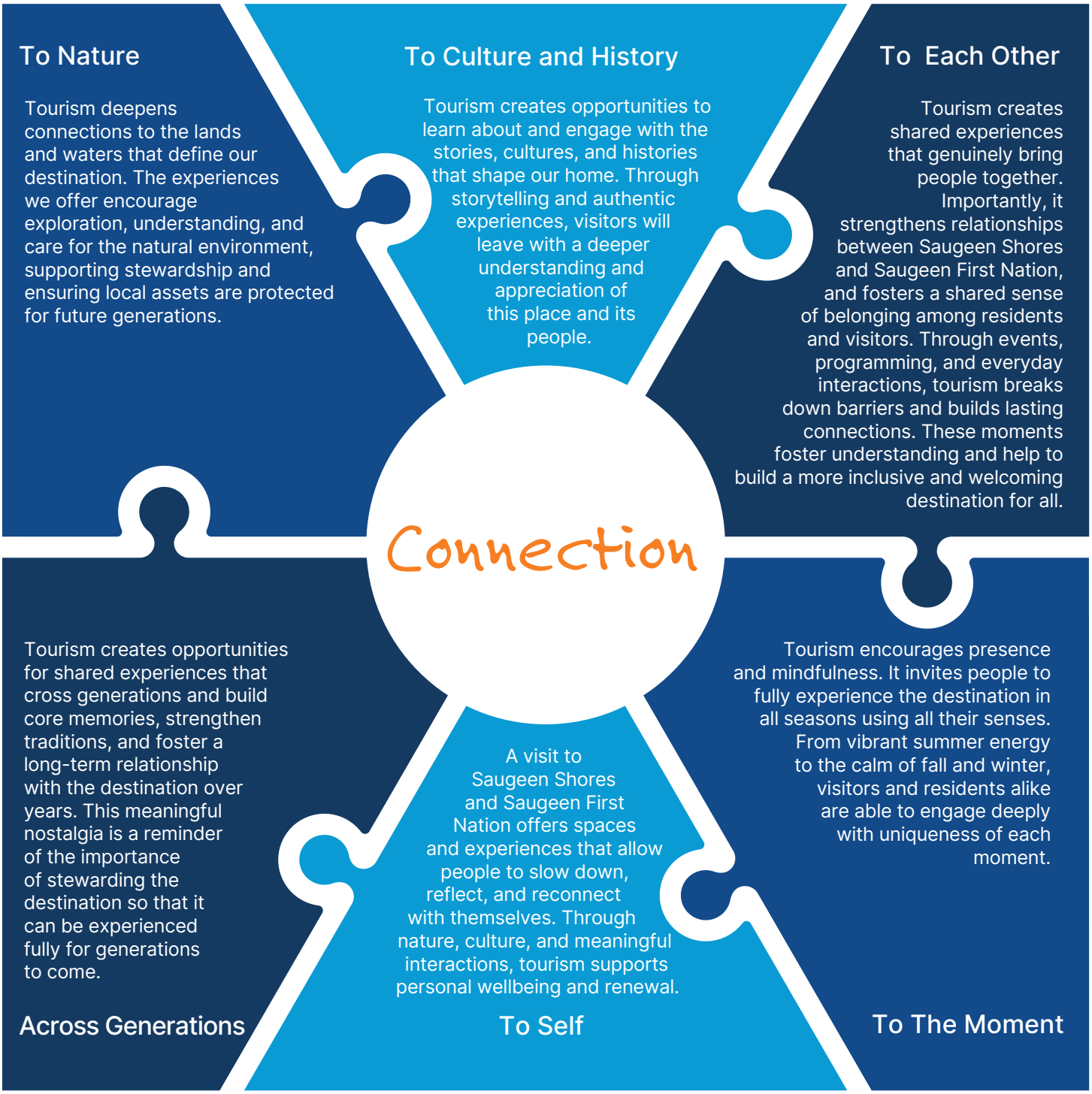


"By 2035, tourism in Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation is a force for good. It strengthens community wellbeing, supports local livelihoods, and fosters meaningful connections to land, water, and each other. Through intentional growth, authentic experiences, and a shared commitment to stewardship, tourism enhances quality of life, builds understanding, and helps the destination and its communities thrive together."

Guiding Principles

In addition to the tourism vision, the Community Tourism Strategy has six guiding principles that can be read into each strategy and every action we intend to pursue. This means that connection is at the heart of our tourism strategy.

For Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation, tourism will be developed and managed to strengthen connections, across communities, the environment, and within ourselves. Each guiding principle below reflects a different way connection shapes the future of tourism. These guiding principles are foundational to all our tourism work.



Strategy Framework

This Community Tourism Strategy is built around five areas of opportunity, including:

1) Destination Management

2) Capacity Development

3) Product Development

4) Marketing and Communications

5) Water Stewardship

Each Area of Opportunity highlights a goal we are working towards and is associated with strategies and example actions for bringing them to life.



AREA OF OPPORTUNITY #1: DESTINATION MANAGEMENT

Destination management is about shaping tourism intentionally, rather than allowing visitation, growth, and destination pressures to unfold on their own. For Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation, this means thinking carefully about how people move through the destination, how tourism affects community life, and how visitor activity can be aligned with local values, infrastructure, and long-term well-being. The goal here is for tourism to be thoughtfully shaped to strengthen community life, welcome visitors well, and create a destination that is vibrant, balanced, and built to thrive for generations.

Strategies	Example Actions
1.1 Build a physically and experientially connected destination	• Develop integrated trail and waterway connections with shared signage and branding across communities. • Introduce wayfinding and interpretive signage that tells stories of place, culture, and environment. • Explore looped routes and shuttle solutions to improve mobility and reduce friction in visitor journeys. • Use placemaking tools (e.g. art, signage, visual cues) to reinforce the idea of one connected destination and encourage visitors to move around.
1.2 Manage visitation to support community wellbeing	• Identify and promote priority tourism zones to reduce pressure on residential areas. • Develop tools to manage peak-period congestion (e.g. parking, beach access, visitor flow). • Encourage off-peak and midweek travel aligned with community capacity. • Integrate tourism considerations into infrastructure planning (e.g. washrooms, access points, signage, garbage cans, etc.). • Continue investing in visitation data and insights (e.g. Environics).
1.3 Secure sustainable funding and resourcing for tourism, development, management and marketing	• Explore a municipal tourism fund (MTF) and other revenue streams. • Align initiatives with grant programs and partner funding opportunities. • Support creation of a tourism coordinator / champion role to drive delivery of the strategy.
1.4 Align tourism with broader community planning	• Integrate tourism into economic development, infrastructure, and community planning, including new infrastructure developments • Ensure tourism decisions reflect community values and quality of life priorities • Track success through community, environmental, and economic indicators (e.g. resident sentiment surveying, beach health monitoring, tourism industry sentiment survey)

A key part of this area of opportunity is building a destination that feels physically and experientially connected. Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation share landscapes, waterways, cultural connections, and visitor flows, but the experience of moving between places can be strengthened. Integrated trail and waterway connections, shared signage and branding, interpretive features, looped routes, shuttle options, and placemaking tools can all help reinforce the idea of one connected destination. These improvements would make it easier for visitors to explore and support a shared sense of place.

At the same time, a more connected destination needs to be carefully managed. Tourism should support community wellbeing and not impact sacred areas or place unnecessary pressure on residential areas, public spaces, beaches, parking systems, or local infrastructure. We need tourism that is intentional, distributing visitors and attracting people with shared values, rather than taking a volume-driven approach. Identifying priority tourism zones, managing peak-period congestion, encouraging off-peak and midweek travel, as well as considering tourism in infrastructure planning and other community services to ensure that visitation matches to community capacity.

For this work to move beyond planning, we will need sustainable funding and resourcing through a municipal tourism fund. Tools such as a Municipal Accommodation Tax, grant programs, partner contributions, and phased implementation planning can help create the conditions for action. This is especially important because many destination management priorities, such as signage, mobility, visitor flow, washrooms, access points, and public realm improvements, require coordination across departments, organizations, and jurisdictions.

More broadly, destination management should be aligned with community planning. Tourism should not sit apart from economic development, infrastructure planning, environmental stewardship, or quality of life priorities. It should be integrated into those conversations so that tourism decisions reflect the needs of our community, businesses, visitors, and the environment. Tracking success through community, environmental, and economic indicators can us keep tourism growth balanced over time.



AREA OF OPPORTUNITY #2: CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

If destination management is about setting the conditions for balanced tourism, capacity development is about making sure the people, partners, and organizations involved have the ability to deliver on that direction. This area focuses on leadership, coordination, skills, relationships, and shared implementation capacity. The goal is to empower people, partners, and organizations across the destination to lead with confidence, work together with purpose, and turn shared vision into meaningful action.

Strategies	Example Actions
2.1 Strengthen coordinated destination leadership and governance	• Establish a formal joint tourism working group for TSS and SFN implementation. • Create regular cross-community coordination meetings (e.g. staff, partners, BIAs, tourism and community organizations). • Define roles, responsibilities, and shared priorities across organizations. • Position tourism as a long-term economic development tool, not a seasonal activity (including in relevant TSS and SFN policies and documents).
2.2 Build local capacity to deliver high-quality visitor experiences	• Deliver training on experience development, cultural awareness, and visitor readiness. • Connect new and existing tourism entrepreneurs with available business coaching, mentorship, financing, grants, and market-readiness supports. • Create opportunities for Indigenous-led tourism development and business participation. • Help businesses and community members assess, test, and refine new tourism experience ideas before bringing them to market. • Host an annual tourism networking and training event (“Tourism Day).
2.3 Use tourism to strengthen relationships across communities within the destination	• Co-create joint programming and events across communities. • Improve visibility and understanding of welcome protocols and access (including when and how visitors are welcomed to Saugeen First Nation). • Develop shared storytelling approaches that reflect Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation. • Pilot collaborative community-focused initiatives (e.g., river camps, cultural programming, sporting, community meal event, etc.).

Building a stronger tourism system requires coordinated destination leadership and governance. This does not necessarily mean creating a complicated structure, but it does mean establishing clearer ways for partners to work together over time. A formal joint tourism working group for Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation to manage implementation, regular cross-community coordination meetings, defined roles and responsibilities, and shared priorities will help us harness the opportunities that tourism brings. This kind of structure can also help ensure that resources are pooled and that implementation is a joint effort.

Capacity development also means supporting local businesses, organizations, and community members so that they can participate meaningfully in tourism. This includes supporting both established businesses and people who may be considering a new tourism-related business, experience, event, or service. Entrepreneurship supports such as business planning, coaching, mentorship, financing guidance, experience testing, and connections to existing support organizations can help promising ideas move from concepts toward viable visitor offerings. Training in experience development, cultural awareness, visitor readiness, and business collaboration can strengthen our tourism offer, while making participation more accessible. There is also an important opportunity to create space for Indigenous-led tourism development and business participation, supported by respectful processes, appropriate partnerships, and community readiness. An annual tourism networking and training event, such as a “Tourism Day,” could help maintain momentum and provide a regular space for shared learning, relationship-building, and coordination.

This focus on capacity is also tied to relationship-building between Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation. Tourism can be a practical tool for building trust, visibility, and shared experiences when it is approached thoughtfully and collaboratively. Joint programming, shared storytelling, clearer welcome protocols, and community-focused initiatives such as camps, cultural programming, and cross-community events can strengthen relationships while creating meaningful experiences for residents and visitors.



AREA OF OPPORTUNITY #3: PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

With stronger coordination and capacity in place, product development brings the destination to life. This area focuses on the experiences, events, programs, and visitor-facing opportunities. The goal here is for the destination to come to life through memorable experiences that reflect its character, celebrate every season, and give people new reasons to gather, explore, learn, and return.

Strategies	Example Actions
3.1 Diversify tourism product to support four-season visitation	• Develop winter and shoulder season experiences (i.e. outdoor recreation, sports, wellness, cultural events). • Expand indoor and weather-independent activities (e.g. arts, culture, culinary, etc.). • Support businesses in extending operating seasons and offerings (e.g. through pop up activations etc.). • Encourage and support entrepreneurs to explore new products, services, and experiences that respond to identified shoulder-season and winter gaps.
3.2 Create signature, place-based experiences	• Launch a signature experiences program (e.g., paddling + storytelling, culinary or arts workshops, guided walking or cycling tours, etc.) • Explore connection opportunities with water stewardship volunteering • Explore connections with neighbouring municipalities and partners like Paisley, Ontario Parks, etc. • Work with local businesses and organizations to develop the experiences, integrate storytelling, • Use assets like the amphitheatre, river, trails, and waterfront as anchors for programming • Provide opportunities for businesses to pitch, test, and refine experience concepts with tourism and economic development partners.
3.3 Activate the destination with events and programming	• Develop existing seasonal anchor events (e.g., winter markets, food festivals, cultural events) • Support community-driven events and festivals that bring people together • Create spaces for local artisans, musicians, and vendors • Encourage cross-community events and shared programming

One of our most important opportunities is to diversify our tourism product to support four-season visitation. We have strong summer draws, particularly our beaches, waterfronts, and outdoor recreation, but our long-term resilience will depend on creating a more balanced year-round offering. Winter and shoulder-season experiences, wellness activities, cultural programming, culinary offerings, arts-based activities, and indoor or weather-independent experiences can all help reduce reliance on peak summer visitation. Supporting businesses to extend their operating seasons and adapt their offerings will be key to making this shift happen.

Related to seasonality, there is also an opportunity to create signature, place-based experiences that reflect the identity of our destination across the year. These experiences should feel connected to the specific character of Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation, rather than being generic tourism products that could happen anywhere. Paddling and storytelling experiences, hands-on workshops, guided tours, cultural learning opportunities, and programming can deepen visitor engagement. Assets such as the amphitheatre, Saugeen River, our trails, waterfront, and community gathering spaces can be anchors for this kind of experience development.



Tourism Business and Experience Ideas to Explore

The research and engagement completed for this strategy identified gaps and opportunities that can offer inspiration for local businesses, entrepreneurs, community organizations, and potential partners. These ideas are not confirmed business opportunities and have not been supported by individual feasibility studies or business cases. Rather, they reflect areas where visitors and community members noted limited offerings, especially during the winter and shoulder seasons.



Outdoor Recreation & Learning

Guided paddling, fishing, or river experiences that combine outdoor recreation with local storytelling, ecology, and cultural learning



Indigenous Culture-Based Experiences

Indigenous-led land, water, arts, food, and culture-based experiences developed on community terms and at a pace determined by Saugeen First Nation



Guided Winter Activities

Guided winter activities such as snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, winter walking, nature interpretation, or cold-weather wellness activities (e.g. Polar dipping)



Outdoor Recreation Support Services

Equipment rentals, public bike repair station, shuttles, guided outings, or other services that make it easier to use local trails, waterways, and outdoor recreational assets



Culinary Experiences

Culinary workshops, tasting experiences, seasonal food events, pop-up dinners, or experiences featuring local producers and food traditions



Arts and Maker Experiences

Workshops, studio visits, public art tours, artisan demonstrations, and opportunities for visitors to create something connected to the destination



Wellness Experiences

Wellness experiences that combine movement, rest, nature and water, including retreats, guided mindfulness, sauna or cold-exposure concepts, and restorative outdoor programming

Evening and Indoor Programming

Live music, storytelling, performances, workshops, museum programming and family activities that provide things to do after daytime attractions close or when the weather does not permit

Winter Market and Seasonal Experiences

Winter markets, holiday experiences, food festivals, cultural events, and seasonal programming that create reasons to visit outside the summer months.

Local Tourism Support Services

Services that connect existing offerings, such as packaged itineraries, transportation between communities, luggage or equipment transfers, and bookable multi-business experiences

Events and programming can also activate our destination, particularly outside the summer peak. Seasonal anchor events, winter markets, food festivals, cultural events, artisan showcases, music programming, and community festivals can create new reasons to visit while strengthening local pride and connection. Where possible, cross-community programming should be encouraged so that events become not only a tourism draw, but also a way of building relationships across the destination.



AREA OF OPPORTUNITY #4: MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

As the destination experience in Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation becomes more connected and developed, marketing and communications will help shape how it is understood, discovered, and navigated by visitors. This area is about more than promotion, encompassing storytelling, visitor information, and making it easier for people to understand what we offer beyond the beach. Our goal is to be known and recognized through a clear destination identity, compelling stories, and easy-to-access information that inspires people to see what makes Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation special.

Strategies	Example Actions
4.1 Establish a clear and connected destination identity	• Develop a shared destination narrative and brand approach rooted in connection. • Align visitor facing messaging across TSS and SFN channels. • Highlight diverse experiences beyond the beach (showing connections across the destination).
4.2 Improve visitor information and trip planning	• Create a new or evolve existing website/platform to create a centralized hub offering user-friendly tourism information. • Grow awareness of the platform and encourage its use by residents, visitors, industry, etc. • Strengthen event calendars and cross-promotion. • Improve on-site signage and visitor orientation tools.
4.3 Enhance digital presence and discoverability	• Build strong, consistent online content across multiple platforms (i.e. web, social, blogs). • Optimize for search engine and AI-driven search. • Engage actively with user-generated platforms (I.e. reviews, Reddit, etc.). • Ensure content is accessible, clear, and mobile-friendly.



A clear and connected destination identity is key to this work. We have an opportunity to position our destination as a cohesive experience while celebrating the distinct identities, stories, and strengths that make up Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation. With a shared destination narrative, aligned messaging across channels, and a stronger emphasis on experiences beyond the beach, Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation can broaden how the destination is perceived, helping to move visitors around, spreading out the economic benefits and offering visitors a more representative experience of the destination. Encouraging people to explore different places, seasons, and activities also supports more balanced visitation.

Improving visitor information and trip planning is another priority. Destinations lose opportunities when visitors cannot easily find information, understand what is available, or navigate between experiences. A centralized, user-friendly tourism website or platform, stronger event calendars, improved cross-promotion, better on-site signage, and clearer visitor orientation tools can all help reduce friction in the visitor journey. It is also important that other websites where visitors may look for information redirect to the centralized platform. These improvements support local businesses and organizations by making it easier for their offerings to be discovered.

Digital presence and discoverability will continue to matter as visitors increasingly use on search, social media, review platforms, AI-driven discovery tools, and user-generated content to make decisions. Strong, consistent online content across websites, social platforms, blogs, and listings will help the destination remain visible in competitive markets. Optimizing content for AI-driven search, engaging with platforms such as review sites and Reddit, monitoring engagement insights, and ensuring content is accessible, clear, and mobile-friendly will help strengthen both marketing effectiveness and visitor experience. It is also important to continue to invest in the collection and analysis of visitor data in order to have the information to make informed marketing decisions.



AREA OF OPPORTUNITY #5: WATER STEWARDSHIP

Water stewardship is a defining part of this strategy because water is central to the identity, ecology, culture, and visitor appeal of our destination. The shorelines, beaches, and waterways are not simply tourism assets, they are living systems that require care, respect, and long-term protection. Water is cherished as one of the destination's greatest gifts. We know that tourism must help to protect water assets. The goal is to foster a shared culture of stewardship in which visitors, residents, partners, and tourism operators work together to protect and sustain the water systems that define us.

Strategies	Example Actions
5.1 Develop a Water Stewardship Council that engages residents and visitors	• Ensure WSC is made up of diverse voices representing a range of worldviews and knowledges types, including youth. • Draft a mission statement for the WSC that includes sociocultural, economic, and environmental dimensions.
5.2 Strengthen partnerships for environmental management	• Create a new or evolve existing website/platform to create a centralized hub offering user-friendly tourism information. • Grow awareness of the platform and encourage its use by residents, visitors, industry, etc. • Strengthen event calendars and cross-promotion. • Improve on-site signage and visitor orientation tools.
5.3 Embed stewardship into the visitor experience	• Develop participatory stewardship programs for residents and visitors (e.g. volunteer clean-ups and restoration opportunities, citizen science via data collection, etc.) • Integrate education and storytelling into tourism experiences (e.g. signage, lectures, themed tours, signature experiences, etc.) • Create opportunities for visitors to give back to the destination (e.g. through time, knowledge, financial contributions, etc.)
5.4 Establish visible stewardship presence and programming	• Introduce ambassadors/guardians along waterways and beaches • Develop interpretive programming on ecology, culture, and water systems • Include youth in stewardship and education initiatives



Embedding stewardship into the visitor experience is one way to ensure that tourism contributes positively to the destination. Participatory stewardship programs such as clean-ups, restoration projects, citizen science, and visitor give-back opportunities can help connect people more deeply to place while supporting environmental outcomes. Education and storytelling can also be built into tourism experiences so that visitors understand not only where they are, but why these landscapes and water systems matter.

To make stewardship feel active and visible, Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation can explore programming and on-site presence connected to beaches, waterways, and natural areas. Ambassadors or guardians along waterways and beaches, interpretive programming on ecology, culture, and water systems, and youth-focused stewardship initiatives can help create a stronger culture of care. These actions also reinforce the idea that every visitor experience here is based on responsibility, respect, and learning.

Finally, successful water stewardship requires strong partnerships. Our elders, the Saugeen Valley Conservation Area, academic and private sector research groups, neighbouring municipalities, community organizations, and tourism partners all have a role to play in protecting and managing our natural systems. Ongoing data collection and ecosystem monitoring, and alignment with existing stewardship frameworks can help ensure that tourism initiatives support broader environmental goals. In this way, water stewardship becomes both a stand-alone priority and a thread that runs through the entire tourism strategy, connecting destination management, capacity development, product development, and communications back to the landscapes and relationships that make this place distinctive.



4. IMPLEMENTATION

We know that, managed responsible, tourism can and will bring positive impacts to our communities contributing to the wellbeing and connectedness of residents and visitors alike. In the Community Tourism Strategy, we have a plan for how to move forward with the 17 strategies included in the plan over the short-, medium, and long-term.

Strategies with low resource implications that do not rely on other tasks being completed can be moved on quickly, whereas others will require coordination first. Across the implementation period, we will reconfirm each year through our work planning processes, which actions best support the strategies below. If there are opportunities to move timelines up on any of the strategies we intend to act on these.

SHORT-TERM STRATEGIES (1-3 YEARS)

1.4

Align tourism with broader community planning.

2.1

Strengthen coordinated destination leadership and governance.

4.1

Establish a clear and connected destination identity.

5.2

Strengthen partnerships for environmental management.



MEDIUM-TERM STRATEGIES (3-5 YEARS)

1.2
Manage visitation to support community wellbeing.

1.3
Secure sustainable funding and resourcing for tourism development, management, and marketing.

2.2
Build local capacity to deliver high-quality visitor experiences.

2.3
Use tourism to strengthen relationships across communities within the destination.

3.1
Diversify the tourism product to support four-season visitation.

3.2
Create signature, place-based experiences.



3.3
Activate the destination with events and programming.

4.2
Improve visitor information and trip planning.

4.3
Enhance digital presence and discoverability.

5.2
Develop a Water Stewardship Council that engages residents and visitors.

LONG-TERM STRATEGIES (5+ YEARS)

1.1

Align tourism with broader community planning.

5.3

Strengthen coordinated destination leadership and governance.

5.4

Align tourism with broader community planning.



Work With Us!

The implementation of the strategies included in this plan, including the actions that are required to bring them to life will be tackled collaboratively by staff at the Town of Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation. However, we cannot do this alone. We need to come together as a tourism community to develop tourism and manage water stewardship in a way that will work for all of us.

Whether actively collaborating with us on a project, sharing your input during the implementation process, or staying up to date with new tourism initiatives please accept our invitation for collaboration. We know that both individuals and organizations are working on projects relevant to tourism and we would like to connect with you to learn more about these efforts, explore alignments, and find ways that we can work together.

Local businesses and entrepreneurs have an important role to play in bringing this strategy to life. Whether you operate an established tourism business, are considering adding a visitor experience to an existing business, or have an early idea for a new product, service, event, or seasonal offering, we want to hear from you. Your idea does not need to be fully developed before reaching out.

Amanda and Brittany can help provide an initial point of connection, discuss how an idea may align with the Community Tourism Strategy, and connect businesses and entrepreneurs with relevant tourism, economic development, training, funding, and business-support organizations. We especially welcome ideas that create meaningful visitor experiences, strengthen connections between Saugeen Shores and Saugeen First Nation, support local livelihoods, contribute to water stewardship, or provide new reasons to visit during the winter and shoulder seasons.

Contact

To share a tourism business or experience idea, discuss a potential partnership, or learn more about how to get involved, please contact:

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Or

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SaugeenShores
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