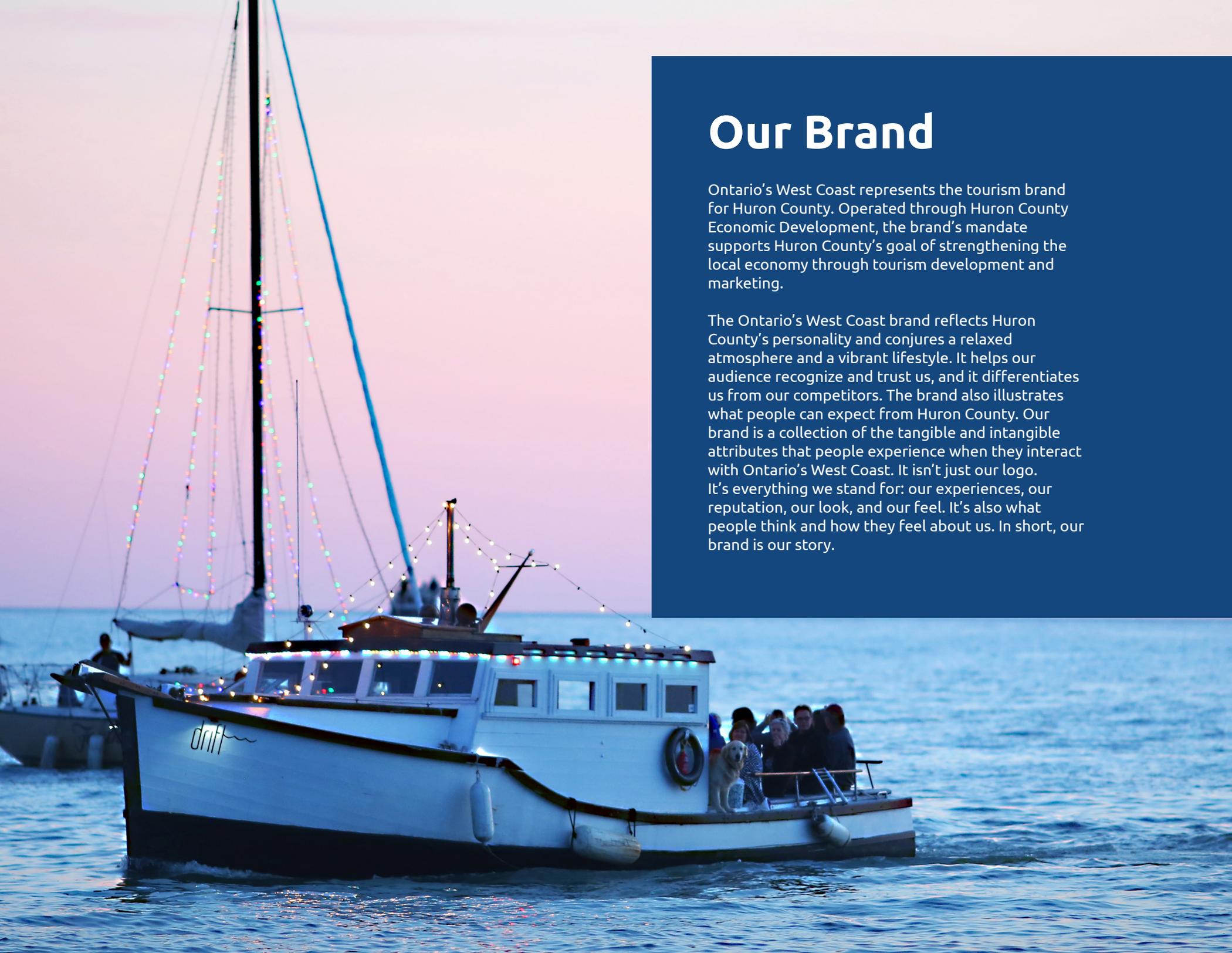


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A photograph of a white sailboat named "drift" on the water at dusk. The boat is decorated with colorful string lights along its mast and cabin. A group of people and a dog are on board. The sky is a mix of pink and blue, and the water is dark blue.

Our Brand

Ontario's West Coast represents the tourism brand for Huron County. Operated through Huron County Economic Development, the brand's mandate supports Huron County's goal of strengthening the local economy through tourism development and marketing.

The Ontario's West Coast brand reflects Huron County's personality and conjures a relaxed atmosphere and a vibrant lifestyle. It helps our audience recognize and trust us, and it differentiates us from our competitors. The brand also illustrates what people can expect from Huron County. Our brand is a collection of the tangible and intangible attributes that people experience when they interact with Ontario's West Coast. It isn't just our logo. It's everything we stand for: our experiences, our reputation, our look, and our feel. It's also what people think and how they feel about us. In short, our brand is our story.

Our Mission

To cultivate outstanding destination marketing and management for Huron County.



Our Vision

Ontario's West Coast is a recognized tourism brand representing outstanding, authentic opportunities to experience the natural environment, immerse in local heritage and historical places, play a role in the dynamic story of rural Ontario, and express yourself alongside our vibrant arts community.

Current Tourism Landscape & Future Opportunity

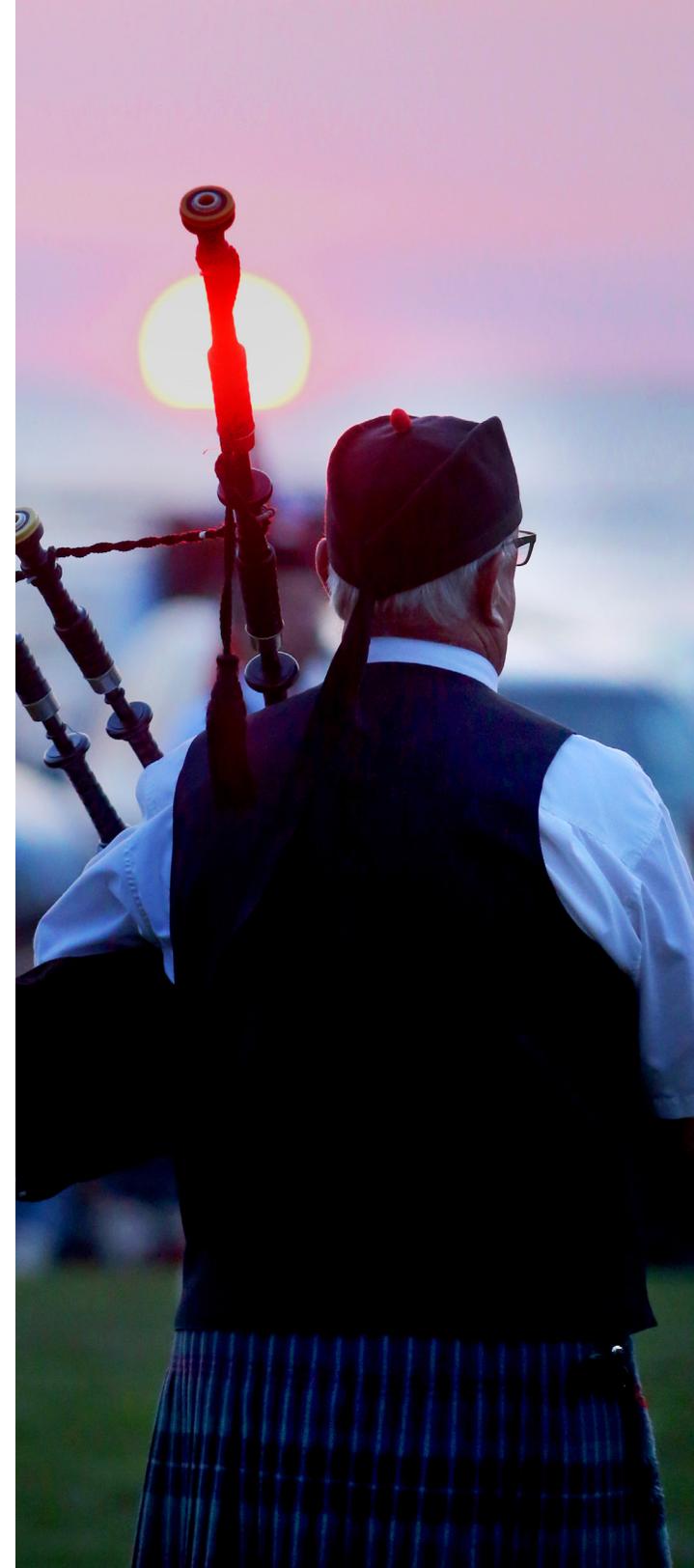
Situated along the shores Lake Huron, Huron County boasts a reputation as one of the most thriving agricultural regions in Ontario, making it a true “farm to table” destination with offerings to delight visitors from every walk of life.

Supported by strong retail and commerce sectors, leisure offerings in sports and recreation, cultural and historic exploration and its famed pristine shoreline, Huron County draws enthusiasts to rejuvenate through escape and immersion in their passions.

Unique, historical and picturesque communities offer visitors small town Ontario charm and hospitality. Rich agriculture provides visitors with beautiful country vistas and fresh produce at the many farms and roadside markets. Festivals, fairs and events are in abundance along with museums and historical attractions. Lake Huron and the vast Maitland River make Huron County an outdoor enthusiast’s paradise, appealing to hikers, cyclists, campers, birders, boaters, photographers, artists and sightseers.

Huron County has recognized that tourism is a powerful driver of growth. It creates jobs and actively contributes to increasing the quality of life for residents. A great experience as a tourist may even persuade a visitor to settle in the community. However, sustainable growth that benefits the community and delivers exceptional experiences must be responsibly managed and well-planned.

Tourism in Canada is a key growth industry. In fact, it is bigger than mining, forestry and agriculture. Increased interest in culinary, local and community based tourism means that regions such as Huron County are well-positioned to leverage these trends in order to increase visitation. Well-defined and measurable data, a collaborative business environment with a clear shared vision, tactical marketing of a strong, visible brand, and consistent signage welcoming visitors are required to enable Huron County to be a stand out destination in a highly competitive market.



Tourism Plan Process

The Huron County Tourism Plan was developed in consultation with key stakeholders from across the county's tourism sector. Through group conversation and facilitated discussion, Huron County Economic Development and tourism industry stakeholders generated a list of pain points, opportunities and strategic priorities for the county to implement over the next three years.

In the creation of this strategic plan for tourism, the county is ensuring that tourism growth meets the needs of the community as well as delivers competitive product that generates repeat visitation. To fully capitalize on the tourism potential, we have identified the four main issues currently hindering sustainable tourism growth. This plan addresses these issues and makes recommendations for paving the way for sustained benefits from tourism.



1 No data: Huron County recognizes the power of tourism to be an active contributor to the local economy including creating and sustaining jobs; providing and circulating new revenue; and having sustainable and profitable tourism business contributing to the tax base. In order to assess tourism's impact, the county needs to first benchmark key metrics (i.e., total visitors; visitor profiles) and track annual performance against these benchmark results. Being able to effectively measure and assess tourism's impact on the county's economy is a top priority for tourism growth and to identify future opportunities.

2 Minimal cohesion within the industry: One of the challenges of tourism development in Huron County is the limited engagement between operators within the industry. Strong tourism planning and development should be both industry-led and market-driven and the county needs to take a role in creating this cohesion.

3 Lack of defined brand and coordinated marketing: Destinations courting the GTA market have significant competition to contend with. Within a two to three hour drive of Toronto there are numerous small towns, regions and recreational areas all trading on their quaint ambiance and accessible nature. To stand out in the minds of consumers, a defined brand and a clear offering is required. Huron County needs to broaden the reach of the brand's recognition to ensure that when people hear the word 'Huron County' they associate it immediately with our demand generators.

4 Limited wayfinding signage: Clear, consistent and attractive signage signifies to a visitor that they have arrived somewhere worth going to. Furthermore, it guides visitors so they do not feel lost and forgotten, helps establish trust, and directs to tourism assets and experiences within a region. Signage is essential to establishing a place as a destination and increasing dispersal within that destination.

Trends Impacting Tourism in Huron County



Culinary Travel

Food is an inherently social and emotional experience, making it an important pillar in experience-based travel. Social media has helped culinary-based experiences and destinations gain exposure. Long considered a niche market, culinary travel is moving into the mainstream as more destinations recognize the benefit of curating culinary experiences to attract these travellers.



Mobile Platforms

Mobile platforms are the primary engagement platform for travellers. Technology is enabling faster decision-making by customers, thereby, increasing business to a destination.



Road Trips & "Micro" Trips

North Americans are vastly underutilizing their vacation time, which has resulted in experience-dense mini getaways to short-haul drive destinations. Micro trips are more time-friendly, more budget-friendly, and more schedule-friendly, yet they provide the same cultural and mental benefits as longer vacations do.



Local Experience

Travellers are choosing to become more immersed in the local culture when visiting a destination. They want to do what the locals do, eat where locals eat, and have access to other people's ways of life, getting a taste of the authentic version of a place.



Environmental Travel

The term 'environmental travel' can have many different meanings, from sustainable travel methods and locations to natural habitat vacations, and even volunteer experiences. Each and every one of these 'green' travel trends are on the rise and will continue to be in the future.



Instagram

Now eight years old, Instagram has more than 500 million active users daily sharing an average of 85 million photos a day. Travel photos incite new wanderlust in viewers, so much so that 40% of Instagram users under 33 voted that 'Instagrammability' was one of their top factors in selecting a vacation destination.



Skip-Gen Travel

The industry is seeing a surge in the number of grandparents travelling with their grandchildren, using the trips to celebrate milestones and create memories while parents work or take a break themselves. With the baby boomer generation coming into retirement, reportedly two of their top priorities are family and travel.

Huron County's Tourism Development S.W.O.T.

Strengths, Weaknesses,
Opportunities and Threats

*This SWOT analysis was informed
and determined by stakeholder
engagement.*

Strengths

Natural assets: unique nature and environmental features

Rural lifestyle

Events

Nationally-recognized culture

Wide variety of experiences for all demographics

Unplugged / relaxed atmosphere

Community pride

Culinary assets

Affordability

Opportunities

Growing agri-tourism

More collaboration with local DMOs and neighbouring counties to extend visitors' length of stay

Dark sky tourism (astronomy)

Desire for single entity for ALL events

Customized packages

Ability for more content creation

Desire to grow tourism

Weaknesses

Regional transportation and transit

Infrastructure: signage, parking, mapping

Events unknown outside of Huron County

Overnight accommodation capacity

No data infrastructure

Poor nightlife

Threats

Weather / climate change

Workforce issues

Financial resources

Resistant communities

Resistant businesses

Customer service disparity

Demand Generators in Huron County

Huron County's demand generators represent the rational attributes that will most help to define and communicate the Ontario's West Coast brand through easily identifiable product features. *These demand generators were informed and determined by stakeholder engagement.*

Local Heritage & Historic Places

Heritage towns and villages, museums



Great Food and Drink

Wineries, breweries, cideries, farmers markets, local food in restaurants, world-class chefs



Natural Environment

Coastline, beaches, forest trails



Outdoor Adventure

Cycling, paddling, skiing, snowshoeing, snowmobiling, fishing, golf, hiking, skating, boating, swimming, motorsports, adrenaline entertainment



Arts & Culture

Art galleries, local artisans, antiques, theatres, music, festivals and events



Market & Audience Opportunity

Ontario's West Coast will continue to position Huron County as a top destination in southwestern Ontario for outdoor adventure, coastal escapes and authentic rural experiences. Visitors are looking for memorable and experiential travel opportunities and Huron County will focus on the area's top demand generators through seasonal marketing efforts. For tourism to flourish, there must be both visitors and hosts, and our local residents need to be our strongest ambassadors.

A review of RTO4's market data and our analysis of stakeholders' perceptions suggests that Huron County is a draw primarily for those travelling a one to four hour drive distance away, largely from the south and the east directions.

Tourists continue to take shorter and more frequent trips, and these short-haul feeder markets should continue to be our focus, with the aim of converting more day trips into overnight stays.



The key to successful tourism destination development is relatively straightforward: highly engaged communities that take an active role in shaping their collective future.

Regional Tourism Organization 4

Strategic Priorities

The following strategic priority areas were informed and determined by stakeholder engagement to align with the Ontario's West Coast's vision, mission and guiding principles.

1

Data Gathering

Set the groundwork to improve the quantity and quality of tourism within Huron County through data gathering and analysis.

2

Business Environment

Help to increase cohesion within the tourism industry in order to create strong, industry-led and market-driven tourism planning and development.

3

Marketing & Awareness

Ensure that Huron County as a destination is being actively and specifically marketed to potential tourists and visitors in-destination.

4

Infrastructure & Support

Through effective and consistent wayfinding signage, create a visitor-friendly Huron County which encourages visitors to find and explore multiple tourism assets and experiences.

1. Data Gathering



Goal: Set the groundwork to improve the quantity and quality of tourism within Huron County through data gathering and analysis.

Effectively measure and assess visitor trends, patterns and their impact on the county's economy as a key revenue generator and job provider. In order to assess tourism's impact the county needs to first benchmark key metrics (i.e., total visitors; visitor profiles) and then track annual performance against the benchmark results.

Actions

1 Economic Impact and Data Report
Collect fine-tuned data from past 5 years to act as a benchmark for tracking the performance of the local tourism economy. This data collection should act as a template for county-wide standardization and measurement of tourism data.

Integrate data from multiple sources (i.e. Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries, Destination Ontario) to develop a set of Key Performance Indicators that can be used to evaluate the impact of tourism on Huron County and the effectiveness of efforts to promote regional tourism. The data will be collected from three sources:

1. Shared data from partner organizations such as attendance, visitor, and tourism-related survey data, as well as data from government businesses.
2. An annual survey of regional businesses that intersect directly with visitors conducted by Huron County.
3. Survey of visitors from across Ontario (re-run every three years by an outside vendor).

Key Performance Indicators may include:

- ✓ Number of visitors
- ✓ Purpose of visit
- ✓ Length of stay
- ✓ Spend per visit
- ✓ Composition of travel party
- ✓ Attendance at events
- ✓ Total spend
- ✓ Visitor profile
- ✓ Number of trips taken
- ✓ Type of accommodation
- ✓ Visitor satisfaction

2. Business Environment



Goal: Help to increase cohesion within the tourism industry in order to create strong, industry-led and market-driven tourism planning and development.

One of the challenges of tourism development in Huron County is the limited engagement between operators within the industry. Strong tourism planning and development should be both industry-led and market-driven and the county needs to take a role in creating this cohesion.

Actions

1 Calendar of Events

Create and manage a comprehensive and centralized county-wide events calendar that will act as a one-stop-shop for all significant events occurring throughout Huron County. This will take the place of events posted on CreativeHuron.ca and HuronCounty.ca and will assist both visitors and industry members in planning.

2 Tourism Symposium

As an initiative to form synergies among the tourism sector within Huron County, an annual tourism symposium will offer a face-to-face engagement opportunity to bring together the industry, update sector on tourism plan implementation, discuss emerging trends, share marketing materials, and discuss opportunities for collaboration. This could also act as a marketplace for travel writers and bloggers and an opportunity to hear from industry speakers and various panel participants.

3 Business Development Workshops

Provide necessary training, workshops and professional development opportunities to support tourism businesses throughout Huron County, with a focus on digital sophistication and readiness training.

4 Industry Communications

Implement a quarterly communications email to tourism industry members with workshops, upcoming networking and opportunities for collaboration, etc.

5 Industry Resources

Create an industry site providing useful information for tourism businesses to succeed. This may include an asset bank of written content and images for tourism providers to easily market their product in Huron County and a product development tool kit offering a basic checklist of tourism-ready business criteria, steps to knowing and understanding the tourism customer, basics of social media and content marketing, resources for developing packages, etc.

3. Marketing & Awareness



Goal: Ensure that Huron County as a destination is being actively and specifically marketed to potential tourists and visitors in-destination.

Destinations courting the GTA market have significant competition to contend with. Within a two to three hour drive of Toronto there are numerous small towns, regions and recreational areas all trading on their quaint ambiance and accessible nature. To stand out in the minds of consumers, a defined brand and a clear offering is required. Huron County needs to broaden the reach of the brand's recognition to ensure that when people hear the word 'Huron County' they associate it immediately with our demand generators.

Actions

1 Improve Digital Presence

Revamp the digital presence of OntariosWestCoast.ca to provide simple, engaging and current content (ie. influence over information). This will include easy to find information on the county's key product and experience offerings and will also include asset mapping technology to assist visitors in discovering key product offerings throughout the county (accommodations, events, restaurants, theatres, etc.).

2 Increase Social Media Engagement

Increase and improve active social media marketing through seasonal and thematic campaigns, working with Cultural Services to provide content.

3 Develop 'Experiential Trails' Campaign

Create and promote an interactive, digital map outlining discovery trails for the visitor to explore. This will launch with the county's growing brewery, winery and cidery products, and expand to farm-to-table trails

(farmer's markets, restaurants, artisanal retailers), arts and culture experiential trails, nature lover's trail, etc.

4 Partnerships

Develop and build on existing partnerships with Ontario by Bike (in collaboration with Cycling Advisory Staff Committee), Taste of Huron, Explore Beyond the Shore, Maitland Trail Association, Culinary Tourism Alliance and the G2G Rail Trail to further promote Huron County as a tourism destination through dedicated marketing initiatives. Build out opportunities to work with other tourism partners and regions looking to extend their visitors' stays through partnership opportunities.

5 Print Promotion

Create annual visitor's guides and supplementary print guides focused on promoting product offerings to targeted audiences (hiking, cycling, fishing, culinary, beer and wine).

6 Proactive Media Engagement

Create and execute a proactive media plan which includes targeting media based on prioritized product development themes and focused on media utilized by Huron County's audience targets. Focused story pitching and FAM trip opportunities will garner more and better earned media coverage.

7 Inter-County Collaboration

Closer collaboration between Economic Development and Cultural Services on promotional materials related to arts, culture and heritage for tourism's marketing platforms; weekly e-newsletter, social media accounts and tourism website OntariosWestCoast.ca.

4. Infrastructure & Support



Goal: Through effective and consistent wayfinding signage, create a visitor-friendly Huron County which encourages visitors to find and explore multiple tourism assets and experiences.

Clear, consistent and attractive signage signifies to a visitor that they have arrived somewhere worth going to. Furthermore, it guides visitors so they do not feel lost and forgotten, helps establish trust, and directs to tourism assets and experiences within a region. Signage is essential to establishing a place as a destination and increasing dispersal within that destination.

Actions

1 Wayfinding Signage

In partnership with RTO4, implement a wayfinding signage system that will provide communities within Huron County and its tourism operators with an effective, cost effective promotional platform that will provide visitors with consistent direction in addition to further highlights which can be experienced within the region. Accordingly,

this tourism-based wayfinding system will be designed to provide a powerful visual aesthetic that will deliver directions and assurance to the county's visitors, ensuring that they stay on the prescribed system and can effectively find a specific point of interest.

The effectiveness of this system is only limited by the willingness of Huron County tourism agencies and operators to establish a network of communication and cooperation to ensure that a region-wide connectivity is achieved and maintained.





Prepared by

Huron County Economic Development

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