



Vermilion River Region Highway Sign
Photo Credit: Expedition Management Consulting Ltd.

COUNTY OF VERMILION RIVER TOURISM OPPORTUNITY ASSESSMENT

FINAL REPORT: OCTOBER 28, 2020

Table of Contents

01 PROJECT OVERVIEW.....4

02 TOURISM ASSET INVENTORY9

03 STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION AND TOUR FINDINGS 15

04 TARGET MARKET ANALYSIS 19

05 TOURISM OPPORTUNITY ASSESSMENT27

06 REGIONAL COLLABORATION OPPORTUNITIES.....42

07 ROLES IN IMPLEMENTATION46

08 NEXT STEPS AND CONCLUSION49

APPENDICES.....51

Appendix A: Market Ready Standards52

Appendix B: References.....54



01

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Colleen Graham at Graham Town
Photo Credit: Expedition Management Consulting Ltd.

01 PROJECT OVERVIEW

The County of Vermilion River

The County of Vermilion River (CVR) is a large rural municipality situated along the Yellowhead Highway #16 near the Alberta-Saskatchewan border. The County features thousands of hectares of aspen parkland, tracts of rolling prairie and picturesque views of the North Saskatchewan, Battle and Vermilion river valleys.¹ CVR is a historically rich area that maintains strong connections to its rural roots through its local museums, antique shops and community events.

The County features seven hamlets, four villages and one town within its boundaries. These communities include Blackfoot, Islay, Clandonald, Streamstown, McLaughlin, Tulliby Lake, Rivercourse, Marwayne, Kitscoty, Paradise Valley, Dewberry and Vermilion. In total, the population of the County is over 8,000.²

The County's primary economic driver is oil and gas activity. As of 2020, the County had approximately 13,854 wells in its jurisdiction.³ Other key economic sectors include agriculture, transportation and a well-developed service industry for oil and gas operations. CVR is also part of the Alberta HUB region, which is a partnership of communities, post-secondary educational institutions and businesses in Northeastern Alberta whose primary goal is to enhance the quality of life and economic interests of this region.⁴

Tourism in the County of Vermilion River

The County of Vermilion River has a number of attractive assets that set it apart from other destinations. Visitors to CVR can experience authentic western culture and the great outdoors in a laid-back, country atmosphere. Unique artists, stores and culinary artisans located throughout the County offer high quality goods through compelling shopping experiences. The absence of large crowds and heavy traffic allows operators to provide their undivided attention so that they can personalize experiences for each visitor. The majority of current tourism activity occurs during the summer months, but visitors are welcome year-round to CVR. During the winter months, adventurous travellers can ski the same cross-country trails that Olympic Gold medalist Becky Scott trained on during her formative years. CVR also has services and facilities that are typically found in much larger centres, in part due to institutions like Lakeland College and the many businesses in the energy sector located in the County.

Tourism has been identified as an opportunity for economic diversification and growth within the County. However, the local tourism industry is somewhat fragmented and not clearly defined.⁵ The industry is still in the early stages of development, but there is potential for growth. Focused and collaborative efforts toward developing this industry can bring valuable benefits to the entire County and the surrounding region. These benefits include, generating visitor spending that has a high multiplier, encouraging new business creation and retention, and attracting new residents to the area.

Why Invest in Tourism?

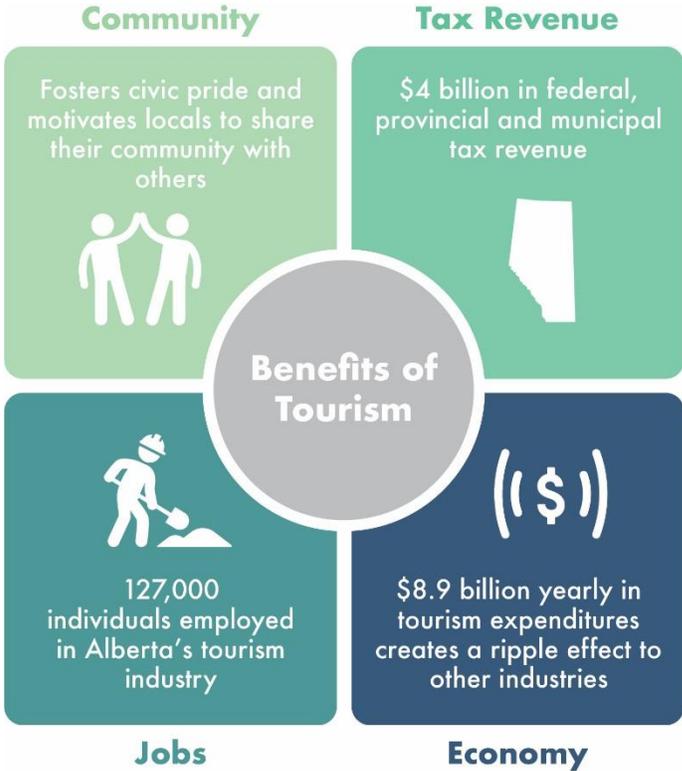
Investing in tourism development can bring a multitude of benefits to a community. The following describes the main benefits and outlines a case for pursuing tourism development in the County of Vermilion River.

The County is strategically positioned along Highway 16 and 41 with strong road connections to major population centres in Alberta and Saskatchewan. A network of well-kept highways connects the County internally and provides strong access to the smaller communities. The County is an important service centre for the oil and gas sector; however, the current economic situation has curtailed investment and income in the energy sector across the province. This has led to communities, business owners and residents looking to other industries for opportunity. Tourism is identified as a growth sector for the province and the County of Vermilion River is well positioned to capitalize on the opportunities in the tourism industry.

Benefits of Tourism

Tourism development has many known community benefits when it is carried out in a responsible and sustainable manner. In the Province of Alberta, the tourism industry generates \$8.9 billion every year in tourism expenditures and supports 22,196 tourism-related businesses.⁶ The revenue generated in this industry generates roughly \$4 billion in federal, provincial and municipal tax revenue. The tourism industry also provides significant employment opportunities, with 127,000 individuals employed within the industry in Alberta. The multiple benefits of tourism are summarized below.

- **Tourism supports jobs** – Visitors spend money at campgrounds, hotels, restaurants, gas stations, grocery stores, and retail stores in the County. This is new money to small businesses that create jobs for residents.
- **Tourism has a ripple effect** – Every dollar spent by a visitor circulates within the economy with spin off effects to industries such as construction, manufacturing, agriculture, automotive, retail, financial services, and real estate.
- **Tourism builds community** – Tourism can foster civic pride and motivate locals to share their community with others.
- **Tourism drives infrastructure** – Tourism can be the catalyst needed to invest in the built infrastructure that makes for great places to live and visit (such as parks, pathways, public art, signage and other amenities).

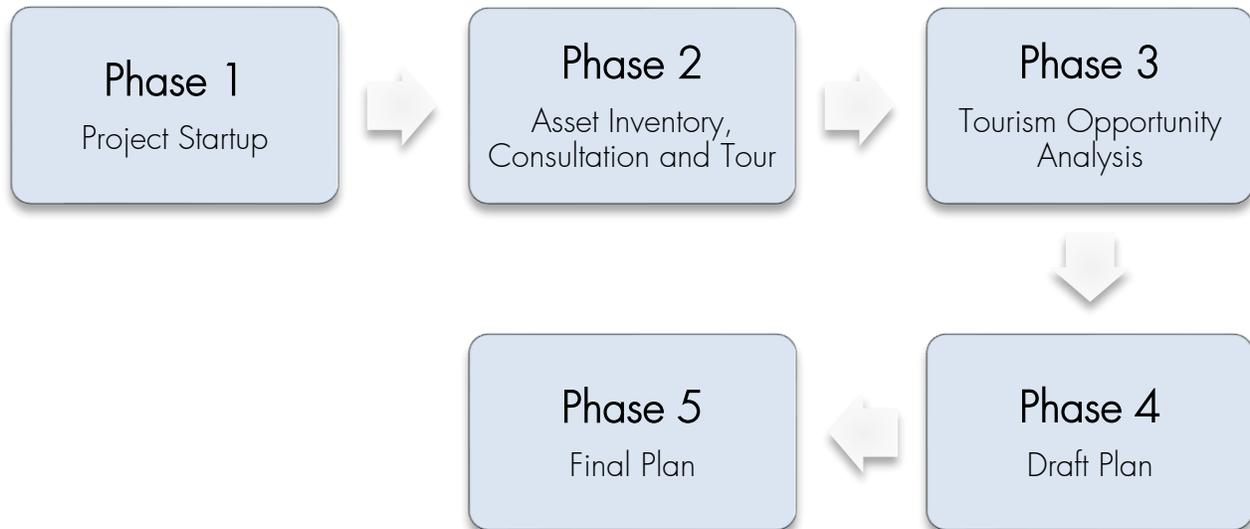


Project Purpose

The purpose of the Tourism Opportunity Assessment was to identify high potential opportunities for tourism product development that can be pursued in the short term by the County and its partners.

Process

The County of Vermilion River Tourism Opportunity Assessment had five, interconnected phases as described below.



Project Team

The Project Team was established for the purpose of providing input and direction to the project. Below is a list of team members.

Project Team	
Roger Garnett	Director of Planning and Development, Council of Vermilion River
Caroline Toppazzini	Economic Development Officer, County of Vermilion River
Consultant Team	
Justin Rousseau	Managing Director, Expedition Management Consulting Ltd.
Maxwell Harrison	Associate, Expedition Management Consulting Ltd.
Erin Pote	Associate, Expedition Management Consulting Ltd.

Overview of Research

A variety of primary and secondary research activities were conducted to develop this report. Primary research was gathered through an online stakeholder survey, one-on-one interviews, a tourism opportunity assessment workshop and a tour of major attractions in the region. Secondary research was gathered from municipal, provincial and national data sources, information requests of the Client, a review of relevant literature and an online review. Please see below for a list of primary research activities completed to support the project.

1. Meetings Conducted:

- a. Project Startup Meeting
Date: June 19, 2019
- b. Project Update Meetings
Date: throughout the project
- c. Tour of the Region
Date: August 21 - 22, 2019
- d. Tourism Opportunity Assessment Workshop with Stakeholders
Date: October 17, 2019
- e. Draft Report Review
Date: November 15, 2019

2. Surveys Administered:

- a. Regional Stakeholder Survey

3. Stakeholders Consulted:

- a. An opportunity was provided for all stakeholders in the community to provide input, either through the stakeholder survey, one-on-one interviews or during the tourism opportunity assessment workshop. 22 unique stakeholder groups participated, including local tourism operators and representatives of the following organizations:
 - i. County of Vermilion River
 - ii. Town of Vermilion
 - iii. Village of Kitscoty
 - iv. Village of Marwayne
 - v. Vermilion River Regional Alliance
 - vi. City of Lloydminster
 - vii. Rolling Greens Fairways
 - viii. Graham Town
 - ix. The Old School Cheesery
 - x. Lea Park Pro Rodeo
 - xi. Dewberry Chuckwagon Racing Heritage Society
 - xii. Jubilee Regional Park
 - xiii. Red Feather Ridge
 - xiv. Lakeland College
 - xv. Climb Thru Time Museum
 - xvi. Mount Joy Snow Resort
 - xvii. Camp N RV
 - xviii. The Tent Guys
 - xix. Lakeland College
 - xx. Go East of Edmonton Tourism
 - xxi. Alberta Lakeland Tourism
 - xxii. Travel Alberta



02

TOURISM ASSET INVENTORY

Patrick Dupuis at the Old School Cheesery
Photo Credit: Expedition Management Consulting Ltd.

02 TOURISM ASSET INVENTORY

The County of Vermilion River's tourism assets were inventoried as part of this project. Expedition Management Consulting's Tourism Asset Inventory Tool was customized to meet the unique needs and requirements of this study. This section provides the key findings from the inventory.

Definition of a Tourism Asset

For the purposes of this report, a tourism asset includes any activity, product, attraction or experience that attracts visitors or could be further developed to attract visitors. Assets that are common to well serviced communities were deliberately left out (e.g. gas stations, chain restaurants, etc.). This was done to maintain the focus of the study on unique and compelling tourism assets.

Description of Categories

A set of tourism asset categories were developed to help organize the inventory. These are described below.

1. Western Attractions and Experiences – Includes attractions and experiences that showcase western heritage and culture.
2. Agri-Tourism Attractions and Experiences – Includes attractions and experiences that have an agricultural-related component
3. Other Culture and Heritage Attractions and Features – Includes culture and heritage attractions and features (other than those that appeared in the western and agri-tourism categories).
4. Culinary Attractions and Experiences – Includes unique dining experiences that may attract visitors.
5. Natural Attractions and Features – Includes both fully developed attractions or those that may not be formalized now, but could be further developed into tourism experiences or attractions (e.g. scenic views, rivers, lakes, etc.).
6. Festivals and Events – Includes both community festivals/events that primarily attract residents, and tourism festivals/events that primarily attract visitors.
7. Water and Land Based Tours – Includes tours that take place on the water or on land.
8. Unique Community Activities – Includes activities or programs that residents participate in and can be further developed into tourism experiences or attractions.
9. Fixed Roof Accommodations – Includes all fixed roof accommodations.
10. Campgrounds – Includes all RV/camping sites and other accommodations (e.g. comfort camping).
11. Specialty Shops – Includes unique shops that can be further developed into tourism experiences or attractions.
12. Community Facilities, Sporting Facilities and Public Spaces – Includes facilities and/or spaces in the community that are used by residents and could also be used by visitors.
13. Meeting and Convention Facilities – Includes facilities that can host meetings, conferences, conventions or exhibitions.
14. Entertainment Facilities – Includes entertainment facilities that are used by residents and can also be used by visitors.

Methodology

The first step in conducting the CVR Tourism Asset Inventory was to confirm a set of categories that could be used to organize assets for the inventory (as described above). The consultant team then initiated a multi-faceted inventory program to gather input from key stakeholders regarding what tourism assets are currently available in the region. This program included a stakeholder survey, stakeholder interviews, an extensive online review, and a two-day tour of the County. The consultant team then recorded the assets collected from the inventory program in the Asset Inventory Tool.

To avoid inflating the asset count, assets were placed into their category of best fit. For example, The Old School Cheesery is listed under Culinary Attractions and not under other categories it may also fit under (e.g. Agri-Tourism, Specialty Shops). If attractions had components that fit well in multiple categories, then those components were listed separately under the category of best fit. For example, Rolling Green Fairways is a Sporting Facility, Meeting Facility, and has a campground, so these components appear in each of those categories.

Information was collected for each asset, including its name, location, contact information, a brief description of its product offering, and where it was sourced from. To support the development of the Tourism Opportunity Assessment, assets were also classified into five stages of tourism product development. These stages are described below. Assets in the inventory were assigned a development classification based on research by the consultant team.

Undeveloped Assets (UD)

Undeveloped (or low developed) natural and cultural resources that the region has available for the passive use of locals and visitors (e.g. lakes, rivers, trails).

Partially Developed Assets (PD)

Partially developed assets that have tourism potential but are not yet visitor ready (e.g. informal B&B's, informal tours).

Visitor Ready Assets (VR)

Established businesses that have appropriate licenses, permits and insurance in place to operate legally.

Market Ready Assets (MR)

Established businesses that market to potential visitors; communicate with potential visitors year-round, and are ready to accept advanced reservations.

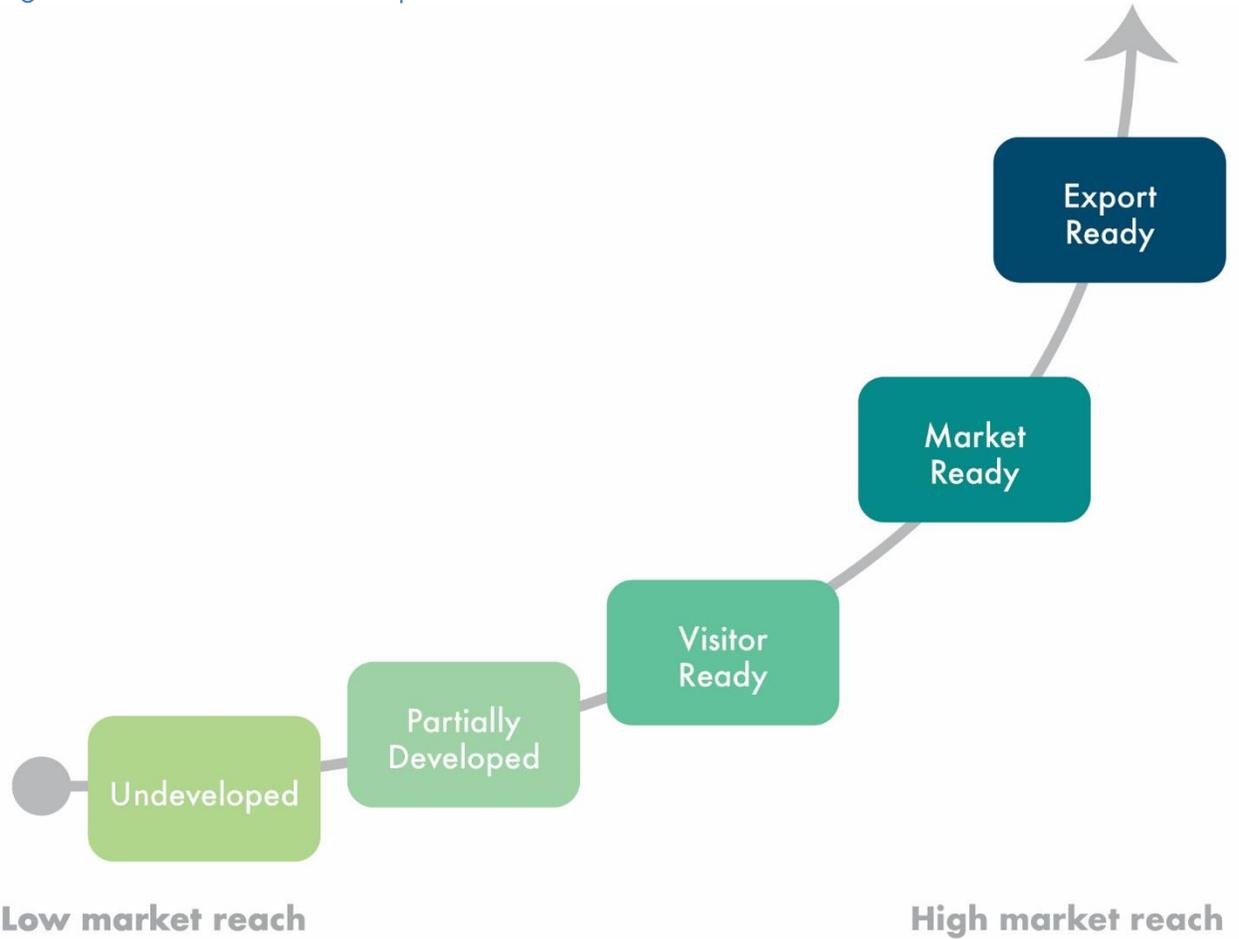
Export Ready Assets (ER)

Established businesses that market to and through travel trade distribution sales channels, understand commission or net rate pricing, agree to trade bookings and have well developed cancellation policies.

Unknown (UK)

In some cases, not enough information was available on certain assets to classify them. These assets have been classified as Unknown.

Figure 1. Tourism Product Development Continuum



Summary of Findings

The following discussion summarizes the key findings from the tourism asset inventory. To view the full list of assets, please contact the Economic Development Department at the County of Vermilion River.

The Tourism Asset Inventory recorded 121 assets across 14 tourism product categories. For each asset, the inventory identified the following information (where available):

- Asset name
- Location
- Contact information
- Description of the product offering/experience
- Source of the asset
- Asset classification
- Additional information specific to the category

The number of assets recorded for each category is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Number of Assets per Category

Asset Inventory Category	Number of Assets Identified
Western Attractions and Experiences	5
Agri-Tourism Attractions and Experiences	4
Culture and Heritage Attractions and Features	5
Culinary Attractions and Experiences	7
Natural Attractions and Features	9
Festivals and Events	Small/Local (17) Large/Regional (5)
Water and Land Based Tours	2
Unique Community Activities	1
Fixed Roof Accommodations	12 (233 rooms)
Campgrounds	10 (450 sites)
Specialty Shops	21
Community Facilities, Sporting Facilities and Public Spaces	19
Meeting and Convention Facilities	3
Entertainment Facilities	1
Total Number of Assets	121

As a result of the asset inventory process, we have identified strengths and gaps in the tourism product offering that is currently available to visitors and residents.

Tourism Product Strengths:

- Western-Themed Events – The County has a strong supply of western-themed events, including the Lea Park Pro Rodeo, CPCA Chuckwagon Races, 3 Cities Fair and Bull-a-rama, Marwayne Pro Bull Riding Competition, and the Vermilion Fair. The niche offering of these western-themed events can be leveraged for tourism growth.
- Vermilion’s Main Street – 50th Avenue in Vermilion is easily accessible to visitors, contains many unique shops and has been attractively designed and landscaped. This shopping destination is ready to delight visitors.
- Campgrounds – There is a strong supply of campgrounds across the County. Many of these campgrounds have excellent services for RV’s.
- Culture and Heritage Attractions – The county has numerous culture and heritage attractions, including four museums and an old Canadian Pacific Rail Line, that showcase the history of the area.

Tourism Product Gaps:

- Tour Operators – There is currently a lack of visitor and market ready tourism operators. Existing tours are often conducted on an ad hoc basis, rather than following set schedules and pricing.
- Tourism-Related Programming and Experiences – The County currently lacks tourism-related programming and experiences. There is an opportunity to develop itineraries and other tourism-related programming that will build off of and leverage existing assets.
- Specialty Accommodations, Resorts and B&B's – There is a lack of diversity in accommodation options throughout the study area. There are few specialty B&B's, wilderness resorts, eco-lodges or higher end/luxury accommodations.
- Entertainment Facilities – There is a lack of entertainment facilities in the County (e.g. movie theatres, performing arts, etc.).
- Visitor Information – There is a lack of information regarding tourism assets within the County. Tourism information is fragmented across multiple channels and sources, which makes trip planning more challenging for visitors.
- High Speed Internet – High speed internet is mostly limited to urban areas in the County. This is a significant gap given that modern visitors have come to expect strong internet connectivity.



*Vermilion Visitor Information Centre
Source: Expedition Management Consulting Ltd.*



03

STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION AND TOUR FINDINGS

*Stakeholder Workshop at Rolling Green Fairways
Photo Credit: Expedition Management Consulting Ltd.*

03 STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION AND TOUR FINDINGS

Stakeholder Consultation

Stakeholders were engaged through one-on-one interviews, an online survey and an in-person meeting. The following describes the input collection methods and summarizes the key findings.

One-on-One Stakeholder Interviews

Tourism stakeholders in the CVR region were invited to participate in one-on-one interviews with the consultant team. The focus of the interviews was to identify the main tourism assets in the region, challenges and opportunities facing the tourism industry, and the highest potential opportunities to encourage future visitation to CVR. Interviews took place in July and August of 2019. In total, ten interviews were completed.

Online Stakeholder Survey

An online survey was available for stakeholders to complete from July 18th to August 31st, 2019. The survey collected input on the overarching challenges and opportunities facing tourism in CVR, as well as what stakeholders saw as the highest potential opportunities to grow tourism in the future. Nine responses were collected in total.

Tourism Opportunity Assessment Workshop

A Tourism Opportunity Assessment Workshop was held at Rolling Green Fairways on October 17th, 2019. The purpose of the workshop was to gather feedback from stakeholders on the initial tourism development ideas that were developed by the consultant team. In total, fifteen participants attended the meeting.

Key Themes from the Stakeholder Consultation

- Collaboration – Stakeholders expressed a strong desire for enhanced collaboration in the development of tourism in the region. Many viewed collaboration as central to future success.
- Lack of Resources – Stakeholders were concerned about a general lack of resources for tourism development in CVR. Funding for development is difficult to secure and volunteers are hard to recruit and retain. Leveraging resources and expertise through collaborative efforts was identified as a potential solution to this challenge.
- Tourism Advertising and Promotion – Stakeholders felt that more should be done to advertise and promote the tourism offerings in CVR. Opportunities for cross-promotion and leveraging marketing dollars to expand their reach were identified specifically.
- Attractive Tourism Assets – Stakeholders identified many attractive tourism assets throughout the County. These assets were largely focused on events, natural attractions, agritourism, culinary offerings and historical experiences.

- Challenge of Geography – Due to the size of the region, many of the tourism assets are dispersed across a large area. This can fragment visitor experiences and make it difficult for operators and stakeholders to collaborate effectively.
- Strong Western and Rural Identity – Stakeholders viewed the region as having an identity that is intimately linked to western heritage and rural life.



*Tourism Opportunity Assessment Workshop at Rolling Green Fairways
Source: Expedition Management Consulting Ltd.*

County Tour

From August 21 – 22, 2019, an assessment team from Expedition Management Consulting Ltd. toured the County of Vermilion River. The purpose of the tour was to identify existing tourism assets and assess their potential for further tourism development. The team assessed the County from a visitor's point of view to help identify strengths and growth areas in the visitor experience.

The team navigated its way through communities in the region, visited local attractions, stopped at the Visitor Information Centre in Vermilion, shopped at local restaurants and stores, and took in the sights and sounds at Vermilion Provincial Park. During the tour, the team recorded what they observed through photographs and notes.

Overall the assessment team enjoyed our time in CVR. Highlights of our experience included an extensive tour of the Lakeland College campus, walking the main street in Vermilion, having an excellent lunch at the Rolling Green Fairways, visiting Graham Town, and enjoying Pie Day at the Climb Thru Time Museum. We also enjoyed speaking directly with operators about their attractions and businesses. The passion these operators have for their work, and their keen interest in growing tourism in CVR, was clear.



*Photos from the Tour of CVR
Source: Expedition Management Consulting Ltd.*



04

TARGET MARKET ANALYSIS

*Dewberry Sports Grounds
Photo Credit: Expedition Management Consulting Ltd.*

04 TARGET MARKET ANALYSIS

This section provides an analysis of target markets for the County of Vermilion River.

Domestic Tourism in Alberta Central Tourism Region

8.91 million visits are made annually by residents of Alberta and other parts of Canada to destinations in the Alberta Central Tourism Region.⁷ Albertans account for 8.5 million (95.8%) of these visits, with 377,000 person-visits (4.2%) by other Canadians.

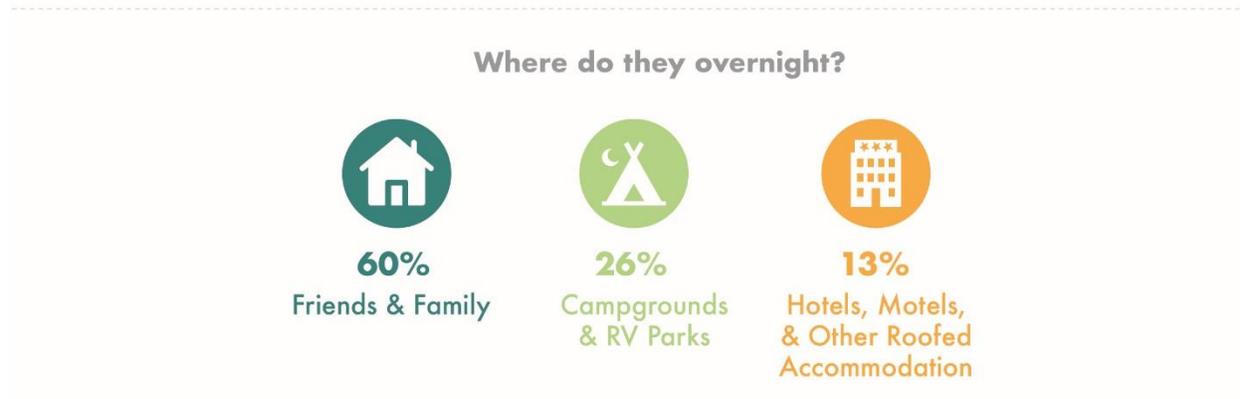
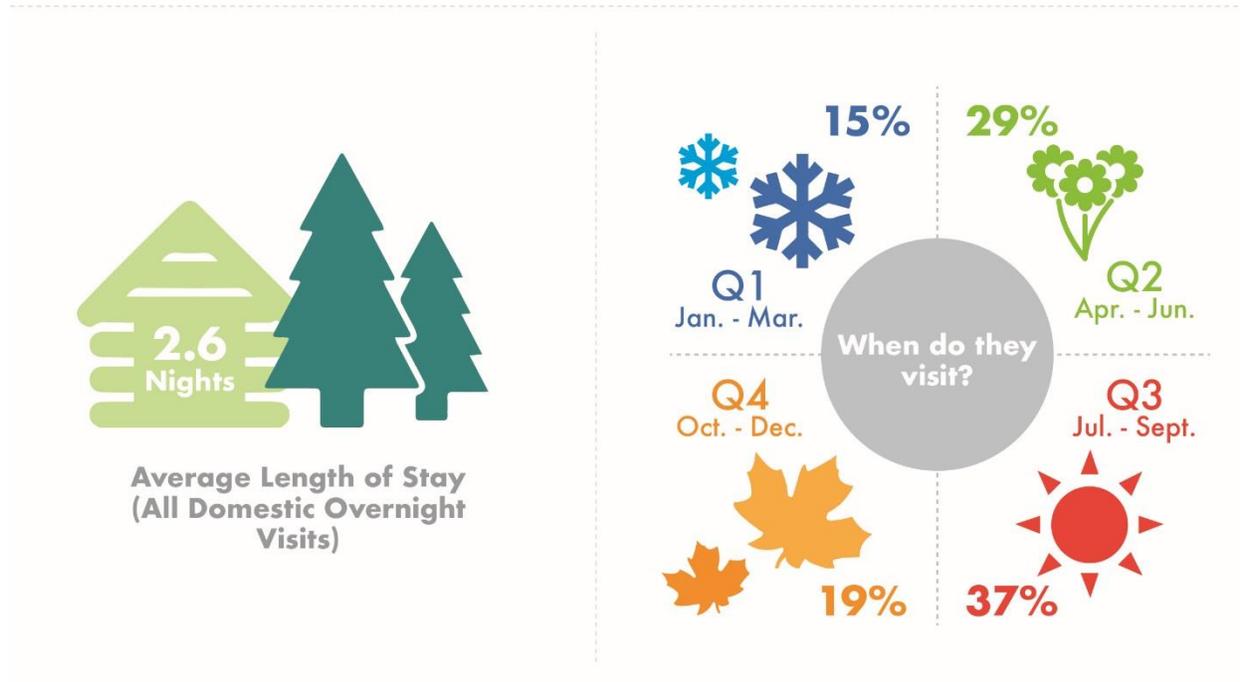
Residents of central Alberta often travel in their region, comprising 37% of visits. Edmonton and area residents account for 36%, followed by residents of Calgary and area with 16%. Approximately 32% of all visits include at least one overnight stop, primarily by residents of Edmonton and area (40%), central Alberta (21%), and Calgary and area (20%).

Residents of Alberta primarily visit from July to September (37%) and April to June (29%), followed by October to December (19%) and January to March (15%). This pattern of seasonal visitation aligns closely to the travel patterns of residents from other parts of Canada travelling to the central Alberta tourism region.

The main purpose of overnight travel is visiting friends and family (44.8%), pleasure (43.8%), and business (8.1%). 6 in 10 nights are spent in the homes of family and friends, followed by campgrounds and RV parks (26%), and hotels, motels and other roofed accommodation (13%). Visitors tend to stay an average of 2.6 nights.

As described above, visiting friends and relatives (VFR) is the main driver for travel to central Alberta. Research on the VFR market in Alberta indicates that residents use their personal experience to determine what to do when friends and family visit from out of town. Planning is typically a joint effort between the hosting resident and their guests. While most hosts are involved in trip planning (80%), very few hosts plan activities in advance of their guests' arrival (15%). More often plans are made once guests arrive (23%) or both before and after guests arrive (41%).⁸ Given that planning happens in the destination and is relatively spontaneous, *resident hosts rely on personal experience* to inform decisions on where to go and what to do with guests.⁹

Summary of Domestic Visitation to Alberta Central Tourism Region



Visitor Markets by Geography

The central Alberta tourism region attracts visitors from across Alberta, Canada and even internationally. Domestic markets are by far the largest in terms of total numbers of visitors. Internationally, the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, China and Japan are markets that may be most attractive to engage in the future.

Visitation to Alberta

34.8 million person-visits are made annually to destinations in Alberta. Visitors come primarily from within Alberta (83.8%), followed by other parts of Canada (10.6%), overseas countries (3.0%), or the United States (2.6%). Alberta-based visitors are responsible for the majority of person-visits; however, this market is only responsible for 54.1% of total tourism expenditures. Other Canada (21.0%), overseas countries (14.8%) and the United States (10.2%) are responsible for almost half of the total tourism expenditures made in the province. Key sources of overnight inbound travel to Alberta include neighbouring provinces, the U.S. and major European and Asian markets.¹⁰

International Visitation

UNITED STATES

- The United States is an established market in Canada that is still growing.
- Perception of Canada’s safety and dollar value guides their decisions to stay longer.
- The beauty and diversity of Albertan landscapes are attracting visitors, as well as, adventure, culture, history and culinary tourism.¹¹
- The US is Alberta’s largest international travel market with 905,000 visits and \$859 million in expenditures in 2016.¹²



UNITED KINGDOM

- The United Kingdom is Alberta’s largest overseas market. In 2016, there were 146,600 visits by U.K. travellers to Alberta, totalling \$189 million in tourism expenditures.¹³
- Awareness of central Alberta is low; however, CVR has experiences that may resonate with this market.
- Residents of the U.K. are keen to travel and tend to stay longer and spend more than other markets.¹⁴



CHINA

- Visitation from China has steadily increased since Canada received Approved Destination Status in 2010.
- In 2016, there were 135,000 visits to Alberta from Chinese travellers, totalling \$136 million in tourism expenditures.¹⁵
- While the traditional escorted tour group remains popular, Chinese travellers are increasingly interested in niche experiences, including ski, winter, RV, self-drive, photography and golf.¹⁶
- Independent, middle-class, affluent and youthful (20 to 45 years old) are characteristics that define the fastest growing segment of Chinese traveller.
- Recent political tensions with China may affect travel in the future.



GERMANY

- German leisure travellers perceive Canada as a top travel destination offering authentic and relevant travel experiences.
- About half of German holiday trips to Canada are into B.C., Alberta and/or the Yukon.
- More than three quarters of these trips are for pleasure or to visit friends and relatives.
- In 2016, there were 91,000 visits by German travellers to Alberta, totalling \$97 million in tourism expenditures.¹⁷
- Cultural experiences tend to resonate strongly with German travellers. This is particularly true for First Nations experiences.



AUSTRALIA

- Australian travel to Canada shows steady, gradual growth. In 2015, there were 92,300 overnight visits by Australians to Alberta, totalling \$133.5 million in tourism expenditures.¹⁸
- Canada is well perceived by Australians, and the majority of their trips to Canada are for pleasure or to visit friends and relatives (86%).
- Most visitors travel independently (nearly 60%), with only 18% choosing an escorted tour.



JAPAN

- Travel from Japan to Canada is slowly recovering after more than a decade of general decline (50% from 2002 to 2010).
- In 2016, there were 70,000 visits by Japanese travellers, totalling \$112 million in tourism expenditures.¹⁹
- While time and affordability are cited as barriers to a Canadian holiday, Japanese travellers feel Canada offers good value for money and is among their top five destinations to consider.
- Older travellers aged 55+ represent the largest segment of potential travellers from Japan, followed by travellers aged 18 to 34.
- The trend is toward more independent travel, but packaged tours booked through travel agents remain standard.²⁰



Explorer Quotient Targets

Explorer Quotient (EQ) is a market segmentation tool developed by Destination Canada and utilized by Alberta Economic Development, Trade and Tourism to help destinations identify their best Traveller Types. There are nine Traveller Types and each one has particular experience preferences, characteristics, and travel values. The experience preferences of the Cultural Explorer, Authentic Experiencer and Personal History Explorer Traveller Types align well with the product offering currently available in CVR. See the figures below for brief summaries of each of these Traveller Types.

What makes Alberta different than other destinations is the unique combination of our authentic experiences, breathtaking landscapes, and of course, Albertans themselves. When all these things come together, there's no place in the world like Alberta.

- Alberta Tourism Brand Industry Toolkit

Cultural Explorers

Cultural Explorers are defined by their love of constant travel and continuous opportunities to embrace, discover and immerse themselves in the culture, people and settings of the places they visit. They love to learn about and absorb themselves in the ancient history, as well as the modern cultures of the places they visit. Cultural Explorers prefer active vacations and experiences that are shared with others. Cultural Explorers particularly enjoy attending farmers' markets, dining at restaurants offering local ingredients, visiting small towns and villages, and food-related tours (e.g. cheese, chocolate, etc.).



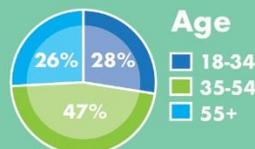
Cultural Explorers

Gender: 34% Male, 66% Female

Education: Average

Employment: Full-Time, slightly above average # of homemakers

Household Income: Average



Authentic Experiencers

Authentic Experiencers look for authentic, tangible engagement with the destinations they seek, with a particular interest in understanding the history of the places they visit. They see travel as a way to experience other people and places. Authentic Experiencers enjoy spontaneity and prefer to do their own thing rather than travel in a group. Authentic Experiencers most appealing activities include visiting small towns and villages, viewing wildlife like birds and animals, visiting well known historic sites and buildings, and dining at restaurants offering local ingredients.



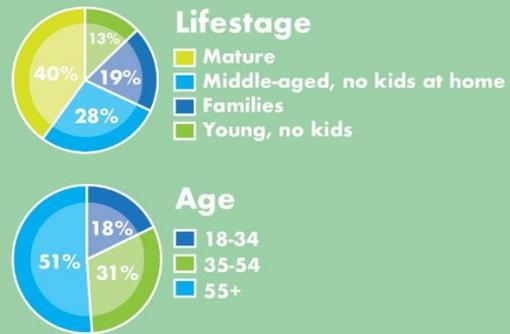
Authentic Experiencers

Gender: 51% Male, 49% Female

Education: Higher than average

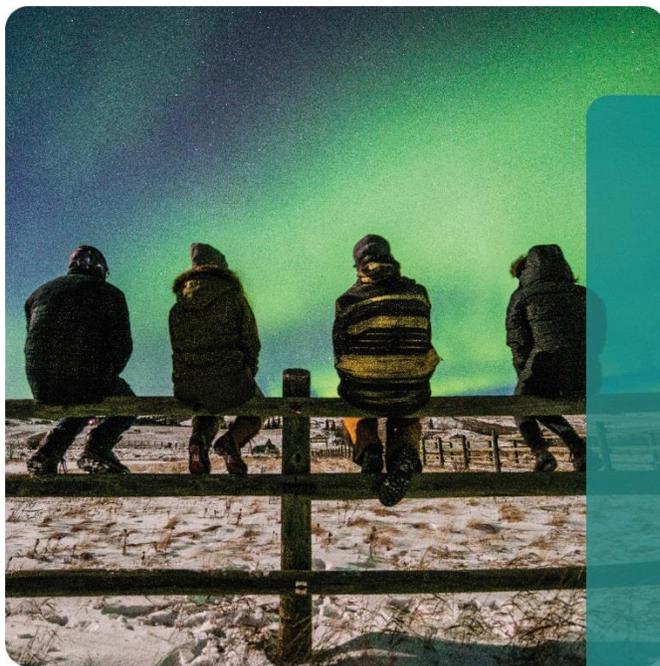
Employment: Full-Time, higher than average are retired

Household Income: Average



Personal History Explorers

Personal History Explorers are primarily defined by their desire to connect to their own cultural roots. As such, their most important travel motivation is interest in understanding their own ancestry and heritage. Personal History Explorers actively seek creature comforts when on vacation and will splurge on the finer things in life. They are attracted to groups where they can socialize and share their experiences with others. Personal History Explorers particularly enjoy immersing themselves in their culture, wildlife viewing, northern lights viewing, dining at restaurants offering local ingredients, and attending farmers' markets.



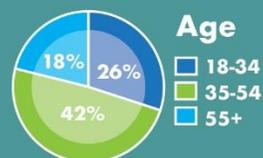
Personal History Explorers

Gender: 47% Male, 53% Female

Education: Average

Employment: Full-Time, or retired

Household Income: Average





05

TOURISM OPPORTUNITY ASSESSMENT

*Copper Cork Distillery in Vermilion
Photo Credit: Expedition Management Consulting Ltd.*

05 TOURISM OPPORTUNITY ASSESSMENT

Several high potential tourism opportunities were identified through the product development planning process. These products show the greatest potential for development in the short term. Descriptions of the opportunities and their key markets are provided in this section.

Tourism Opportunity Evaluation Tool

Expedition Management Consulting utilized the following set of criteria as a tool to assist us in determining which tourism opportunities have the highest potential for tourism development. The evaluation process placed high value on the current availability of assets and their level of market readiness. It is recognized that there are limited resources for implementation, therefore it is critical that existing resources are leveraged to their full extent. The assessment also carefully considered the product/market match of each opportunity.

Opportunity Assessment Criteria

Criteria	Description
1. Availability and Market Readiness of the Opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The opportunity is currently available in the region or could be developed with limited investment. - The extent to which the opportunity is visitor ready, market ready or export ready (see Appendix A for Market Ready Standards).
2. Human Resource Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development of the opportunity will not put un-due stress on existing human resources. - The operator of the opportunity has a strong organizational structure that can support growth (i.e. leadership, business infrastructure, experience, management capacity).
3. Partner and Community Buy-In	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The opportunity demonstrates commitment from a wide variety of partners (public and/or private). - The community is open to sharing the opportunity with visitors.
4. Unique and Authentic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The opportunity provides experiential product. - Promotes an authentic experience that highlights what is unique and valuable about the region. - Product differentiates itself from the competition.
5. Market Demand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The opportunity reaches identified target markets. - The opportunity demonstrates market demand through relevant indicators (e.g. visitation statistics, gap analysis, expressed demand, survey data, population projections, trends, etc.). - Limited competition exists relative to market demand (by geography, season, product offering, etc.). - Development of the opportunity will attract day-trippers. - Development of the opportunity will attract over-nighters.

6. Market Reach	- The opportunity has the potential to be promoted year-round to leverage the brand of the community. - The opportunity has the potential to attract the attention of the media.
7. Return on Investment	- The opportunity will produce a high return on investment.
8. Strategic Alignment	- Development of the opportunity aligns with the strategic intent and organizational strategy of stakeholders.
9. Community Impact	- The opportunity fosters the culture, health and development of the community by enhancing community spirit.
10. Ability to Generate New Product	- The opportunity has potential to develop new and complementary product on an annual basis.
11. Growth Potential	- The opportunity has potential to achieve year over year growth in revenue, product and visitation.
12. Environmental Impact	- The opportunity has minimal environmental impacts. - Further development of the opportunity would have minimal environmental impacts.
13. Physical Infrastructure Requirements	- The community has the physical infrastructure in place to support development (e.g. roads, public facilities, accommodations, etc.).
14. Logistics	- The opportunity has a sound logistical plan that will help ensure the execution of high-quality experiences for visitors.
15. Evaluation and Performance	- The opportunity can be clearly evaluated and have its performance measured.

Top Tourism Development Opportunities

Quick Wins



A blue star indicates that a recommended tactic is a “Quick Win.” Quick wins are actions that can be implemented within a year or two, have a high probability of success and have a relatively low cost.

1. Develop a New “Western Ways Festival”

Description:

Currently, there are several attractive western-style events hosted during the spring and summer months in communities throughout the region. These include the Lea Park Rodeo, Dewberry Chuckwagon Races, 3 Cities Fair and Bull-a-rama, Lea Park Jamboree, and the Vermilion Fair. At the present time, these events appear to be operating in isolation with a fairly limited market and with a product that is not overly compelling to those outside the rodeo circuit. As such, there is lost opportunity for cross promotion and broader business involvement.



*Cattle Drive in Lundbreck, Alberta
Source: Travel Alberta*

There is significant opportunity to drive tourism growth in the region by strengthening the connections between these events and building more diverse programming to complement existing programming and attract a wider audience. Businesses and attractions throughout the County can “piggy-back” on the success of these established events by adding their own Western Ways experiences during the *Western Ways Festival*. To start with, the *Western Ways Festival* can take place over the course of two weekends. As the festival grows and builds momentum, additional events can be added to the festival to extend its duration. Eventually, the region can become known far and wide for its *Western Ways Festival* and can use this market awareness for year-round promotions to further the region’s brand.

The true strength of this offering will be in the provision of a wide variety of on-brand programming by businesses and organizations throughout the County. These ancillary events could be structured similarly to Open Farm Days where participating businesses register their experience on a central website, so visitors have a menu of options to participate. As one example, the Old School Cheesery could host a long table lunch and promote it on the website as part of the *Western Ways Festival*. Other examples could be a country music festival at Graham Town, a living history exhibit at Climb Thru Time Museum or animation along the main streets in local communities and along the old CP Rail Line running through the County. Experiences could be small, intimate events with cowboy poetry and storytelling, or they could be bigger productions with live music and other entertainment. The opportunities are endless. See <https://albertafarmdays.ca/culinary-events/> for more information on the Open Farm Days concept. Another example that illustrates this type of festival is the Jasper Dark Sky Festival (<https://jasperdarksky.travel/>).

Objectives:

1. Encourage visitors to do more, stay longer and spend more in the County by building off of the success of existing events.
2. Attract more diverse visitor markets by expanding the types of western experiences available.
3. Engage businesses and organizations in the provision of high-quality western experiences during the festival.
4. Develop the festival into a keystone attraction for the region that can be leveraged for year-round promotion. Eventually, CVR will be known far and wide for its *Western Ways Festival*.

Target Markets:

- Visitors from Lloydminster, Edmonton and area, central Alberta and Saskatchewan.
- Residents of CVR and the surrounding municipalities.
- Cultural Explorers, Authentic Experiencers, Personal History Explorers.

Recommended Tactics:



1.A – Establish a *Western Ways Festival* Planning Committee who will be responsible for developing the new festival. The Committee should include representation from existing western events, tourism operators, local businesses and municipal partners.



1.B – Host a full-day *Western Ways Festival* planning forum that would engage event organizers, businesses and other partner organizations. The planning forum would have the following objectives:

1. Share the vision for the festival.
2. Brainstorm ideas for enhanced programming.
3. Begin to develop experiences collaboratively.

1.C – In the short term, establish a two-week *Western Ways Festival* by linking successful western-style events under a *Western Ways Festival* brand. Programming should initially focus on weekends.

1.D – Encourage tourism operators and partner organizations to build more diverse Western Ways programming to complement existing programming and attract a wider audience.

1.E – Establish a website where *Western Ways Festival* experiences can be promoted. It is recommended to model this website after the Open Farm Days website: <https://albertafarmdays.ca/>

1.F – Aim to add another western-style event and an additional week of programming to the *Western Ways Festival* by year 3 as the festival grows and builds momentum.

1.G – Continually assess the opportunity to add additional programming and weeks to the *Western Ways Festival* as demand allows.

1.H – Leverage the *Western Ways Festival* for year-round promotion of CVR.

2. Drive Visitation to Main Street Vermilion

Description:

Vermilion’s main street (50th Ave) and historic downtown is lined by boutique shops in attractive red brick buildings. This is a compelling attraction that has the potential to draw visitors into the region to a much greater degree. In recent years, the Town of Vermilion has invested significant resources into beautifying 50th Avenue and improving the signage throughout the community. This has contributed to the growth of businesses along main street with over 30 new licenses being distributed by the Town over the past few years.²¹

Both the County of Vermilion River and the Town of Vermilion stand to benefit by cooperating to attract visitors to the region. Communities may compete at the local level for visitors; however, it is important for them to cooperate to draw visitors into their region in the first place. Main Street Vermilion is a unique asset that presents a high-potential opportunity to grow visitation to the area and become a focal point for tourism activity in the region.



*Main Street in Vermilion
Source: Expedition Management Consulting Ltd.*

Objectives:

1. Leverage Vermilion’s Main Street to grow visitation in the region.
2. Develop Vermilion’s Main Street into a key entry and jumping-off point for visitors to the County.
3. Significantly enhance ongoing programming to drive visitor spending at businesses in Vermilion’s downtown and the broader region.

Target Markets:

- Visitors from urban areas in Lloydminster, Edmonton and area, central Alberta and Saskatchewan.
- Residents of CVR and the surrounding municipalities.
- Cultural Explorers and Personal History Explorers.

Recommended Tactics:

- ★ 2.A – Work with the Town of Vermilion to establish a *Visit Main Street Vermilion* Planning Committee who will lead tourism development initiatives in this area. The Committee should include representation from local businesses, tourism operators and municipal partners.
- ★ 2.B – Through the Planning Committee, host a full-day *Visit Main Street Vermilion* planning forum that would engage businesses and other partner organizations. The planning forum would have the following objectives:
 - 1. Share the vision for Main Street Vermilion.
 - 2. Brainstorm ideas for enhanced programming and linkages to other area attractions.
 - 3. Begin to develop experiences collaboratively.
- ★ 2.C – Develop shopping tours targeted at visitors from urban areas within a three-hour drive of downtown Vermilion.
- 2.D – Develop reciprocal shopping tours with like-minded boutique shopping communities with attractive downtowns (e.g. Camrose, Olds).
- 2.E – Develop culinary experiences and tours along main street based on the region’s attractive culinary offering.
- 2.F – Host compelling, on-brand events along main street to attract visitors to the downtown.
- 2.G – Develop complementary programming along main street during larger events in the region.
- 2.H – Develop an ongoing destination animation program.
- 2.I – Enhance interpretation of the historical and cultural aspects of Vermilion’s Main Street.
- ★ 2.J – Increase and enhance the visitor information available along Vermilion’s Main Street. This should include information related to the main street, as well as other attractions in the Town and County.
- ★ 2.K – Encourage cross-promotion between tourism-related businesses along Vermilion’s Main Street and businesses located in other parts of the region.

3. Create Interesting Travel Itineraries

Description:

Creating travel itineraries is one of the easiest and most inexpensive things the region can do to promote tourism. Itineraries can be developed in each of the region's main product lines and posted on websites for the consumption of visitors. For examples of interesting travel itineraries developed in other parts of Alberta see:

- Travel Drumheller: <https://traveldrumheller.com/itineraries/>
- Travel Alberta: <https://www.travelalberta.com/ca/plan-your-trip/itineraries/>

Developing travel itineraries for tourism development is particularly appealing because it does not necessarily require the creation of new experiences. In most cases, all that is needed is to combine existing attractions in creative ways that offer compelling routes for visitors.

When developing new itineraries, it is helpful to think through the following steps:²²

STEP 1: Research other itineraries in the marketplace

Take a tour which will be similar to the tour you wish to develop through your itinerary and obtain copies of other itineraries for comparison. This will help you develop ideas for your tour, give you an idea of what is already in the marketplace and provide possible ideas for itinerary design and content.

STEP 2: Name your itinerary

Come up with an interesting or catchy name that will resonate with your target audience.

STEP 3: Map out the duration, locations and other logistical details

- When and where will your itinerary begin?
- When and where will your itinerary end?
- Will operators and attractions be open to visitors during the tour?
- What time of year can the itinerary be completed?

STEP 4: List the major locations and highlights

What major attractions will your itinerary bring visitors to? What are the main locations and highlights that visitors are going to experience?

STEP 5: Research itinerary content

List the main topics you wish to include in your itinerary, such as unique stories, history, flora, fauna, culture, as well as the main points to consider with each of these topics and the resources you will use to find the information.

STEP 6: List any 3rd party activities, attractions, entrance fees and inclusions

List any activities offered by tourism operators or entrance fees along your itinerary and be sure to identify them.

STEP 7: Provide options for food and beverage

Your itinerary should identify options for food and beverage along the tour at regular mealtimes.

STEP 8: Provide options for accommodations

If your itinerary takes place over multiple days, it should provide options for accommodations.

STEP 9: Perfect the timing

It is important to map out your itinerary accurately to ensure that visitors will arrive on time for activity and meal stops. Prepare a table that shows start, stop and duration times for each location, attraction or activity.

STEP 10: Test drive your itinerary

It recommended that several 'dry runs' of your itinerary be completed prior to launch. This will ensure the timing is right.

Objectives:

- 1. Drive visitation and spending at tourism operators, businesses and events in the region.
- 2. Showcase the best attractions in the region and enhance the effectiveness of tourism promotions.
- 3. Encourage visitation by making experiences more accessible and easier to consume.

Target Markets:

- Visitors from Lloydminster, Edmonton and area, central Alberta and Saskatchewan.
- Residents of CVR and the surrounding municipalities.
- Cultural Explorers, Authentic Experiencers, Personal History Explorers.

Recommended Tactics:

- ★ 3.A – Create interesting travel itineraries for the region. Itineraries showcasing the region’s best attractions should be developed, as well as itineraries for each of the main product lines in the County (i.e. Western Ways, Rural Roots and Routes, The Great Outdoors).
- ★ 3.B – Promote the itineraries to target markets using effective marketing channels.
- 3.C – Consider adding new experiences to fill any gaps in itinerary planning.

4. Develop Compelling New Packages from Existing Experiences

Description:

The clear advantage of packaging is that the region does not necessarily need to create new products, but instead can efficiently utilize existing assets. Value will be added to the visitor experience by combining existing products into new and innovative packages that will attract and excite visitors.

From a tourism perspective, packaging refers to the linking of a number of individual products/services into a single experience, typically for a single price. A package is a saleable item, with a set price for a set period of time. There is a broad range of products and services that can be linked in a package, including:

- Food and beverage
- Accommodation
- Built attraction – museum, art gallery, theme park, etc.
- Natural attraction – water access, scenic vistas, etc.
- Transportation
- Programming – gourmet cooking, wine tasting, wood carving, etc.
- Guided tour
- Entertainment – theatre performance, stage show, concert
- Event/festival
- Shopping
- Activity – hiking, kayaking, skiing, snowmobiling
- Ability to experience local culture.

Packages can be linked in many ways and have varying durations (e.g. from a half day to multi-day packages). As packages are developed, consideration should be paid to the region's tourism brand to ensure alignment in the product offerings. In the short term, it is recommended that the region undertake a full day packaging workshop where operators can come together to create new packages and begin to map out logistics.

Objectives:

1. Drive visitation and spending at tourism operators, businesses and events in the region.
2. Create new and exciting visitor experiences by combining existing products and services.
3. Engage businesses and organization in a highly collaborative way.

Target Markets:

- Visitors from Lloydminster, Edmonton and area, central Alberta and Saskatchewan.
- Residents of CVR and the surrounding municipalities.
- Cultural Explorers, Authentic Experiencers, Personal History Explorers.



Recommended Tactics:

- 4.A – Host tourism packaging workshops to increase operators’ package development capacities.
- 4.B – Develop compelling new tourism packages from existing experiences and offerings in the region. The initial packages should be focused on the region’s main product lines.
- 4.C – Promote the packages to target markets using effective marketing channels.
- 4.D – Consider adding new experiences to fill any gaps in the packages.

5. Attract the Visiting Friends and Relatives Market

Description:

Travel associated with visiting friends and relatives (VFR) is a significant driver of tourism in CVR. On a provincial level, VFR is the primary reason for 44% of total overnight trips and accounts for 29% of all overnight tourism spending in Alberta. Given that the primary purpose of VFR travel is to visit a friend or relative, every community in the region has the potential to benefit from VFR.

The role of residents as hosts is instrumental to the VFR experience. As the main point of entry into a destination, they are often responsible for introducing their visiting friends and relatives to the region and recommending options for activities and experiences to take part in during the visit. Research indicates that resident hosts are the “gatekeepers of the product” and must be sold on the value of their community’s tourism offering.²³ It is therefore encouraging to note that often up to 85% of residents in Alberta communities are likely or very likely to invite their friends and family to visit within the next two years.²⁴ This represents a huge opportunity to convert these invitations into actual trips.

There are a host of opportunities to attract the VFR market in Alberta. Many of these opportunities fall into the following three categories:

1. **Support your sales force (i.e. residents)** – Hosts are your sales force and you can increase their chance of success by offering programs to support them, such as:
 - a. VFR-focused website
 - b. VFR hosting checklists, FAQ’s, Explorer Quotient quizzes, itinerary planning tools and guides
 - c. VFR ambassador programs
 - d. Incentives for VFR travel
 - e. Personal itinerary planning

2. **Build compelling VFR product** – The VFR market can be expanded by building compelling VFR product, including:
 - a. Niche VFR experiences
 - b. Family occasions and events
 - c. Festivals and events

3. **Integrate VFR into destination development activities and strategy** – VFR can be integrated into your destination development plan. This can be accomplished by:
 - a. Positioning VFR as a core driver
 - b. Developing a VFR strategy
 - c. Resourcing VFR development activities

Objectives:

1. Drive visitation and tourism spending in the region by attracting the VFR market.

Target Markets:

- The friends and relatives of residents who can be motivated to travel to the region. VFR is unique for the region in that it has the potential to attract regional, out-of-province and international visitors.

Recommended Tactics:

5.A – Develop VFR-focused marketing tools and programs to encourage VFR travel to the region. These tools and programs could include the following.

- A tourism ambassador program that provides education on VFR tourism and hosting techniques for residents.
- An incentive program for VFR travel, such as visitor passes that give residents discounts if they bring a visiting friend or relative with them.
- Resident-focused VFR trip planning resources, such as hosting checklists/tips/FAQ's, itinerary planning tools, educational webinars and more.

5.B – Develop experiences that cater to the needs and wants of the VFR segment.



5.C – Target residents with tourism advertising and promotions to help attract the VFR segment.

5.D – Partner regionally to encourage VFR tourism between neighbouring communities.



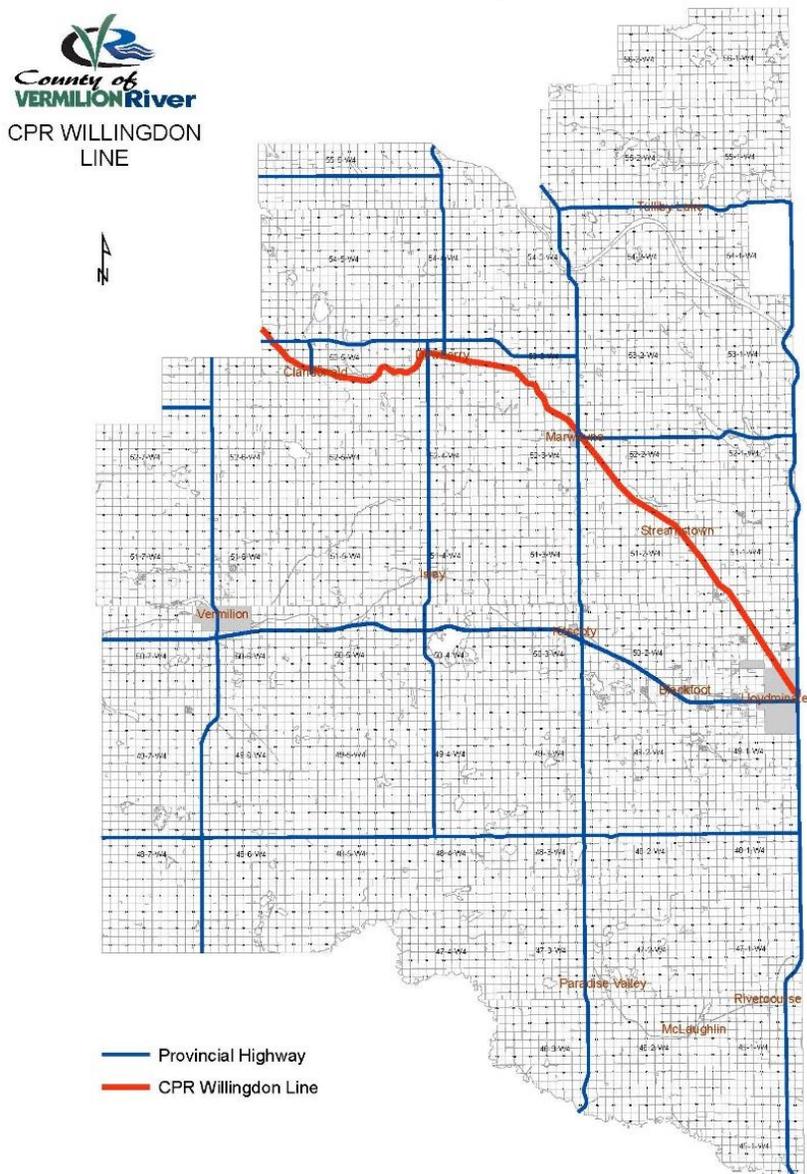
5.E – Integrate VFR into future destination development initiatives and position VFR as a core pillar of destination development.

6. Develop the CPR Willingdon Line into a Recreational Trail

Description:

The County should consider trail developments to enhance recreational opportunities, improve connectivity between communities, and further link key tourism sites to one another. One unique opportunity lies with the Canadian Pacific Railway's Willingdon Line, which runs through the County (see Figure 3). This line was abandoned decades ago and has had its rails removed. As such, there is opportunity to redevelop the line into a long-distance recreation trail. Multi-season and multi-use options could be considered during its development, along with interpretation and rest areas. If developed appropriately, the trail could become a tourism attraction, while also serving as a recreational asset for residents.

Figure 3. Canadian Pacific Railway's Willingdon Line



Objectives:

1. Attract visitors to the County by providing a high-quality trail experience.
2. Improve connectivity between communities and linkages between tourism assets.
3. Provide enhanced recreational opportunities for residents.

Target Markets:

- Trail enthusiasts from Lloydminster, Edmonton and area, central Alberta and Saskatchewan.
- Residents of CVR and the surrounding municipalities.

Recommended Tactics:

6.A – Conduct a tourism opportunity assessment and development plan for the CPR Willingdon Line. This study would identify high potential visitor amenities and experiences that could be developed along the line. It would also provide direction on trail management and marketing.

6.B – Develop a trail feasibility study for the CPR Willingdon Line. This study would include detailed concept designs, trail standards, access points, and a plan to operationalize the trail.

Tourism Product Development Process

When developing new tourism experiences, it is helpful to first conceptualize a process for how they are developed. Figure 4 below provides a high-level overview of this process.

Figure 4. Tourism Product Development Process



The delivery of new, high quality products will lead to an increase in visitation to the region. As interest in the region grows, it will be important to continue developing new products to keep existing visitor markets engaged and attract new visitors.

Product Development Considerations

The development of new, high-quality tourism products in the region will be instrumental to the growth of the industry. Fortunately, the responsibility and associated resource requirements to develop new experiences will not fall on any single stakeholder group (i.e. municipalities, businesses, non-governmental organizations). Every stakeholder group can play a role by contributing to the development of new products. Stakeholders will need to be highly collaborative and open to cooperation in the early stages of tourism development to improve the chances of success.

Since many tourism operators are not currently set up to handle large volumes of visitors, it makes sense to start small and build their businesses up from there. New products can then be linked together through itineraries or packages to create attractive tourism offerings. As compelling offerings are developed, they can be promoted and sold through existing channels such as Go East of Edmonton or Eventbrite.

Although the region has many assets that can be further developed to attract visitors, there are considerable benefits to be gained by initially focusing tourism development resources on a single, unique tourism experience. It is recognized that the County is not a “something for all” destination.²⁵ Therefore, focusing development efforts on initiatives that cultivate unique and authentic experience offerings will be the best use of resources in the short-term.

Experiential Travel

Tourism businesses primarily sell experiences. Even if a tangible product or service is being sold, it is really the experience generated by the product/service that is motivating customers to make purchases. The demand for experiences has given rise to *experiential travel*, which is the basis of the modern tourism economy.

Experiential travel is travel that connects you with the essence of a place and its people by engaging visitors in a series of memorable travel activities revealed over time that are inherently personal, engage the senses and make connections on an emotional, physical, spiritual or intellectual level. It responds to the desire to venture beyond the beaten tourist paths, dive deeper into authentic, local culture, connect with people and enriches their lives.²⁶

What is an experience?

An experience is something that is personally encountered, lived through and affects the individual. It may involve observation or participation; be active or passive, planned or opportunistic, personal or shared.



06

REGIONAL COLLABORATION OPPORTUNITIES

*Vermilion Provincial Park
Photo Credit: Expedition Management Consulting Ltd.*

06 REGIONAL COLLABORATION OPPORTUNITIES

This section describes four opportunities for regional collaboration in the development of tourism in CVR.

1. Regional Tourism Committee

Stakeholders should come together and form a regional tourism committee, whose purpose would be to spearhead recommendations in this report and lead destination development activities in the region. Ideally, the committee would have representation from the private, public and not-for-profit sectors. Figure 5 below provides an example of the sectors that should have representation in such a committee.

Figure 5. Regional Tourism Committee



Objectives:

1. Identify a single organization to lead destination development activities in the region.
2. Ensure multi-stakeholder involvement from the private, public and not-for-profit sectors.

Recommended Tactics:

- ★ 1.A – Establish a regional tourism committee to lead destination development activities. The committee should have representation from each of the sectors identified in Figure 5.
- 1.B – Begin implementation of the initiatives identified in the tourism opportunity assessment.

2. Regional Collaborative Marketing and Destination Development

Stakeholders should take a much more collaborative approach to marketing and developing experiences. For example, the region should develop a single source for all of its tourism information (online and print), and attractions could increase the cross-promotion between themselves to encourage visitors to do more in the region. Collaborative marketing initiatives can be further leveraged through grant programs.

Objectives:

1. Enhance collaboration between tourism-related businesses and other stakeholders in the region.
2. Improve the effectiveness and efficiency of tourism marketing and experience development.

Recommended Tactics:

2.A – Develop an annual tourism marketing campaign and leverage funds through the Travel Alberta Cooperative Investment Program (Partnership Marketing stream) or other grant programs.



2.B – Encourage tourism-related businesses in the region to cross-promote each others' offerings.

2.C – Establish a single source for the region's tourism information (online and print).

3. Regional Tourism Planning

An excellent opportunity for regional stakeholders to collaborate would be coming together to plan for the future of tourism in the region. Tourism planning projects could take many forms, including a regional tourism strategy, regional tourism product development plan, or a regional visitor friendly assessment and action plan. Resources from multiple partners can be combined to fund projects of this scale, and grant funding may be available from Alberta Economic Development, Trade and Tourism to further leverage available resources.

Objectives:

1. Collaboratively plan for tourism development in the region.

Recommended Tactics:

3.A – Develop a Tourism Strategy and Action Plan for the region. The strategy should set a long-term vision for tourism development and address key needs (e.g. the need for additional tourism product, the need for enhanced coordination of tourism marketing activities, the need to better understand visitors to the region and target markets).

3.B – Complete a Regional Visitor Friendly Assessment and Action Plan. The visitor friendly assessment will take a comprehensive look at how the region presents itself to visitors, including its ambience and visual appeal, wayfinding and signage, customer service, public services and amenities, and visitor information services. Based on the findings of the assessment, a practical action plan should be developed to tangibly improve the visitor friendliness of the region.

3.C – Leverage local tourism planning resources through Provincial funding programs, including the:

- [Community and Regional Economic Support \(CARES\) Program*](#)
- [Cooperative Investment Program](#)
- [Tourism Growth Innovation Fund**](#)
- [Visitor Friendly Program](#)
- [Community Initiatives Program](#)
- [Visitor Services Innovation Fund](#)

*Tourism projects have been identified as an area of focus for the CARES Program.

**This program is currently under review as part of Alberta's 10 Year Tourism Strategy. It is possible the program may no longer exist after the review has concluded.

4. Partnering with Lloydminster

Lloydminster is a large urban area situated along Highway 16 at the eastern boundary of the County. The community has a population of over 31,000 people and serves as a regional service hub for the surrounding rural areas.²⁷ The community has a dedicated website for tourism (www.discoverlloydminster.ca) and publishes a visitor guide. Attractions and tourism-related businesses in the County of Vermilion River and Town of Vermilion are already featured in Lloydminster’s visitor information resources; however, there may be opportunity to enhance their exposure and/or collaboratively develop itineraries and packages to increase visitation to both the Vermilion region and Lloydminster.

Objectives:

- 1. Strengthen tourism relationships between Lloydminster and the Vermilion region.
- 2. Enhance tourism offerings through mutually beneficial partnerships.

Recommended Tactics:



- 4.A – Organize a meeting with Lloydminster’s tourism lead(s) to explore opportunities for collaborative product development and marketing.
- 4.B – Action collaborative tourism initiatives as they are identified which will lead to mutually beneficial outcomes (e.g. itinerary development, package development, etc.).
- 4.C – Commit to ongoing communication to keep each other apprised of new developments and emerging opportunities in the tourism sector.



07

ROLES IN IMPLEMENTATION

*Climb Thru Time Museum
Photo Credit: Expedition Management Consulting Ltd.*

07 ROLES IN IMPLEMENTATION

This section provides further direction on implementing the recommendations included in this report.

Roles in Implementation

Collaborative effort will be required from multiple stakeholders to achieve the goals put forward by the tourism opportunity assessment. Each stakeholders’ role in implementation is described below.

Organization	Role
County of Vermilion River and Municipal Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take the lead role in ensuring the tourism opportunity assessment is moving forward in the most effective and cohesive manner. Leverage resources to ensure tourism development occurs.
Regional Tourism Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lead the implementation of destination development activities in the region.
Businesses and Entrepreneurs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The private sector provides many of the front-line services to visitors, such as accommodations, food and beverage, and experiences. Local businesses will play a key role in growing tourism in the region through the development and delivery of high-quality experiences. Businesses must be actively engaged in implementation and need to be more involved in tourism development than they currently are.
Go East of Edmonton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Go East of Edmonton is a regional tourism marketing organization that promotes tourism offerings in over 50 communities across East Central Alberta. The region should look at partnering with Go East to expand the reach of its tourism marketing activities.
Vermilion and District Chamber of Commerce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Chamber is a member-based organization that supports the business community in the Vermilion area. It works with its members to champion local causes that promote and support local businesses to grow the economy. The Chamber is a key link to the business owners. The Chamber should encourage members to participate in implementation.
Residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Passionate and dedicated community champions will need to be inspired to help implement the tourism opportunity assessment and generate buy-in within the community. Providing the opportunity to participate in Committees will be important.
Alberta Economic Development, Trade and Tourism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alberta Economic Development, Trade and Tourism could be an important funding partner moving forward. The department also provides excellent resources, training and advice in implementation.
Travel Alberta	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Travel Alberta is the provincial tourism marketing organization that promotes product regionally, nationally and internationally. The region should work closely with Travel Alberta to benefit from its extensive knowledge and resources.
Alberta Environment and Parks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alberta Environment and Parks manages the province’s land base and natural resources through the Land-use Framework. All land-based activities are considered through this Framework, including tourism.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Alberta Parks division manages provincial parks in the region which have important campgrounds (e.g. Vermilion Provincial Park and Whitney Lakes Provincial Park). Alberta Parks is an important partner in developing tourism product and assets in the region.
Neighbouring Municipalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is potential to partner with neighbouring municipalities on regional tourism initiatives (e.g. product development opportunities, itineraries, packages and collaborative marketing).
Other DMO's	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are opportunities to partner with other DMO's on initiatives that support tourism development in CVR (e.g. Travel Lakeland, Edmonton Tourism).



The Old School Cheesery
Source: Expedition
Management Consulting Ltd.



08

NEXT STEPS AND CONCLUSION

*Historic Craig's Department Store
Photo Credit: Expedition Management Consulting Ltd.*

08 NEXT STEPS AND CONCLUSION

Next Steps

The following action items have been identified as the top priorities to further the objectives of this assessment. These are organized in order of priority.

Top 10 Action Items

1. Establish a regional tourism committee to lead destination development activities.
2. Secure resources for destination and product development initiatives (see below for more information).
3. Establish a *Western Ways Festival* Planning Committee and begin the development of this new festival.
4. Create interesting travel itineraries for the region.
5. Host packaging workshops to increase operators' package development capacities.
6. Develop compelling new tourism packages from existing experiences and offerings in the region.
7. Establish a single source for tourism-related information (online and print) and promote itineraries and packages.
8. Work with the Town of Vermilion to establish a *Visit Main Street Vermilion* Planning Committee and begin implementing the recommended tactics.
9. Develop VFR-focused marketing tools and programs to encourage VFR travel to the region.
10. Develop a Tourism Strategy and Action Plan for the region.

Tourism Economic Development Grant Funding Proposals

Grant funding proposals for tourism economic development initiatives should be developed and submitted to applicable government programs (see 3.C on page 44). The action items identified above should be considered for inclusion in the grant funding proposals. It is important to note that the most recent CARES program intake was from November 1st to December 2nd, 2019. Future intake dates will be advertised on the program's webpage when finalized.

Conclusion

The County of Vermilion River Tourism Opportunity Assessment provides a resource that will guide the region in the future development of its tourism assets. The tourism opportunities identified in this report will assist the County and its tourism partners find their focus and leverage their strengths to develop highly engaging experiences that will attract key target markets. The stage is also set for the future development of tourism through the identification of opportunities for regional collaboration. The tourism industry is in the early stages of development in the County; however, the region is well-positioned for growth. The time is right to invest in tourism and further diversify the local economies in the region.



*Dairy Learning Centre at Lakeland College
Photo Credit: Expedition Management Consulting Ltd.*

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Market Ready Standards

Market Ready Standards are broken down into 3-categories of “readiness” to assist tourism-related businesses in progressively increasing the quality and professionalism of their operation.²⁸

Visitor Ready

These criteria are used to determine if a tourism supplier is ready to offer “visitor ready” product to consumers.

Visitor Ready: Refers to a business which has all of their licenses, permits and insurance in place in order to operate legally.

Criteria

The following criteria must be met if a business is to be classified as “visitor ready”. The business must:

- Maintain good standing of all applicable business licenses, insurance, and legislative requirements.
- Maintain a staffed business location with a set schedule of operating hours.
- Provide a contact telephone number or email contact year-round. If closed for season, provide automated response through voicemail and or email.
- Have branded on-site signage.

Market Ready

These criteria are used to determine if a tourism supplier is ready to offer “market ready” product to consumers.

Market Ready: Refers to a business that markets to potential visitors; communicates with potential visitors year-round, and is ready to accept advanced reservations.

Criteria

The following criteria must be met if a business is to be classified as “market ready”. The business must meet visitor ready criteria plus:

- Provide a published pricing policy.
- Have a published consumer billing, payment, and cancellation policy.
- Have marketing materials such as brochure, rack card or website.
- Have site based parking in close proximity.
- During operating season, maintain a 24-48 hour response time; or less, to inquiries and a 24 hour response time to reservation/booking requests.
- Be prepared to communicate and accept reservations by telephone, fax and/or e-mail and provide same day confirmation of booking arrangements.
- Have high resolution images and video footage for promotional and training purposes.
- Have frontline staff who are trained in customer service (such as WorldHost® or equivalent customer training program)
- Be an active stakeholder or eligible to become a stakeholder of your local tourism association.

Export Ready

These criteria are used to determine if a tourism supplier is ready to offer “export ready” product to international markets.

Export Ready: Refers to a business that markets to and through travel trade distribution sales channels, understands commission or net rate pricing, agrees to trade bookings and a cancellation policy.

Criteria

The following criteria must be met if a business is to be classified as “export ready”. The business must meet “visitor and market ready” criteria plus:

- Be in business at least one year, with a proven track record for safe and professional operation.
- Demonstrate an adequate budget and marketing plan that includes international tourism operators.
- Understand the roles played by receptive tour operators, tour operators, travel wholesalers, and retail travel agents and understand rack or retail pricing, agent commissions and wholesale net rates at each level.
- Be willing to include receptive tour operators in your marketing and sales plan and provide contracted wholesale net rates to receptive tour operators.
- Provide detailed pricing and program information to tour operators and wholesalers at least one year in advance of selling season.
- Be prepared to set up billing arrangements with the tour operator, wholesale agency or receptive tour operator.
- If you plan to pursue group business, ensure you are able to accommodate and adapt to the needs of the market (e.g. tour bus access and parking, washroom facilities, maximum group size, group pricing, and frontline staff that speak the language of your target markets).
- Carry adequate insurance (discuss this with your receptive operator as sometimes they can add suppliers to their existing policies at nominal cost).
- Provide support (free or reduced rates) for international media and travel trade familiarization tours.
- Offer currency exchange rates consistent with industry norms.

Appendix B: References

- ¹ County of Vermilion River. (2018). County website.
- ² Government of Canada. (2016). 2016 Federal Census for the County of Vermilion River.
- ³ County of Vermilion River. (2020).
- ⁴ County of Vermilion River. (nd). Invest In The County of Vermilion River.
- ⁵ County of Vermilion River. (2019). Tourism Opportunity Assessment RFP.
- ⁶ Retrieved from: <https://industry.travelalberta.com/visitor-market-insight/visitor-insights/visitor-economy>
- ⁷ Alberta Economic Development, Trade and Tourism. (2018). Domestic Tourism in Alberta Central Tourism Region 2016.
- ⁸ Visiting Friends and Relatives in Alberta Study, 2016 - Quantitative Phase, produced by TNS Canada for Alberta Economic Development, Trade and Tourism, November 25, 2016
- ⁹ Expedition Management Consulting Ltd. (2017). Lac La Biche County Visitor Friendly Assessment and Action Plan.
- ¹⁰ Alberta Economic Development, Trade and Tourism. (2018). A Summary of 2016 Visitor Numbers and Expenditures.
- ¹¹ Retrieved from <http://industry.travelalberta.com/news/71d24c3fc3a048c3b018f4f051eed1c4/long-term-efforts-coming-to-fruit-in-u-s-market>
- ¹² Travel Alberta. (2019). Market Highlights: United States.
- ¹³ Travel Alberta. (2019). Market Highlights: United Kingdom.
- ¹⁴ United Kingdom Market Profile, February 2013, Canadian Tourism Commission, accessed at https://www.destinationcanada.com/sites/default/files/archive/2013-12-01/Intelligence_MarketInsights_MarketProfile_UK_2013_EN.pdf
- ¹⁵ Travel Alberta. (2019). Market Highlights: China.
- ¹⁶ Team Alberta Marketing Plan, 2016-2018, accessed at <https://taprdsccdn.azureedge.net/cms/-/media/IndustryHub/files/about/publications/business-marketing-plan/travel-alberta-2016-2018-marketing-plan>.
- ¹⁷ Travel Alberta. (2019). Market Highlights: Germany.
- ¹⁸ International Visitation and Expenditures to Alberta: 2000 - 2015, Alberta Economic Development, Trade and Tourism. Tourism Research Unit, accessed at <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/555cc2f9-7c17-4020-8145-50ae88186051/resource/420dc3b0-b727-475a-84a3-43c1cf9b2c7e/download/international-visits-and-expenditure-final.pdf>.
- ¹⁹ Travel Alberta. (2019). Market Highlights: Japan.
- ²⁰ Japanese Market Profile, February 2013, Canadian Tourism Commission, accessed at https://www.destinationcanada.com/sites/default/files/archive/2013-12-01/Intelligence_MarketInsights_MarketProfile_Japan_2013_EN.pdf.
- ²¹ Town of Vermilion. (2019).
- ²² Retrieved from <https://www.tourismcouncilwa.com.au/guide-planning-tour-itinerary>
- ²³ Visiting Friends and Relatives in Alberta Study, 2016 - Quantitative Phase, produced by TNS Canada for Alberta Economic Development, Trade and Tourism, November 25, 2016
- ²⁴ Expedition Management Consulting Ltd. (2019). Primary Survey Research from 2016 – 2019.
- ²⁵ County of Vermilion River. (2019). Tourism Opportunity Assessment RFP.
- ²⁶ Tourism Café. (2016).
- ²⁷ Retrieved from: <https://www.lloydminster.ca/en/business-and-growth/community-profile.aspx>
- ²⁸ Destination BC. (nd). Market Ready Standards.