

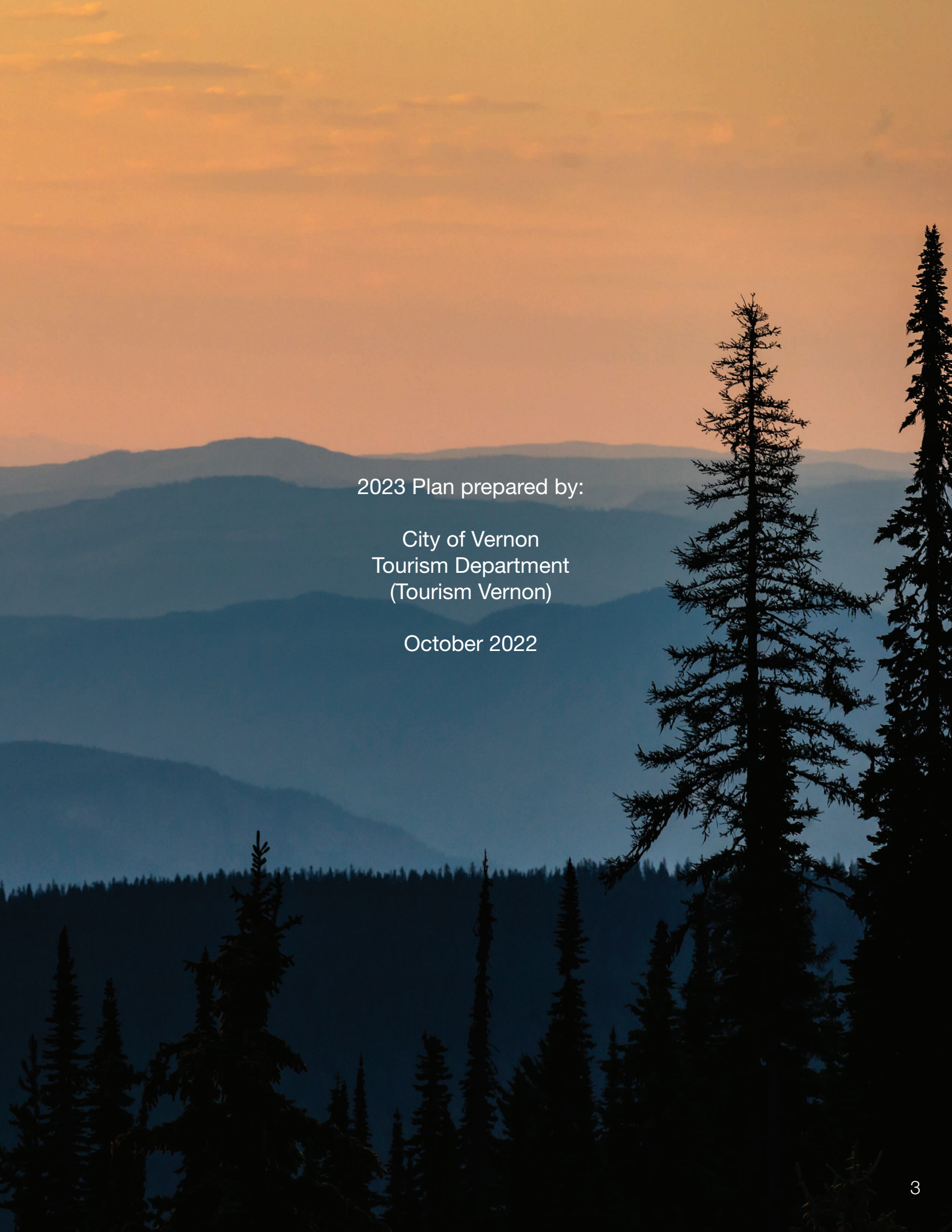
TOURISM VERNON 2023 MARKETING PLAN



TOURISM
Vernon

CITY OF VERNON
TOURISM DEPARTMENT





2023 Plan prepared by:

City of Vernon
Tourism Department
(Tourism Vernon)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Tourism remains a significant driver of economic growth to Vernon. 2021 Hotel Room Revenue for the community reached \$32,955,585. 2022 Hotel Room Revenues are on track to hit ~\$38M; a banner year for Vernon. 2023 marks year one of Tourism Vernon's new Five-Year Strategic Plan that plants sustainability at its core. Sustainability plays out in the 2023 Marketing Plan as Destination Management; an exciting tool for balancing economic growth with Vernon's environmental, social and economic needs. This balance plays out in the 2023 Marketing Plan as a sophisticated, thoughtful approach to marketing campaigns, marketing content and industry engagement tools.

Tourism Vernon will also welcome the return of robust, nation-wide marketing campaigns, regular media and influencer visits, and full-

scale industry engagement sessions in 2023. While traditional marketing and media tactics can be found throughout this plan, an emphasis on digital tactics is here to stay. Digital marketing addresses consumers' growing demand for online information, provides detailed data and insights and allow staff to make quick, micro adjustments to how and who a campaign is targeting. Data-driven marketing will be a key area of investment for Tourism Vernon's 2023 marketing tactics. Staff plan to continue collecting Telus insights data and prioritizing analytic reporting on an increasing scale. Summer and winter remain Vernon's top tourism seasons. In order to extend economic impacts throughout the shoulder seasons, Tourism Vernon plans to increase all marketing and media activity headed into spring and fall.

In partnership with Vernon hoteliers and resorts, Tourism Vernon staff plan to actively target travel trade and tour groups throughout 2023 to increase room revenue and economic impact to the broader community. While group travel has been slower to recover compared to other markets, now is the time to nurture relationships in this sector. As a primarily short-haul destination, capturing the Free Independent Traveler (FIT) and Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) markets also remains a priority for Tourism Vernon. There are many economic factors at play as we head into 2023, and a slowing of the current travel boom is anticipated. Travel has long been considered to be a discretionary spend for most households. However, current consumer behavior is defying this notion. Data has shown that while recessions can slow tourism growth, travelers

will opt for a domestic destination as opposed to an international vacation. Vernon is an established domestic destination and, as evidenced through the pandemic, Canadians are still very likely to visit the Okanagan Valley during economic uncertainty. It's likely that momentum from the current travel boom will carry revenues for months into an economic downturn, though forward bookings may slow. With cautious optimism, 2023 MRDT revenues are budgeted slightly above the five-year average. Additional funding is being requested from the 2020/2021 program savings held in the Hotel Tax reserve. As Tourism Vernon launches year one of a new strategic direction, marketing efforts remain supportive of Council's Strategic Plan and Vernon's environmental, social and economic needs as a community.



2023-2027 STRATEGIC DIRECTION

The *2023-27 Tourism Vernon Five Year Strategic Plan* sets the goals and vision for Tourism Vernon through to December 31, 2027. The strategy was developed with significant input from the public and stakeholders, and has been endorsed by the Tourism Commission and City Council. The 2023 Tactical Marketing Plan has been developed to achieve these goals and objectives identified within the strategic plan.

The information below is a high-level summary of the strategic framework as outlined in the *2023-27 Tourism Vernon Five Year Strategic Plan*. A full copy of the plan is available [*online here*](#).

MISSION

To refresh the mind, body, and soul of the active explorer in the Okanagan

VISION

Vernon is the 365-day adventure capital of the Okanagan

OUR ROLE

To promote, protect and enhance Vernon's position as one of North America's premier holiday and lifestyle destinations through leading the execution of targeted marketing programs, supporting destination development programs and advocating for the sustainable growth of tourism in Vernon. We will be the most innovative and effective Destination Management Organization in the Thompson Okanagan in inspiring our target markets to experience our destination.



A person wearing a red cap and a light-colored t-shirt stands on a grassy hill, looking out over a valley. The sun is setting in the background, creating a warm, golden glow over the landscape. The valley below is filled with green fields, trees, and small houses. In the distance, there are rolling hills and mountains under a cloudy sky.

GOALS

- ↑ Increased year-round visitation
- ↑ Increased visitor satisfaction
- ↑ Increased stakeholder engagement
- ↑ Increased community support for tourism

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

To effectively capture our target markets and drive sustainable visitation, these six key strategy pillars have been identified:

1. Lead with the brand
2. Focus marketing on key audiences
3. Leverage specific sports
4. Establish strong partnerships
5. Activate local pride
6. Incubate products and experiences



TARGET MARKETS

The primary target markets have been derived and adapted from those found in the *2023-27 Tourism Vernon Five Year Strategic Plan*. The sectors of focus have been identified for each target market.

PRIMARY

Active Explorers

- 35-55 years of age
- Travelling as a family during school breaks
- Coming from Western Canada (BC and Alberta)

SECONDARY

Near Retirement

- 55+ years of age
- Travelling as couples and multi-generations
- Coming mostly from Alberta and Lower Mainland

Specific Sports

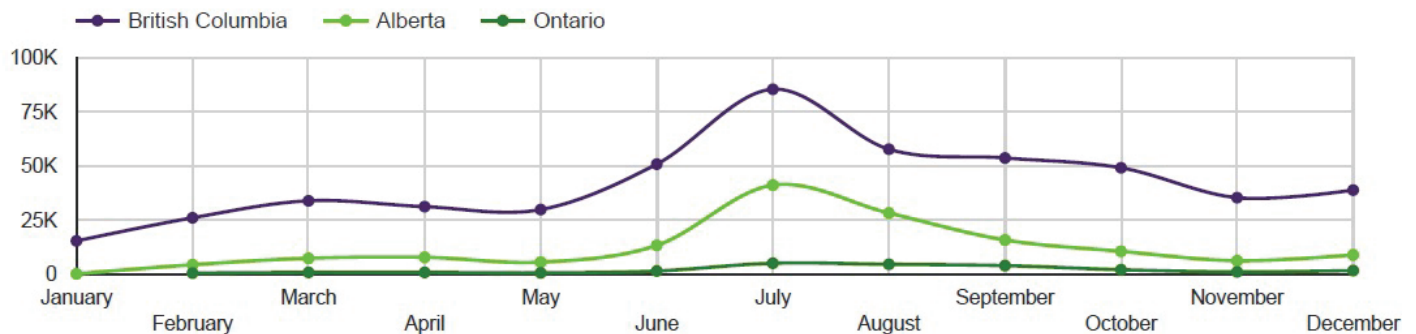
- 16-45 years of age; including families with older children
- Travelling in a family unit or small groups
- Coming from Western Canada (BC and Alberta)
- Strong international appeal

GEOGRAPHY AND SEGMENTS

- **Calgary** makes up 21% of visitors
- **Greater Vancouver** makes up 18% of visitors
- **Edmonton** makes up 12% of visitors
- Long haul markets, particularly Ontario, have shown recent strength and will be monitored closely.
- International visitors from the USA travel as couples and many fitting the near retirement segments with peak visitation in the fall months according to Telus Insights data.
- Travel trade and business travel groups are making a comeback and will be monitored closely.



Monthly total trips by province





SUSTAINABILITY & CLIMATE ACTION

‘Sustainability’ has repeatedly been identified by stakeholders across Vernon as critical for the survival and optimization of tourism businesses, to mitigate negative impacts, enhance the quality of life of residents and improve visitor experiences. As such, Tourism Vernon will start the evolution from Destination Marketing to Destination Management to ensure we are active stewards in our community, prioritizing long-term sustainability and community well-being in every aspect of our work.

Sustainable tourism experiences are important as travelers look towards lessening the environmental impact when they take a vacation. It will be the quality, rather than quantity, of experiences in Vernon that will demonstrate our commitments

to sustainability and set us apart as a destination. Tourism Vernon is committed to educating the local tourism industry on sustainable business practices and promoting sustainable tourism experiences to travelers. Staff will continue to attend conferences, courses and educational seminars to maintain expert working knowledge of sustainable tourism practices.

The City of Vernon's Climate Action Plan integrates sustainability and community across all initiatives. As a community, our key objectives are to mitigate negative environmental impacts, adapt behaviors to align with community values and climate change, enhance community and business resiliency, and support regenerative opportunities to ensure we make positive environmental contributions to Vernon. Tourism Vernon staff are committed to supporting and implementing the City of Vernon's Climate Action Plan and integrating sustainability in our community. Supporting our industry in adapting to climate change and the transition to a clean energy economy is vital.



2023 MARKETING GOALS & OBJECTIVES

- Capitalize on the existing demand for outdoor leisure travel by promoting Vernon's exceptional outdoor experiences and complimenting activities to high-volume and high value target markets
- Promote Vernon's diverse experiences to high-value segments with high impact promotions with a focus on target market segments
- Encourage longer stays and repeat visitors to come back to recreate memories made from culturally rich experiences
- Activate local pride to share our active healthy lifestyle and convert visitors to the Okanagan way of life
- Align destination stewardship efforts with government, industry and community organizations to support sustainable development
- Continue to build visitation to Vernon in the shoulder seasons and winter
- Improve and grow engagement across all Tourism Vernon's owned marketing channels

2023 STRATEGIES

- Develop marketing content with a focus on responsible tourism hyper targeted to the key audiences to increase length of stay and visitor yield with a focus on shoulder and off-season
- Invest in brand storytelling to show the sense of place in the community of vibrant locals eager to share their laid-back lifestyle and lived experiences with visitors
- Enhance audience engagement with Tourism Vernon's channels by promoting content, events and attractions that appeal specifically to target markets
- Enhance mobile and digital visitor services program: assisting potential visitors and existing visitors that we may not have reached otherwise and providing them with timely, helpful information in new, innovative ways



- Embed sustainability in the core of all marketing initiatives, itinerary content and digital assets
- Continue to build our owned video and photo asset library to focus on identified target audiences that can be used as multi-purpose promotional tools, allowing staff to easily and quickly create or adjust content for marketing campaigns, and repurpose existing assets for new campaigns
- Incubate products and experiences to encourage repeat visitors through sport tourism, festivals and events and making memories
- Continue to leverage strategic partnerships with local, regional and provincial partners to pool marketing funds and extend the reach of promotional efforts
- Focus on strengths of what makes Vernon distinct in marketing and key messaging
- Continue to focus on gathering Vernon-specific data to better understand micro and macro tourism trends specific to our community



TACTICS

Measurable promotional initiatives that increase awareness of responsible travel, length of stay, visitor yield and return visitation, with a focus on shoulder and off-season tourism.

DIGITAL MARKETING

New Website Development

- Mobile focused design compatibility for enhanced on-the-go user experience
- Better user experience with rich imagery and video content along with easy to navigate menus with shortest number of clicks to reach the information visitors need
- Better mapping functionality for visitors to navigate their way around roads and trails
- Easy to navigate CMS for staff to regularly update content and imagery to keep it fresh and relevant and add to the events calendar on a daily basis
- Transfer top performing positions for keywords and SEO from previous site to new site while consolidating page count
- Continue to update and consolidate current content as transferred to the new site
- Integrated business directory to allow for streamlined conversions to stakeholder and accommodation providers' websites and booking platforms

Brand Assessment

As identified in the 2023-27 Strategic Plan, Tourism Vernon will work with a third-party agency to conduct a branding and visual identity assessment. This will help shape the voice, tone and messaging for the new website, marketing campaigns and content development.

Social Media: Paid and Organic

Facebook, Instagram and YouTube have proven to be adaptable and versatile platforms for marketing to target audiences. Content will continue to be tailored to resonate with the primary and secondary target markets.

Digital Advertising and Sponsored Content

Digital advertising offers reliable metrics and reporting which gives Tourism Vernon the ability to narrow target markets. Continue to emphasize digital ads and sponsored content on local/regional platforms such as Castanet, Vancouver is Awesome and national platforms such as Global News, NHL.com and Narcity. Sponsored content will continue to highlight key stakeholders and sectors of focus.

E-newsletters

Tourism Vernon will continue to produce e-newsletters for consumer, golf and local industry, and travel media. With an increase in subscribers throughout 2022, staff will work on increasing click-through-rates to Tourism Vernon and stakeholders' websites.

Content Development: photo, video and copywriting

Video and photo asset libraries will be diversified to effectively reflect and capture each target audience with a specific focus on increasing content for retirees and their interests. With the new website planned for 2023 updating the photo, video and copywriting will be an important focus. Staff will continue to work with contractors and in-house to utilize existing content while adding new experiences to the mix.

Asset Management & User Generated Content Software

CrowdRiff is a digital platform that pulls user generated photos from multiple social media channels and collects them all in one easy-to-access hub for DMOs to use in countless ways. Introduced by Destination BC, CrowdRiff allows DMOs to search photo and video content by location, hashtag and activity and gain rights to use in our own marketing campaigns.

TRADITIONAL MARKETING

Television and Radio Campaigns

Traditional media is effective for advertising to particular market segments. Staff will continue to work with organizations like Rogers Media, Corus Entertainment, Bell Media, NG Media and others to promote Vernon. Many companies also offer digital video and out-of-home packages for a healthy mix of traditional and new media advertising options.

Print Advertising

Tourism Vernon will continue to choose strategic placements in high quality print publications to match our target audiences' interests. Some examples are advertising in Kootenay Mountain Culture, WestJet Magazine and Avenue Calgary.

Visitor Guide

With the Visitor Centre closed permanently, the official Visitor Guide is a vital piece of the visitor experience. The Visitor Guide provides valuable visuals and details regarding Vernon's tourism and stakeholder offerings. In 2023 the Visitor Guide will see a refresh highlighting some key pillars from the new strategic plan.



Market Research

Tourism Vernon will continue to invest in Telus Insights Data to provide information on the demographics of visitors to Vernon. The Telus data helps staff to make strategic marketing decisions to create successful campaigns. The Tourism Sentiment Index is used to measure visitor satisfaction by analyzing online conversations about our destination. Staff will utilize this software to further understand topics driving positive and negative conversations and to help adjust content and marketing campaigns as necessary.

MEDIA DEVELOPMENT



Writers, Bloggers & Influencers

Working closely with Destination Canada, Destination BC, Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association and existing media contacts, Tourism Vernon will arrange hosted media and influencer visits. Traditional travel media writers and influencer/bloggers can be a significant influence over where people choose to vacation. A focus in 2023 will be aligning the audiences of the travel media with the target audiences and specific sports groups to reach those segments with highly engaging content.

Influencer Event/Familiarization Tours

Create an iconic weekend getaway in Vernon, inviting and hosting multiple regionally based influencers to showcase what Vernon has to offer. After a couple year hiatus, staff will bring back familiarization tours for industry stakeholders and frontline staff to educate and activate local pride.

Activate Local Pride

Continue to work with local experts from various sectors like biking, culinary and indigenous culture to create written, video and photo content for Tourism Vernon's website and social channels. Locals are an important ambassador for visitors with the ability to share their inside knowledge for an authentic visitor experience.

INDUSTRY & PARTNER ENGAGEMENT

Vernon's Tourism Industry Conference

After a successful in-person conference in 2022, Tourism Vernon will host the annual event in spring of 2023. The goal is to bring industry leaders together to network, establish strong partnerships and grow relationships while educating stakeholders about industry trends, and the strategic direction of Tourism Vernon.

Indigenous Tourism

Indigenous Tourism is a key cultural pillar for attracting visitors to Canada and BC. The City of Vernon has monthly meetings with Okanagan Indian Band where joint economic development and tourism initiatives are discussed. Tourism Vernon will continue building relationships with OKIB and staff are here to support their tourism journey and promote product development opportunities. In addition, we look forward to having an OKIB representative at the Tourism Commission to build on this priority sector and relationship.



Travel Trade

Work with key accommodation providers and resorts to identify how Tourism Vernon can support their travel trade marketing and sales efforts. Develop campaigns to support corporate groups, meetings and business travel as that industry fully recovers.

Strategic Partnerships

Strategic marketing partnerships entail leveraging tourism partners to extend marketing reach and effectiveness. Priority will be given to projects aligned with Tourism Vernon's new strategic direction, target audiences and projects with the most reach per dollars contributed. BC's tourism industry functions best through collaboration and partnering, so continuing to partner with leading organizations and key stakeholders will remain a priority along Tourism Vernon's path to success. Examples of strategic partnership opportunities arise with:

- Resorts (Predator Ridge Resort, Sparkling Hill Resort, SilverStar Mountain Resort)
- Local businesses or organizations seeking to feature Vernon in their marketing efforts
- Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association (TOTA)
- Destination BC partner programs
- Destination Silver Star
- Nearby communities for Okanagan-wide campaigns



Sponsorships

With the return of events in 2022, Tourism Vernon will continue to support events that promote overnight stays and bring more visitors to the area. Some examples include Vernon Winter Carnival, Sovereign2SilverStar, Crankworx and Kalamalka Classic. Sponsorship opportunities within the sectors of focus continue to be a priority for 2023. Examples include sponsorships for the North Okanagan Cycling Society (NOCS) to promote sustainable trail use in the mountain biking sector and supporting the Arts Council of the North Okanagan (ACNO) to bring events like BC Culture Days to the community to grow the arts and culture sector.

Hotelier Engagement Program

Tourism Vernon staff plan to host a networking event for local hoteliers to provide an opportunity to engage and build relationships and partnerships.

Small Accommodators Fund

Staff will formalize the application and details and promote the program in 2023. Small accommodation businesses will need to be educated on the program to better utilize the funds.



Cooperative Partnerships

Destination BC's (DBC) Cooperative Marketing Partnerships Program is an application-based program that provides funding to Regional Destination Marketing Organizations, community consortiums, sector organizations or approved community partnerships in British Columbia. Tourism Vernon plans to participate in the following cooperative projects:

- Mountain Biking BC (influencer visits, partnerships with nearby biking communities)
- Golf Sector with BC's Golf Alliance Partners
- Okanagan Rail Trail with Tourism Kelowna and the District of Lake Country
- BC Interior Ale Trail with Tourism Kamloops and Shuswap Tourism



Tourism Vernon's Co-Op Marketing Program

In 2022 staff received the most applications for this program and will continue to support tourism stakeholders in their marketing initiatives. Businesses and organizations can apply for up to \$10,000 in this 50/50 marketing program. Tourism Vernon will set aside up to \$100,000 split over two intake periods to distribute the funds for marketing campaigns that align with the five-year strategic plan.

Support Local Campaign

In partnership with local organizations like the Greater Vernon Chamber of Commerce and the Downtown Vernon Association, Tourism Vernon will continue to encourage locals and visitors to shop local which plays a key role in supporting tourism businesses and the local economy.



Stakeholder Survey

A requirement as a 3% MRDT collector, this annual survey provides Tourism Vernon stakeholders an opportunity to relay valuable feedback to Tourism Vernon in a documented way. Survey questions are approved ahead of time by DBC and, once the survey is complete, results are also sent along for DBC's review.



VISITOR SERVICES

2022 saw an increase in visitor engagement as the industry continued to make a full recovery. A new staff member dedicated to visitor services has increased capacity to build out a better, year-round mobile and digital visitor services program.

A new website, a QR code program, increased presence on digital chats, and revisiting the content within our Visitor Guide will assist in diversifying Tourism Vernon's ability to meet visitors exactly where they are with exactly the information they need. Summer students will be hired once again for the summer months to help with the high volume of visitor inquiries and on-location mobile visitor services program.



COLLABORATION & ALIGNMENT

Local

Tourism Vernon works locally with the Regional District of North Okanagan, Downtown Vernon Association, the Greater Vernon Chamber of Commerce, Destination Silver Star and the Okanagan Indian Band as key partners for common goals and positive community profile and event support. Regular consultation with these (and other) local agencies allows for proactive planning and promotion of new attractions, events and tourism products.

Regional

Tourism Vernon works with the Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association on media hosting and marketing projects multiple times each year. Staff also partner with tourism destination marketing agencies (DMOs) throughout the Okanagan and the interior. Tourism Vernon participates in a number of regional sector projects with organizations like Tourism Kamloops, Visit Penticton and Tourism Kelowna to promote regional attractions like the Okanagan Rail Trail, BC Ale Trail and the Okanagan Singletrack with Mountain Biking BC.

Provincial & National

Tourism Vernon belongs to and engages with a number of provincial and national tourism organizations like the Tourism Industry Association of BC, BC Hotel Association, Canada Sport Tourism Alliance and the BC DMO Association.

Tourism Vernon also works with Destination BC to ensure alignment with their programs, brand and opportunities including media familiarization tours, co-op marketing programs and BC's visitor services network.

