



EAST HANTS TOURISM STRATEGY NOVEMBER 2019



EAST HANTS
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 Executive Summary

2 Background

4 Advancing Tourism Growth

8 Key Strategy 1 - Product & Experience Development

10 Key Strategy 2 - Marketing & Promotion

12 Key Strategy 3 - Attracting Investment

14 Key Strategy 4 - Supporting Industry

16 Key Strategy 5 - Developing Facilities & Infrastructure

18 Summary

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The tourism sector is an important economic driver providing visitors and residents with products and experiences that enrich their quality of life. Through strategic product and experience development, targeted marketing efforts, infrastructure investment, supporting our industry members and attracting investment, East Hants will work to encourage growth of the tourism industry. Partnerships with neighbouring municipalities as well as provincial and federal partners will enable a regional approach to tourism planning, development, and marketing that resonates with our visitors.

In 2009, the Municipality of East Hants released a Tourism Strategy which included a vision and mission. While much has been accomplished since 2009, much has changed within the tourism industry and the communities within East Hants.

THE MISSION

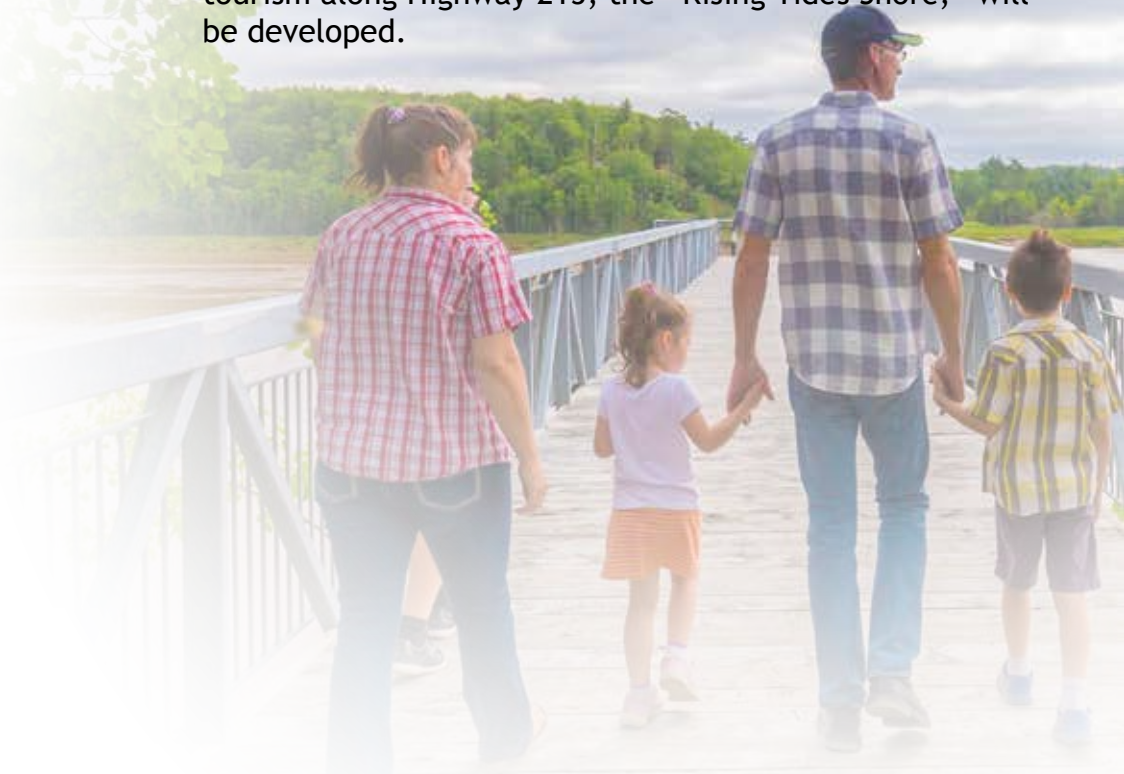
To advance the growth of the tourism industry by creating and sustaining an environment which provides a rewarding experience for visitors and citizens of East Hants and celebrates our natural and built attractions and assets.

THE VISION

East Hants is a world-class destination that creates a rewarding experience through its natural beauty, culture and heritage by blending its past, present and future in a growing sustainable environment.

BACKGROUND

The Municipality of East Hants has become an operator of tourism assets, has developed a Master Plan for the Development and Upgrading of Burntcoat Head Park and undertaken major infrastructure projects. The Municipality has also begun to partner with neighbouring municipalities on tourism development and promotion. As part of this inter-municipal partnership, a strategy for tourism along Highway 215, the “Rising Tides Shore,” will be developed.



In July 2018, East Hants Council accepted the Tourism Industry Review & Background Report - East Hants, West Hants, and the Town of Windsor. This project, undertaken with the support of the three municipal partners and the Community Business Development Corporation (CBDC), resulted in a more concise understanding of the current state of the tourism industry in our region and included an asset inventory for all three municipalities. The analysis within the background report identifies several opportunities for growth, including listing the accommodations sector as an area where improvements can be made.

BACKGROUND

Research into the motivations for visitor travel has changed the way industry develops products and experiences and has greatly changed how destinations are marketed. Destination Canada and Tourism Nova Scotia have shifted focus away from demographic-based target marketing and now use the Explorer Quotient which looks at travel motivation and helps industry develop products that suit the needs of visitors. Provincial tourism marketing efforts now focus solely on icons like the Bay of Fundy which means marketing of local assets is accomplished at a local level.

In their Driving Export Revenue 2018-2023 Strategic Plan, Tourism Nova Scotia (TNS) identifies various stakeholder groups with roles to play in growing the tourism sector. Tourism Nova Scotia has a role in research, marketing, sector development initiatives, partnership programs, and visitor information through novascotia.com to encourage first-time visitors from high-value markets.

East Hants has a role to play in each of the provincial stakeholder categories through our role as an operator of tourism attractions, a community providing visitor servicing and destination marketing, and as municipal government. This strategy further describes the role of the Municipality of East Hants in tourism development:

- Industry (tourism operators and businesses) - Using Tourism Nova Scotia research and insight, develop and offer vibrant experiences and products that visitors want and which create an emotional connection that encourages visitors to come back again and again thus driving revenues.
- Community (including municipalities, destination marketing organizations, regional tourism industry associations) - plan, innovate, and collaborate with local tourism operators to welcome tourism in their areas, and to provide visitor services such as information, rest areas, and appropriate amenities.
- Government (all levels) - enable tourism growth through policy, and investments in programs and infrastructure that will improve the operating environment for tourism businesses.

ADVANCING TOURISM GROWTH

As East Hants and its partners move forward with tourism planning and development, there will be ongoing reviews of market trends, private product development, infrastructure development opportunities, and regional changes to ensure that actions align with the needs of both residents and visitors.

Continuing to build opportunities for visitor experience development which draw visitors to all areas of East Hants and its partner municipalities will benefit local industry members and residents.



ADVANCING TOURISM GROWTH

Visitors having positive memorable experiences at attractions and businesses is critical to tourism growth. The creative expertise and entrepreneurial drive of the private sector leads to memorable experiences encouraging repeat visitation and increased word-of-mouth advertising. Providing these types of experiences requires appropriate infrastructure, quality product, partnerships, and strategic investment. Promoting the vast array of attractions and experiences in the region to our target markets will ensure that the hard work of operators to provide quality products and services delivers return on investment.

Council will, as part of its policy development and annual budgeting, continually work to enhance the overall environment for the tourism industry and work to attract visitors to this region of Nova Scotia.



ADVANCING TOURISM GROWTH

Current Tourism Marketing Tactics

Tourism Nova Scotia's (TNS) marketing efforts reach millions of people annually through their website, social media, and traditional advertising campaigns. TNS is highly selective and only promotes what it considers to be Demand Generators in its paid media and social media campaigns.

There are several **Demand Generators** in our region that are part of TNS campaigns including the Bay of Fundy, Burntcoat Head Park, Dinner on the Ocean Floor, Fundy Tides & Fireside Adventure, and tidal bore rafting.

Demand Generators - experiences and attractions that TNS feels will motivate visitors in specific geographic regions outside the Atlantic Provinces to make their first trip to Nova Scotia.

Demand Supporters - other experiences and things to do which may not be the main motivator for visiting but contribute to the overall appeal of the destination.

ADVANCING TOURISM GROWTH

People draw on a vast amount of information while they research, plan and eventually book elements of a trip or vacation. A potential visitor could be planning their trip for weeks, months or even years prior to booking. Creating awareness of East Hants and its assets in the planning stages requires thoughtful marketing.

TNS targets their marketing differently than traditional, demographic-based segmentation and has licenced Destination Canada's **Explorer Quotient Program** to determine to whom and how they market.

Marketing efforts stemming from the East Hants Tourism Strategy, and our partnership with West Hants and Windsor, will build upon the TNS marketing efforts by featuring both Demand Generators and Demand Supporters and will target appropriate Explorer Quotient segments.

Destination Canada's Explorer Quotient Program which segments potential visitors based on an understanding of why and how people travel as opposed to age and geography based segmentation. Research conducted by TNS shows that Nova Scotia's assets align with several segments with the Explorer Quotient program and they have selected three to target in their marketing efforts (Authentic Experiencers, Cultural Explorer and Free Sprints).

KEY STRATEGY 1

DEVELOPING PRODUCTS & EXPERIENCES

In the tourism industry the term “product” can refer to a physical product such as an item for sale in a gift shop, a hotel room, a well-kept area for viewing natural attractions, or it could refer to an intangible product such as a guided tour or experience. Products and experiences are often interdependent. Visitors expect all products and experiences to be of good quality and to provide value for their money.

Creating programs and events which are suitable for the products in the area and which appeal to visitors will increase visitation to this region and generate opportunities for visitors to stay longer and spend more money in this region. Burntcoat Head Park and Fundy Tidal Interpretive Centre have robust programming and well-known experiences. Opportunities exist to support industry and non-profits to further develop experiences in other communities in the municipality as well as for offering direct programming at other municipal sites.

Major multi-day events that attract visitors from a wide geographic area can have a large impact on tourism revenues. Development of major events hosted by the municipality would require additional resources. Community groups or businesses interested in developing major multi-day events that are designed to attract visitors can be supported through existing resources such as municipal grant programs or other services.

KEY STRATEGY 1

DEVELOPING PRODUCTS & EXPERIENCES

Goal: Develop products and experiences which meet the needs of visitors and increase visitation and revenues.

Objectives:

- Offering programs at non-traditional tourism sites (e.g.: river parks).
- Working with partners to increase travel trade participation (e.g.: land-based group tours, cruise excursions).
- Supporting development of major community events which complement the tourism sector.



KEY STRATEGY 2

MARKETING & PROMOTION

Marketing to the Atlantic Provinces

Marketing to international markets is important, however it is also important to ensure that potential visitors from within the Atlantic Provinces are aware of the wonderful opportunities in this area. In 2018, 48% of visitors to Nova Scotia were from within the Atlantic Provinces.

While there are several attractions in East Hants which benefit from provincial international marketing efforts, it is also important to ensure that potential visitors are aware of all the other assets and attractions that might influence their decision to travel to the area. There are attractions located in all areas of the municipality which appeal to visitors. Creating promotional messages which represent all East Hants assets while keeping visitors travel patterns in mind will be key to ensuring our messaging is relevant to visitors.

Goal: Promote all East Hants tourism assets.

Objectives:

- Targeting Explorer Quotient segments which align with East Hants' assets.
- Enhancing industry's knowledge of East Hants' and Rising Tides Shore assets. (e.g.: familiarization tours or other programs encouraging first hand word of mouth advertising).
- Engaging directly with visitors via social media marketing.

Goal: Market the Rising Tides Shore in partnership with West Hants and Windsor.

Objectives:

- Developing a marketing/branding plan for the Rising Tides Shore.
- Determining feasibility of a tourism wayfinding signage program.

KEY STRATEGY 2

MARKETING & PROMOTION

Marketing to the Rest of the World

As part of its strategic plan, Tourism Nova Scotia markets Demand Generators like the Bay of Fundy in key national and international markets. Their focus is on targeting the countries/provinces which their research shows will most likely result in first time visitors to Nova Scotia. Visitor statistics at Burntcoat Head Park show a strong proportion of visitors from these targeted provinces and countries indicating that the provincial marketing effort is working for Burntcoat. Aligning municipal activities and planning with the Tourism Nova Scotia strategic plan will position East Hants and its partners to best take advantage of the significant marketing reach, budget, and other resources provided through TNS.

Goal: Capitalize on Tourism Nova Scotia's significant marketing efforts to maximize reach while minimizing cost and resources required.

Objectives:

- Providing digital content to TNS that is market-ready.
- Leveraging tourism marketing funds by participating in TNS programs (e.g.: Digital Content Marketing Program).
- Hosting TNS travel trade and media familiarization (FAM) tours.

KEY STRATEGY 3

ATTRACTING INVESTMENT

Areas which include accommodations, services, and attractions (known as tourism clusters) are well positioned to attract and retain overnight visitors. In Maitland, for example, the rich shipbuilding history provides an opportunity for private development of a shipbuilding experience tying accommodations, food services, and local museums together while also positively impacting other local businesses.

In the corridor, the availability of services, proximity to major highways and placement of the East Hants Sportsplex and other facilities, positions the area well to attract sports tourism, however lack of large scale accommodations would mean that those expenditures would take place outside of East Hants.

Mount Uniacke's abundant natural beauty and proximity to Highway 101, along with the existing attractions in the area, provide an opportunity for investment in small fixed-roof accommodations.

Strategic private investment in developing new tourism products and experiences would have lasting impacts. Ensuring that potential investors (local or out-of-province) have the data they need to make informed decisions is vital to attracting investment. Anecdotal evidence indicates that occupancy rates in East Hants are strong and that there could be room for investment in fixed-roof accommodations.

Currently there is a gap in the availability of comprehensive data specific to East Hants's tourism industry. Improvements in collecting, analyzing and packaging data will enable staff to better inform and attract potential investors.

KEY STRATEGY 3

ATTRACTING INVESTMENT

Goal: Increase private investment in the tourism industry to enhance the tourism sector and create opportunities for residents and visitors.

Objectives:

- Developing a Business Attraction action plan that encourages tourism private sector investment.
- Creating data-gathering processes to inform investment attraction activities (e.g.: Visitor Exit Survey, increase Business Retention and Expansion meetings).
- Developing collateral materials and an investment portfolio.
- Partnering with business development agencies to ensure awareness of East Hants opportunities.
- Supporting placemaking and investment attraction efforts.

KEY STRATEGY 4

SUPPORTING INDUSTRY

The expertise and creative drive of the private sector in providing quality products and services to visitors is vital to the continued successes and growth of the industry. Development of new and enhanced visitor experiences leads to increased visitation and revenues not only for the business hosting the experience, but for all of the businesses that visitors make use of in the area. Supporting industry and non-profit groups throughout the municipality to develop robust programming and experiences for visitors will serve to increase revenues and visitation.

Visitors expect quality and value from a destination. Tourism Nova Scotia views industry's role as including investment in facility and product development to offer more world-class experiences and deliver on visitor expectations. Providing opportunities for industry to get together both formally and informally can spark ideas which could lead to the next big thing in experience development.

KEY STRATEGY 4

SUPPORTING INDUSTRY

Goal: Support operators in product development, experience development and quality enhancement.

Objectives:

- Connecting operators with partners to develop experiences (e.g.: TNS's World Class EXCELLerator Program).
- Facilitating product enhancement efforts by connecting operators to programs and services. (e.g.: technology development, streetscapes programs).
- Supporting development of niche tourism experiences which align with East Hants assets and target EQ segments (e.g.: agri-tourism, fishing/naturalists, artisans).
- Promoting professional development (e.g.: training and education opportunities for operators and front line staff).

KEY STRATEGY 5

INVESTING IN FACILITIES & INFRASTRUCTURE

Natural Attraction Development

The East Hants Parks, Open Space, and Active Transportation Plan identifies several potential natural attractions that can be developed, and suggests that development along primary routes provides the best opportunity for visitors. Development of natural attractions as destinations such as waterfalls, hiking areas, and multi-use trails should be done in a way which reflects the attraction itself and does not over-develop.

Goal: Establish and enhance natural attractions to support visitation.

Objectives:

- Reviewing the concept plans for Dawson Dowell Park (e.g.: public washrooms, RV supports).
- Evaluating natural attraction development opportunities. (e.g.: waterfalls, OHV trails, multi-use trails).
- Securing additional water access points along rivers and lakes.

KEY STRATEGY 5

INVESTING IN FACILITIES & INFRASTRUCTURE

Infrastructure Development

Visitors expect appropriate infrastructure at their destinations. Careful planning and strategic infrastructure investments can have meaningful impacts on tourism growth. Infrastructure such as water/sewer, high speed internet, and roads, are all of importance to businesses and visitors. Depending on the type of attraction or facility appropriate infrastructure may include washrooms, interpretive facilities, trails, parking, signage, or other types of infrastructure.

Development and implementation of the 2014 Burntcoat Head Park Master Plan for Upgrading and Enhancement in conjunction with provincial marketing efforts, experience development, and extended season length, has resulted in increased visitation and revenues. Continued support from Tourism Nova Scotia's marketing efforts along with our own marketing and programming is designed to increase visitation.

Goal: Ensure appropriate infrastructure and facilities are in place at municipally-owned tourism assets to meet the needs of visitors.

Objectives:

- Continuing to work with other levels of government to advocate for overall infrastructure improvements in our region. (e.g.: water / sewer, sidewalks, high speed internet or other related infrastructure).
- Evaluating the opportunities identified in the updates to the Burntcoat Head Park Master Plan, once finalized and accepted.
- Evaluating Fundy Tidal Interpretive Centre's long-term sustainability, including infrastructure assessments.

SUMMARY

Tourism industry growth can be achieved through investment attraction efforts, industry support, product & experience development, strategic marketing and partnerships, and infrastructure planning. Over the next five years the key strategies in the East Hants Tourism Strategy will inform Staff activities and workplans in various departments. These activities will be brought to Council through the annual budgeting and business planning process.