

Tourism Industry Engagement Report

Business Success Program
Economic & Business Development
December 6, 2021



EAST HANTS
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Introduction

East Hants' tourism sector is a vital contributor to East Hants' economy, and local tourism operators are essential to the fabric of our business community. The Tourism Industry has been identified as one of East Hants focus growth industries and represents opportunities for new businesses to locate to our area.

Through the Business Success program, East Hants Economic and Business Development (EBD) engaged with seven local tourism operators, all located within the Fundy Shore and Central Region, to learn more about their experiences. This engagement allowed East Hants EBD to better understand the tourism operators' needs, desires for the future, issues being faced, and opportunities that can be worked towards as we aim to collectively grow East Hants' tourism sector.

The tourism industry is an area of focus for economic recovery following the COVID-19 lockdowns and public health restrictions.

COVID-19 Impact on Tourism

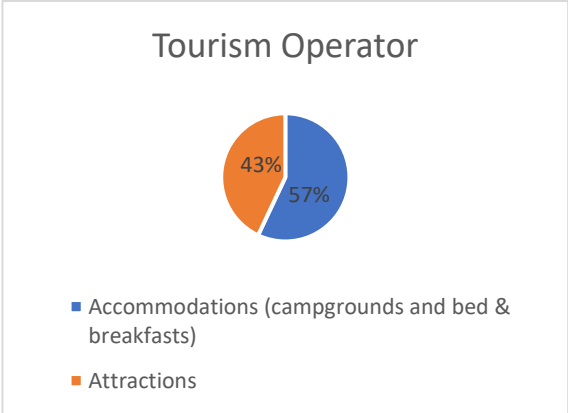
The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted businesses across all sectors since its emergence in 2020. However, as travel grinded to a complete halt, the tourism sector has been one of the most severely impacted and is just beginning to show signs of recovery. Despite border restrictions loosening and travel recommencing, visitor stats have not returned to pre-COVID levels. Given the impacts of COVID-19 on the sector, East Hants EBD recognized this was an important time to connect with tourism stakeholders to get a pulse on the issues and supports needed for COVID-19 recovery.

The key issue identified by the tourism operators was that they weren't having travellers. The majority of the tourism operators identified that their customer base is comprised primarily of international travellers during a typical season (pre-COVID). International travellers plan their vacations further in advance, therefore leaving tourism operators with additional concerns over how long it will take their industry to recover. There were additional concerns that the international market for tourists will be dependent on how airlines resume flights and recover from the pandemic.

Tourism operators also expressed disappointment with the lack of grants and other COVID-19 relief programs for the tourism industry and issues they had with eligibility. With the unpredictability of the COVID-19 pandemic, as restrictions continuously changed to adapt to the current situation, tourism operators expressed difficulties they faced with planning ahead for their business.

Analysis

The tourism operators that participated consisted of attractions (43%) and accommodation providers (57%) and were all located within the Fundy Shore and Central Region.



Current Market

- Majority of businesses said their pre-COVID market was primarily international travelers, with over 90% of their customers from the United States and Western Europe - specifically Austria, Germany, Belgium and Switzerland.
- Bed and breakfasts accommodations stated that the majority of their customers were couples.

Operations

- Businesses indicated that their operating seasons ran from spring until the fall.
 - Most commonly from April/May until October/November.
- Tourism operators cited that weather was the primary consideration for not extending their season.
 - Operators noted that majority of international travel ends around Thanksgiving which is why they close for the season around that time.
 - While operators were interested in finding new opportunities, most were not looking to extend their season.

Strengths

- Businesses listed the centrality and beauty of the Fundy Shore and Central Region as positives about the community and doing business in the area.
 - These factors were also mentioned as attractions for their customers (the tides being another attraction factor).
- Positive feedback was shared regarding the Municipality taking ownership of Burntcoat Head Park and the Fundy Tidal Interpretive Centre.
 - It was said that this has helped improve the area and local industry.
- Businesses expressed pleasure with improvements to local roads in recent years.

Challenges and Opportunities

- Businesses identified issues they have with telecommunications, including costs of installing telephone or internet lines.
- There were concerns with appearances of buildings and properties in Maitland.
- There is an interest in exploring or accessing solar power and green energy programs for their business.
- All of the businesses indicated that attracting investment into the region needs to be a focus to grow the industry. Particularly food and beverage services and vehicle service stations.
- Businesses expressed desire and interest in new opportunities, including networking and/or partnership opportunities.

Despite the slowdown in tourism activity due to the COVID-19 pandemic, new residents moving to the area have also reached out to EBD for information and support with starting new tourism businesses in the Fundy Shore and Central Region. While COVID-19 has had a devastating impact on tourism businesses, the commitment from East Hants' existing operators to continue their operations and seek out new opportunities, along with the interest from new entrepreneurs highlights that tourism remains an important and growing sector for East Hants.

Actions

As part of the Business Success Program, Economic and Business Development has initiated a number of immediate actions to support the business that participated based on their specific needs. This has included:

- Navigation of municipal services, support programs, and resources.
- Referrals were made to Futurworx (hiring support and information on wage subsidies/grants; conversations have started with some businesses regarding applying for Canada Student Summer jobs in the future), CBDC (business planning and financing), Tourism Nova Scotia, and the Essential Business Skills Programs.
- Provided information on COVID-19 related programs, as well as other programs to support the tourism industry, including the Federal government's Tourism Relief Fund, and Tourism Nova Scotia's new programs - Lights, Camera, Action and the Digital Assistance Program.
- Connected businesses to Energy Efficiency Nova Scotia programs, and the Nova Scotia Department of Environment and Climate Change consultation on Sustainable Development Goals Act and new Climate Plan for Clean Growth.
- Connections to land expansion opportunities for a local business.

Next Steps

A key takeaway from the Business Success Program included the business's willingness to seek new opportunities and collaborate with others. Businesses indicated an interest in creating new experiences, packages, networking opportunities, and programs.

Economic and Business Development is currently working with Tourism Nova Scotia on developing supports for local tourism operators based on these interests, and is exploring ways to market opportunities for new investment in the region on-line.

Collaboration, creativity and cooperation will be important to enhance East Hants' offerings and to attract new businesses to the region, which leads to the goal of increased visitation, as East Hants focuses on recovery from COVID-19 and growing our tourism sector.