




**GRANDE
PRAIRIE**
REGIONAL
TOURISM ASSOCIATION

UNTAPPED, UNFILTERED, UNFORGETTABLE

GRANDE PRAIRIE REGIONAL TOURISM ASSOCIATION

DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY





The Grande Prairie Regional Tourism Association respectfully acknowledges that the Grande Prairie Tourism Region is located within Treaty 6 and Treaty 8 and the traditional territories of the Sturgeon Lake First Nation No. 154, Alexander First Nation No. 134A, Alexis Whitecourt First Nation No. 232, Alexis Nakota Sioux First Nation No. 133, Wabamun First Nation No. 133A, Paul First Nation, Horse Lake First Nation, Sucker Creek First Nation, the Kapawe'no First Nation, the Aseniwuche Winewak Nation, the Mountain Métis and the Métis Local 1990 – Grande Prairie and Region.

Photo: GPRTA | Cover: Travel Alberta

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AWN	Aseniwuche Winewak Nation
DMO	Destination Management Organization
CATSA	Canadian Air Transport Security Authority
CMTA	Canadian Motorcycle Tourism Association
EQ	Explorer Quotient
GOA	Government of Alberta
GPRTA	Grande Prairie Regional Tourism Association
GPTR	Grande Prairie Tourism Region
ITA	Indigenous Tourism Alberta
MDP	Municipal Development Plan
NRTAC	Northern Rockies Tourism Advisory Committee
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats Analysis
TDM	Tourism Development Manager (Travel Alberta Regional Representative)
TDZ	Tourism Development Zone
TIAA	Tourism Industry Association of Alberta
WAADT	Weighted Annual Average Daily Traffic

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1 GRANDE PRAIRIE REGIONAL TOURISM ASSOCIATION

1.1 WHO WE ARE

We are an ambassador for the Grande Prairie Region and are the visible voice for the industry. Grande Prairie Regional Tourism Association (GPRTA) is a non-profit destination management and marketing organization funded by partnership fees, memberships, marketing programs and fundraising initiatives.

GPRTA is dedicated to increasing local business revenue by promoting the Grande Prairie area through every possible marketing avenue and is continually seeking new opportunities to showcase the region.

We are a tourism destination management organization (DMO) working in conjunction with Travel Alberta as a Tourism Destination Region (TDR) helping promote tourism by negotiating and investing in marketing programs and partnership proposals.

1.2 OUR VISION

Grande Prairie Regional Tourism Association captures the pride and passion of our people, our natural settings, our diverse history, and our innovative industry, to lead our members and region in offering distinct experiences to travelers and residents establishing Grande Prairie & Region as a destination.

1.3 OUR MISSION

Grande Prairie Regional Tourism Association is a champion for regional tourism that will engage in marketing, advocacy and educational activities.

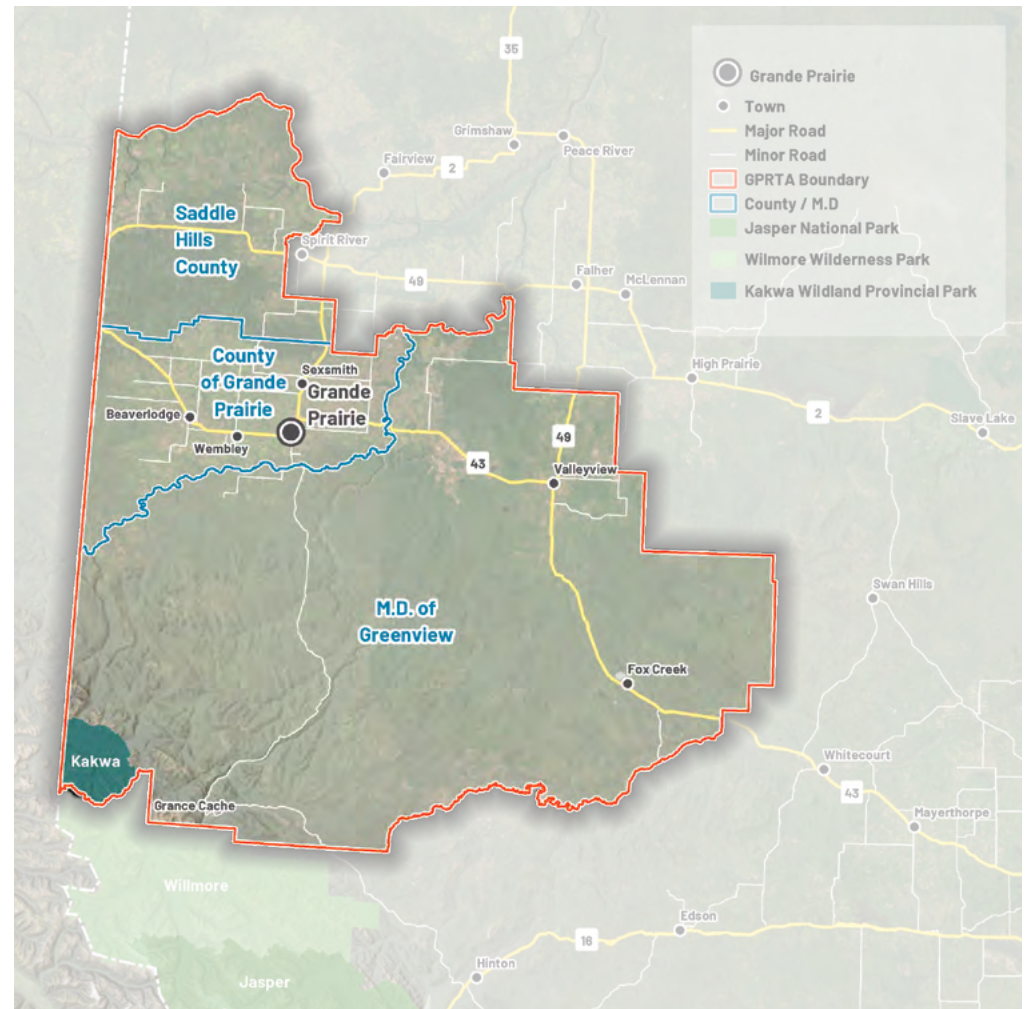


Figure 1: Grande Prairie Tourism region



2 GPRTA MESSAGE

2.1 FROM THE GPRTA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

To the many members and supporters of the GPRTA, I am extremely pleased to present the GPRTA 2023–2028 Destination Development Strategy. This document represents the efforts and contributions of over 180 key stakeholders from our region and will help to define the direction and actions for our Association for the next five years.

Tourism in both the Province of Alberta and the Grande Prairie tourism region is at an inflection point. As we move forward from the recovery phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are realizing pent up market demand for precisely the types of experiences our region and the Province have to offer. In order to benefit the most from this opportunity it will require us to work collaboratively with our members and partners, strategically enhance and grow our current inventory of experiences and promote these experiences aggressively in our most productive markets.

This opportunity has also been the catalyst for Travel Alberta to set a goal of doubling tourism revenues from \$10.1B to \$20B by 2035. In order to meet this objective, it is recognized that revenues will need to be generated from regions of the Province other than the legacy regions of Calgary, Edmonton and the Rocky Mountain National Parks. To that end, ten new Tourism Development Zones (TDZ) were identified by Travel Alberta that have the most potential for generating new tourism dollars. The Northern Rockies Region is one of these regions and its boundaries are essentially those of the GPRTA with the addition of a small area to the south and to the east. Travel Alberta has just completed the Destination Development Plan for the Northern Rockies TDZ. GPRTA hired the same consulting group completing that work to also complete this strategy simultaneously. This resulted in significant savings to GPRTA and allowed us to integrate much of the base research and engagement completed by Travel Alberta into our own strategy and most importantly ensure alignment between both organization's objectives and efforts.

This strategy takes the broader research and results of the Travel Alberta work and focuses more directly on just the GPRTA and its members, resulting in the strategic priorities, goals and action items presented at the end of the plan. The execution of these action items will provide the direction for the Association for the next five years.

This is a living document which will be reviewed annually to better reflect any significant changes to the Grande Prairie Tourism Region landscape and to monitor the progress made on the execution of these strategic priorities. That process and the execution of this strategy will require the continued support and engagement of all our members and supporters. I know we are up to the challenge, the future of tourism in the Grande Prairie Region has never looked brighter.

Ken Loudon, Executive Director,
Grande Prairie Regional Tourism Association

2.2 FROM THE GPRTA PRESIDENT

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the GPRTA, I would like to thank and congratulate our management team on the successful completion of the GPRTA Destination Development Strategy 2023-2028. This document will provide the team with a focused strategy to see the Association take the next step in its evolution while directly helping our industry and members realize the potential that is so apparent in our region. The strategy's alignment with Travel Alberta's recent Destination Development Plan for our region will help to ensure that our successful partnership with Travel Alberta continues to be strengthened and fosters additional synergies between both organizations.

The Grande Prairie tourism region is blessed with a remarkable inventory of tourism offerings that is as diverse as the geography within our region. The visitor economy is not only a major employer and economic contributor but also contributes to the enviable lifestyle we enjoy in the region. The enhancements and growth addressed in this strategy should further improve the leisure options for our residents as well as provide for additional and better tourism experiences for our guests.

Realizing all of the priorities and action items in this report will be a challenge and will require that we all work collaboratively towards those goals. I, and the Board of Directors know our team is up to the challenge and look forward to working closely with them in the pursuit of this ambitious strategy.

On behalf of the Board, thank you to all the stakeholders and members of the Association who participated in this process. Your support and input is critical to the success of the Association.



Sandi Neville, President
Grande Prairie Regional Tourism Association
General Manager, Stanford Inn and Suites, Grande Prairie

GPRTA EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

- **President** – Sandi Neville, General Manager, Stanford Inn & Suites
- **Past President** – Johnathan Clarkson, General Manager, Nitehawk Year-Round Adventure Park
- **Secretary Treasurer** – Cyndi Corbett, Councillor, Town Of Beaverlodge

GPRTA BOARD MEMBERS

- Dave Anderson, President Buckwild
- Grant Berg, Councillor, City Of Grande Prairie
- Bruce Black, Councillor, Town Of Sexsmith
- Wendy Bosch, Executive Director, Grande Prairie Downtown Association
- Paulette Butler, General Manager, Sandman Hotel
- Duane Didlow, Councillor, Ward 9, Grande Cache
- Kristeva Dowling, Co-Founder, Stolen Harvest Meadery
- Naomi Ducklow, General Manager, Best Western
- Brian Grant, CEO, Grande Prairie Airport
- Rebecca Ketchum, Councillor, Town Of Wembley
- Linden Roberts, Executive Director, Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum
- Kristen Smith, Deputy Reeve, Ward 3, Saddle Hills County
- Lee Swaile, Owner, Omg! Cupcakes
- Steve Zimmerman, Councillor, Division 4, County Of Grande Prairie



3 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This document represents the culmination of hundreds of hours of engagement with key stakeholders from the Grande Prairie Tourism Region including GPTRA members, entrepreneurs and municipal and provincial employees. This included the engagement that was conducted simultaneously as part of the Travel Alberta research for the Northern Rockies Tourism Development Zone. In addition, GPRTA-specific engagement sessions such as the January 10th all-day meeting with fifty-eight stakeholders held in Grande Prairie, as well as many more GPRTA-specific stakeholder engagement sessions. This report and its recommendations are a direct reflection of what was heard during these sessions. None of this document would be possible without the assistance of all these people and the GPRTA would like to thank everyone for their commitment and assistance.

3.1 PROJECT FACILITATION TEAM

The team that helped to facilitate these engagement sessions, provide some of the market intelligence and coordinate the writing of the plan included the GPRTA management team, Travel Alberta, the Legacy Tourism Group (project lead), and RC Strategies who specifically helped to complete the mapping, asset inventory and land constraint sections of the report. In particular, thanks go out to Christopher Smith, Travel Alberta's Destination Development Manager for the Northern Rockies region whose contributions and leadership were a key element in the entire planning process.



3.2 DISCLAIMER

While every effort has been made to ensure that the information contained in this report is accurate and obtained from reliable sources, neither the Grande Prairie Regional Tourism Association, nor the Legacy Tourism Group is responsible for any errors or admissions or for the results obtained from the use of this information. All information is provided "as is" with no guarantee of completeness, accuracy or timeliness and is without warranty of any kind either express or implied. In no event will GPRTA, the Legacy Tourism Group or their related partners, agents or employees thereof, be liable for the results of any decisions made based or reliant upon the information provide herein.

3.3 INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT

This plan identifies that one of the critical gaps in the experience inventory of the Grande Prairie Tourism Region is the limited number of Indigenous owned and operated experiences. While the experiences that currently exist are excellent, the market demand for these types of experiences far exceeds the supply.

This plan therefore references the critical need to engage Indigenous groups within the GPTR. While this engagement is being pursued by the GPRTA and some of its members, it should be noted that a separate consultation process with Indigenous communities in the region is being undertaken by Travel Alberta in collaboration with Indigenous Tourism Alberta. This consultation should also provide an opportunity for GPRTA to engage and develop a stronger relationship with each Indigenous community in the region. It is also hoped that this engagement by GPRTA will identify ways to collaborate and assist with any of the current Indigenous offerings in the region as well as determine if there is any interest in pursuing tourism initiatives by those communities who currently are not engaged in tourism. The results of this consultation process will then be integrated into the evolving Destination Development Strategy.

3.4 LIVING DOCUMENT

The past three years have made it very clear that the challenges and realities that the tourism sector faces can change dramatically over a very short period of time. The GPRTA Destination Development Strategy is therefore intended to be a living document and is expected to evolve over the next five years. Emerging markets, new sources of funding, the completion of additional engagement with Indigenous communities and an ever expanding and contracting inventory of experiences and product necessitate that at a minimum, this document and its action items should be reviewed and amended annually, as the times require.

THE CITY OF
GRANDE
prairie





4 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

4.1 WHY NOW?

As was mentioned in the message from the Executive Director, tourism in Alberta is at a major inflection point. Coming out of the recovery phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, visitors' desires to connect with nature, enjoy the outdoors and have authentic experiences in cultures other than their own have taken on greater significance than ever. These experiences are key elements to what Alberta (and the GPRTA) has to offer to the world. The reality however, is that in order to capitalize on this opportunity Alberta will need to realize revenues from destinations other than those generated in the current legacy regions of Calgary, Edmonton and the Rocky Mountain National Parks corridor. In order to grow the Alberta visitor economy in a substantive way and meet the revenue target of growing from the current \$10.1B to \$20B in revenues by 2035, other areas with the highest potential for tourism need to be identified and developed. The Tourism Development Zones (TDZ) are just that. Ten regions in the province have been identified by Travel Alberta as having tremendous growth potential for tourism and a Destination Development Plan was just recently completed for each. The Northern Rockies TDZ is one of these regions.

The timing of this strategic planning process was carefully scheduled by GPRTA management to take advantage of the TDZ planning process. The Grande Prairie Tourism Region (GPTR) that the Grande Prairie Regional Tourism Association represents, covers essentially the same geography and population centres of the Northern Rockies TDZ, less the areas immediately around Hinton and Whitecourt. This has meant that the overwhelming majority of the research and engagement for the Northern Rockies TDZ was able to be utilized in the creation of this document. This has in turn led to significant savings for GPRTA and most importantly has ensured that there is consistent alignment in terms of the findings, strategic priorities and goals between the TDZ Plan and the GPRTA Strategy. Recognizing that Travel Alberta is one of the most important partners for the GPRTA, this alignment is mission critical if many of the actions recommended in this strategy are to be realized.

The other major reason why this strategic review is taking place now is the fact that Travel Alberta, via the TDZ process, has identified the Northern Rockies/GPRTA tourism region as having tremendous potential for growth in the tourism sector. The pent up, post-pandemic, international and domestic market demand is aimed squarely at many of the types of experiences that the Grande Prairie Tourism Region either currently offers or might offer in the future. The opportunity to capitalize on this reality is why GPRTA management are investing the time and resources now to strategically map out a way forward over the next five years.

4.2 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

This report is meant to help guide the creation of compelling guest experiences and position the region for significant and sustainable growth. The critical analysis and recommendations included in this document directly represent the input from both the key stakeholders whom participated in workshop sessions and/or were interviewed as part of the engagement process.

This is a Destination Development Strategy that was created by the stakeholders with the absolute intent that to the greatest extent possible, it will be executed. This is not a study to be placed on the shelf and ignored. The recommendations and action items found in this document are meant to be pragmatic tasks that will address the SWOT analysis findings by enhancing the region's strengths, addressing its weaknesses, mitigating threats and realizing its opportunities.

Throughout the planning process the following principles provided the foundation upon which the strategy was developed:

- The area that the GPRTA represents is one of if not the most diverse regions in the province. This diversity, from its people to its geography, is one of the region's greatest strengths. It is therefore critical that this diversity not only be acknowledged but that collaboration among these diverse stakeholders also be ensured.
- Resident sentiment and support are crucial to ensuring the social license required to pursue growth in the GPTR visitor economy. In order to engender that support, any and all strategies and recommendations in this strategy need to contribute to enhancing the quality of the lives of the local residents.
- Travel Alberta's commitment to assisting the Grande Prairie Tourism Region in the realization of its tourism aspirations is recognized and greatly appreciated. While it is understood that the stakeholders of the region are key players in the execution of this plan, it is also understood that Travel Alberta's transition to a Destination Management Organization should allow for more collaboration related to product development in the region.
- The natural resources of the region are what ultimately makes it so special and worthy as an exceptional destination. It is therefore crucial that these resources not only be conserved, but that any development be regenerative, leaving the land and resources better off than prior to that development occurring. It is further recognized that wherever possible, any growth to tourism should be developed in a way that supports the region's efforts towards being a greener, sustainable economy.
- The plan must accurately represent the input from local stakeholders within the region and only recommend strategies and action items that have the support of the majority of those stakeholders and just as importantly, can realistically be implemented.

4.3 PLANNING GOALS

The overall goals for the plan are the following:

- Provide the management of the GPRTA with an actionable road map that will identify key areas for growth and product enhancement as well as a set of detailed, strategic action items for the Association to execute/coordinate to see these results realized.
- Increase the quantity and enhance the quality of the visitor experiences in the Grande Prairie Tourism Region including assisting operators in becoming more market and export ready.
- Increase tourism revenues generated within the region by increasing the yield of existing operations and identifying new markets that will attract a higher-yield visitor.
- Increase the length-of-stay for visitors in general, as well as addressing the issues of seasonality by expanding and promoting the number of non-peak season experiences.
- Increase the awareness of local residents as to the benefits of tourism to the region and their quality of life.
- Reduce the obstacles and challenges that stakeholders face in their ongoing operations as well as those related to trying to create new experiences within the region.





5 METHODOLOGY

The process followed to complete the GPRTA Destination Development Strategy was as follows:

1. Primary and secondary research and documents provided by regional and provincial organizations (Grande Prairie Regional Tourism Association, the Municipal District of Greenview, and Travel Alberta) were reviewed and summarized by project facilitation members.
2. Meetings were held with key stakeholders to ground truth the data compiled from the research review and to complete the asset inventory for the region which was then augmented by research by the project facilitation team.
3. A major SWOT analysis review was conducted as part of the initial workshop and then vetted by key stakeholders.
4. The destination analysis process was then completed based upon the SWOT findings and those results were further vetted by other key stakeholders.
5. Based on that analysis, as well as a review of the key findings of the Travel Alberta TDZ Destination Development Plan, sectors with the greatest opportunity for growth within GPRTA were identified and vetted by key stakeholders and GPRTA management.
6. Strategic priorities related to these growth sectors were then developed.
7. Lastly, specific goals and corresponding action items related to each strategic priority were then created with and vetted by key stakeholders, requiring multiple meetings and revisions to come to a final version that was reviewed by GPRTA management.

Photo: Darrel Comeau

6 ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

When identifying new, innovative tourism opportunities to develop and completing broader, destination development planning, it is critical to ensure the process is strategic and stakeholder-centric. This approach provides the foundation for the plan and results in positive attention and support from key stakeholder groups. It allows our team to develop stakeholder-supported plans that keenly reflect the priority issues that are important to the local stakeholders and operators while ensuring that resident concerns are acknowledged and included.

This project was effectively underway shortly after the LTG team started working on the Northern Rockies TDZ Destination Development Plan, allowing the team to incorporate engagement activities related to the development of the GPRTA Destination Development Strategy in all the engagement activities in the Northern Rockies project that were applicable to the Grande Prairie Tourism Region.

Specific to this project, a full-day workshop was held with 58 stakeholders on January 10, 2022 to accelerate the process of gathering key information and insights from the GPRTA membership. Virtual meetings were also held with elected representatives of 7 of the 9 member government entities.

Additional in-person and virtual engagement sessions were held with operators, local and regional government staff, and various Government of Alberta (GOA) staff (Alberta Environment and Protected Areas, Alberta Forestry, Parks and Tourism, Alberta Transportation).

This process was used to develop and confirm the description of the region, the asset inventory, the vision, SWOT analysis, gap identification, goals, action items and key performance indicators.

Forty-four separate engagement sessions (20 in-person, 24 virtual) totalling 182 participants were held between late October, 2022 and late March, 2023. Appendix I includes a detailed spreadsheet of the formal engagement activities and Appendix II includes the participants in the January 10 workshop.

Engagement totals do not include additional email and phone discussions that only included the GPRTA staff or board members, provincial Travel Alberta staff or specific follow-up discussions.



Photo: Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum

7 THE GRANDE PRAIRIE TOURISM REGION

7.1 THE GEOGRAPHIC AREA

The GPRTA encompasses one of the largest geographic areas for a Destination Management Organization in Alberta, including 1 city, 3 counties, and 5 towns as members of the organization.

7.2 GPRTA MEMBER COMMUNITIES

The GPRTA is made up of a group of community members and individual businesses from the region. The following are descriptions of each member community.



Beaverlodge

Photo: Paul Lavoie

A Place to Build Dreams

In the 2022 *Alberta Regional Dashboard*, the Town of Beaverlodge had a population estimate of 2,506. The land area is 5.38 km². (2.08 sq mi).

History

The town was named for the Beaverlodge River, which was known as Uz-i-pa ("temporary lodge") by members of the Beaver First Nation. The first European-Canadian settlers arrived in 1909.

When your community's name is Beaverlodge, it's only natural that a large Beaver sculpture greets visitors. The creature is symbolic of the attitude here and the town's motto: A Place To Build Dreams.

The popular attraction was unveiled on July 21, 2004, to commemorate Beaverlodge's 75th anniversary since incorporation. It's surrounded by interpretive signage to provide history and town information as well as background about the beaver itself. Like the namesake animal, the people here are busy throughout the year and love to welcome tourists.

Favourite summertime activities include camping at the Pioneer Campground or nearby Hommy Park, Saskatoon Island Provincial Park or Red Willow Campground, golfing, quading, hiking, and fishing. If you enjoy fast-paced action, there's North Peace Bracket Racing Association and motocross track to go dirt biking and paintballing is another great option. The community features many ball diamonds.

Winter activities are equally abundant. Spring Lake Campground is ideal for skiing and ice fishing. Skating, curling, or sledding on local trails are other popular activities. The Beaverlodge Recreation Centre will help you keep active, no matter the weather, with a gym, pool and track. There are seven modern playparks for the active family. This is also a great area for the avid hunter. Scenery

Saskatoon Mountain is a must-stop on your visit. Drive to the picnic area at the top and take in a beautiful panorama of the nearby landscape that includes mountains, foothills, forests, lakes, and cultivated lands typical of the Peace Country.

Attractions

At the Beaverlodge Cultural Centre, visitors can enjoy browsing in the art gallery, the potters and weavers' studios, and the gift shop before relaxing in the tearoom. The centre features several exhibits throughout the year. A variety of classes are also offered.

The McNaught Homestead heritage site was designated a Provincial Historical Resource on July 23, 2003. The property, located south of Beaverlodge on Secondary Highway 722, was donated by Noel McNaught to the Art Gallery of Grande Prairie.

Visitors can take in a replica of Euphemia McNaught's work in the form of a mural painted on the side of the IGA building. In the 2010/2011 school year, students from Beaverlodge High School helped refresh the mural.

For a little more education on the area, visitors are welcome at the Beaverlodge research station Monday through Friday. Researchers study soil microbiology and biodiversity, soil fertility, soil physics and management, integrating cropping systems, plant pathology, canola breeding, entomology, and forage seeds and grass production.

In the spirit of agriculture, the community also has a mid-week farmer's market. Supper is available on Tuesday evening and you can enjoy lunch on Wednesdays.

Hungry?

Sunrise Diner is a great local café with several menu options. If you have room for dessert, the cinnamon buns are a must try. Other options include The Green Pepper Café, for Chinese food, and BMI Restaurant.

Anna's Pizza, Petals on Main – a flower shop and bistro renowned for its coffee – is another popular spot.

If you just need a snack, make a stop at the Beaverlodge Butcher shop. You'll find some of the best in-house made jerky available in three flavors and there are nine flavors of pepperoni sticks.

If you're thirsty and are looking for a different taste sensation, the Broken Tine Orchard is located southwest of the community. It produces exceptional wines combining the tangy and vibrant fruit juice of the haskap berry with honey produced from the farm's very own beehives.

Other Activities

If you have more time to spend in the area, don't forget a visit to the Riverbend Golf and Country Club. The 9-hole course offers a scenic experience and great play for golfers at any level.

Since the clubhouse is a historic landmark, it's worth the visit even if you're not a player. Enjoy the history of the area and then relax in the clubhouse for a bite to eat in a great atmosphere with a view.

A must see on your visit the South Peace Centennial Museum as well. It is Alberta's largest – and only – working steam powered equipment museum. Pioneer Days and the Autumn Fall Festival are held here.

Watch for the renowned nearby Rio Grande Rodeo at the end of June.

The Beaverlodge & District Agricultural Society provides a facility for the Beaverlodge Farmer's Market, an indoor riding arena and two outdoor rings. Its arenas are used by various groups such as 4-H, Beaverlodge Roper's Club, Mountainside Horse Club and offers many hours of public riding. Arenas are also rented out for private use.

For the crafty traveler, the Around the Block quilt shop, a family owned business that turned 20 in 2020 is a popular spot for supplies, classes and sewing machines.

If you're in the Peace Region, you will surely hear the sound of the beaver tail beckoning you.



City of Grande Prairie

Photo: Room Creative

In the 2022 *Alberta Regional Dashboard*, the City of Grande Prairie had a population estimate of 67,669. The land area is 132.71 km² (51.24 sq mi). It is Canada's northernmost city and the seventh-largest city in Alberta.

There's never any shortage of things to see and do here. This community, which marked 100 years since becoming a town in 2019, offers all you could want in a community much larger than its 70,000 people – no matter the time of year.

The early settlers who gave Grande Prairie its name for its expansive landscape could only imagine the vibrant, dynamic legacy they would start.

Muskoseepi Park

A great place to begin your visit to Grande Prairie is Muskoseepi Park which runs through the heart of the city, showcasing how the community has balanced growth with preserving green space.

The park is a shining gem in the city's crown of attractions and features more than 1,100 acres of parkland with six distinct areas offering their own special opportunities. This includes nearly 30 kilometres of asphalt, gravel and wilderness trails.

Within the park is the Grande Prairie Museum which features many artifacts that showcase the history of the area. If you're visiting during the summer, you will also have the opportunity to walk through the Heritage Village and check out some of the historic local buildings.

The recently renovated Aquatera Outdoor Pool, lawn bowling, horseshoes, mini golf, a spray park and picnic area, a skateboard park, and a newly constructed playground are all part of the downtown component of the park. If you're visiting during the winter, the park features a pond that can be used for ice skating and there is plenty of space for tobogganing.

Downtown

While you are close to the downtown area, you can enjoy a walk up the streets to visit some exceptional shopping attractions. There are more than 400 shops and services in the city centre. You'll find an array of locally owned cafes, restaurants and gift shops and year-round Farmer's Market. The downtown core has recently undergone a revitalization project for an even more inviting and walkable shopping district.

Art Galleries

Downtown is also home to many art galleries. Some artwork comes from far-away places but Grande Prairie has also produced many talented artisans who craft works such as sculptures, paintings and pottery. The Art Gallery of Grande Prairie, located in the Montrose Cultural Centre along with the public library, and the nearby Centre for Creative Arts are both excellent locations to check out fabulous exhibits. If you happen to be downtown for an opening night at either of these locations, you can meet some gifted artists! If you are looking to purchase a special piece of art, private galleries such as the Grant Berg Gallery are the perfect place to visit.

Places to Eat

Grande Prairie has many franchise fast food and full service restaurants as well as a host of locally owned eateries, including several that will give your taste buds a tour of global cuisine, from Ethiopian dishes to food from the Middle East, Greece, and Asia.

You'll find many renowned chain restaurant names here including The Keg, Montana's, Mr. Mike's, Brown's Social House, the Sawmill, and Canadian Brewhouse. Pho House Vietnamese, Tito's, Hong Fah, Padrino's, Red Rock Urban Grill, Better Than Fred's, the Office Lounge, Ramona's Pizza and Family Restaurant, Jeffrey's Café Co., provide visitors with a wide range of offerings. An international food festival made its debut in June 2019 with 20 countries represented, reflective of the city's significant multicultural makeup.

Several locally owned coffee shops offer cozy atmospheres and great coffee selections, including Wapiti Bean Co., Ole Smokes, Grains, and Jeffrey's. Grande Prairie also has a growing number of award-winning breweries and distilleries that use ingredients grown in the area. These include Latitude 55 Distilling Co, Broken Oak Distilling Co, Grain Bin Brewing Company, and GP Brewing Co.

The Eastlink Centre

Our early pioneers would never have imagined a 450,000-square-foot modern health and fitness facility.

The Eastlink Centre is located on the community's southwest side. It delivers numerous aquatics options, including a 50-metre pool, water park and surfing centre. You'll also find a field house, racquetball, courts, fitness classes, drop-in yoga and an expansive gym facility staffed with personal trainers. The facility attracts large-scale swim meets and other high-calibre athletics events.

Other Activities

Bonnett's Energy Centre is Grande Prairie's premiere entertainment facility for big name concerts and Junior A hockey. Big name music acts included Loverboy, Dallas Smith and Dean Brody. Elton John, Janet Jackson, Shania Twain, the Backstreet Boys, and Rihanna have also hit the stage at Bonnett's Energy Centre. The facility has also hosted the 2004, Royal Bank Cup (Junior A hockey), the 2006 Ford World Women's Curling Championship and the 2016 Scotties Tournament of Hearts.

Are you looking for interactive group activities in Grande Prairie? Bowling and laser tag are local favourites, as are The Sand Zone and Hornbrook Hollow's Funhouse; each offering unique indoor play spaces for families of all ages. If you like to use your analytical side, pay a visit to Trapped, an interactive escape room game. Card's Board Game Café is a great place to sit and relax and try some games you may not have at home. Still have energy? Visit the Fun Park Indoor Amusement Center for some indoor trampoline fun.

Shopping Opportunities

Grande Prairie is a regional shopping centre with residents of communities from as far away as Fort St. John, B.C. and the Northwest Territories visiting to stock up. They know they'll find stores they wouldn't expect to see north of Edmonton. The Prairie Mall has more than 100 stores and the Westgate Shopping Centre on the city's west side continues to expand opportunities for shoppers.

In 2019, two major developments had ribbon cuttings. Windsor Ford opened the largest Ford Dealership in Canada here in Grande Prairie and Grande Prairie now has the largest single floor Canadian Tire store in Canada.

Events

The entertainment calendar is never slow in Grande Prairie. There are many festivals and events held throughout the year, including the Bear Creek Folk Festival held annually in Muskoseepi Park. In 2019, the event marked its fourth year with a three-day event, using four stages.

The Douglas J. Cardinal Theatre located in Northwestern Polytechnic and Grande Prairie Live Theatre regularly showcase local and touring entertainment.

The Grande Prairie Stompede, held every May at Evergreen Park, just outside of Grande Prairie attracts thousands of visitors every year from near and far for top notch rodeo action. This celebration of western heritage has something for everyone, including a midway and art show.

The Festival of Trees is the Grande Prairie Regional Hospital Foundation's largest annual fundraiser, another feature event at Evergreen Park.

If you're in Grande Prairie between mid-November and late December, the Peace Draft Horse Club will get you into the festive spirit with the Northern Spirit Light Show.

If you are wanting to maintain an active lifestyle even when you are away from home, find out what kind of races may be on. Grande Prairie has several fun runs each year including the Mega Bounce Run, the Glow run, the Zombie run, and the Run for a Wolf which supports athletic scholarships at the college.



County of Grande Prairie

Life's Good in the Middle

In the *2022 Alberta Regional Dashboard*, the County of Grande Prairie No. 1 had a population estimate of 25,928. The land area is 5,790.59 km² (2,235.76 sq mi).

The County is an all-season recreation paradise with a little bit of everything within its borders.

The County of Grande Prairie spans the Saddle Hills in the north to the Wapiti River in the south and stretches east from the Smoky River to the B.C. border. The landscape is diverse, including prairie; rivers, creeks, and small lakes; a mixed boreal forest; and the province's northernmost badlands. This contrasting landscape creates different habitats for a variety of wildlife.

The history is just as rich, with evidence of humans dating back to 9,000–10,000 B.C. when the now fertile farmland was covered by a vast glacier. For pre-human history, dinosaur fossils are being excavated from Kleskun Hill, Pipestone Creek, and the Red Willow River.

Outdoor enthusiasts have plenty of options in the County, including canoeing, jet-boating, parasailing, fishing, wildlife watching, geocaching, hiking, cycling, snowmobiling, and ATV riding. There are also farmers' markets, festivals, cultural events, golf courses, museums, rodeos, and historic sites to explore.



Fox Creek

Photo: GPRTA

In the *2022 Alberta Regional Dashboard*, the Town of Fox Creek had a population estimate of 1,735. The land area is 12.26 km² (4.73 sq mi).

Fox Creek is a vibrant community located almost exactly halfway between Edmonton and Grande Prairie on Hwy 43. The Town acts as a strong service centre for the active oil and gas industry surrounding the community and serves as an excellent location for travelers to stop, enjoy nature and stretch your legs.

Fox Creek, surrounded by beautiful forests, offers a vast variety of top notch outdoor activities. The town is well known for our quadding, hunting, fishing, ice fishing, incredibly groomed snowmobile trails and cross-country skiing. Take a trip out to one of our two lakes located just minutes from the town to enjoy a day with the family at the beach, a picnic by the water, day use camping areas that are perfect for any summer event, two very well taken care of campgrounds that offer private sites and free firewood, boat docks and the opportunity for many water sports.

Add to that, a full complement of recreation facilities; our brand new multiplex facility that boasts a swimming pool, arena, gymnasium, fitness centre, library and walking track, the scenic 9-Hole Silver Birch Gold Course with grass greens and a clubhouse that offers great food, men's and ladies' night and is host to many weekend tournaments. Tennis courts and baseball diamonds that come alive every June for our annual slo-pitch tournament and regular season minor and adult leagues. Stop in with your family to enjoy our brand new skate park, located conveniently beside the dog park, visit Marnevic Memorial Park featured as one of Canada's top 150 coolest playgrounds, for a unique construction themed experience or wander next door to our world class bike park facility. If you're wanting to enjoy the boreal forest, head out on one of our many trail systems that wind along our beautiful creeks through the forest. There is never a shortage of things to do, or places to visit to get active and get outside.



Municipal District of Greenview No. 16

Life's Great on Greenview Side of the Fence

In the *2022 Alberta Regional Dashboard*, the Municipal District of Greenview No. 16 had a population estimate of 9,439. The land area is 32,915 km². The MD of Greenview is a popular recreation destination for tourists and locals alike.

The Municipal District of Greenview is not a day trip and done kind of place, no matter what time of year you visit. Plan on staying here multiple days to see and do everything the area offers, whether you prefer indoor activities and events or exploring the great outdoors. Or maybe you like to do some of both. It's all here!

Greenview includes the key regional centres of Valleyview, Grande Cache and Fox Creek. That means visitors can enjoy urban amenities such as museums, heritage centres and golf courses or experience a wide range of adventures on land or water amid breath-taking scenery.

There are more than 2,700 kilometres of hiking trails to explore, wildlife and sight-seeing galore, and amazing fishing and hunting opportunities. You'll find 30 campgrounds, 17 day use areas and numerous provincial parks within our borders.

Year-Round Adventure

Perhaps no place typifies the spirit and opportunities of Greenview more than the Nitehawk Year-Round Adventure Park at Grovedale. There's something for everyone, whether you enjoy downhill and cross-country skiing, snowboarding and luge by winter, mountain biking and hiking. Rental facilities with full food and beverage catering are also available year-round.

Portal to the Peace

Valleyview is a hub on the east side of the Municipal District with traffic links to Peace River, Grande Prairie and Edmonton, via Fox Creek on the southern edge. From Valleyview, head west to Debolt for a visit to the Debolt and District Pioneer Museum to enjoy the collection of heritage buildings from the area. On your way, don't forget to stop at the Crooked Creek Corner Store to get some of their fresh out of the oven doughnuts, renowned throughout the region.

If it is lunch time, grab a burger at Scotty's Burger Shack. A portion of the proceeds from all sales at Scotty's is donated to the Ronald McDonald House to assist families who are dealing with cancer.

After an overnight stay in Grande Prairie, you will want to get an early start to head down Highway 40.

Spectacular Scenery

Before arriving in Grande Cache, you will want to stop at Sulphur Gates. A short, easy hike will take you into to a beautiful lookout point to see the confluence of the Sulphur and Smoky Rivers. For the more adventurous, the largest waterfall in Alberta, Kakwa Falls, is located within the Kakwa Wilderness Provincial Park.

When you arrive in Grande Cache you will want to be sure to visit the Tourism and Interpretive Centre which showcases the history of the area.

If you visit in August, The Canadian Death Race is held annually. In addition to the event itself, which attracts competitors from around the world, there are numerous activities including a parade and a pop up market in the park, along with live music and entertainment.

For those who enjoy adventure a little further afield, there are many geocaches in town and on trails in the nearby vicinity.

Want to cool down on a hot day? Wild Blue Yonder, operating out of Grande Cache, offers rafting trips for everyone from beginners to expert water sportsmen. They have trips easy enough for children or challenging enough to give the expert rafter an adrenaline rush. If you prefer calmer waters, there are plenty of lakes around the area to appeal to anglers and swimmers.



Saddle Hills County

Discover the Peace

In the 2022 *Alberta Regional Dashboard*, Saddle Hills County had a population estimate of 2,312. The land area is 5,827.7 km² (2,250.1 sq mi).

Located approximately 450 km (280 mi) northwest of Edmonton and 90 km (56 mi) north of Grande Prairie along the southern banks of the Peace River. The County is home to a diverse agricultural community and contains rich deposits of natural gas and oil.

Saddle Up For A Great Visit

Saddle Hills County is a place where legends are made. Some of the legends can be confirmed, others are a little less clear.

For example, this is a spot renowned for big game hunting, thanks to the Northern Boreal forest offering unique wildlife. Elk, moose and mule deer are some of the popular species that roam the deep river valleys, lush, wooded hillsides and rolling plains here.

It's also a haven for summer and winter outdoor activities. The ancient rim rock formations along the Pouce Coupe River canyon provide spectacular views and excellent wilderness hiking opportunities.

A popular year-round recreation spot is Moonshine Lake Provincial Park, a great getaway that offers something for everyone. The Park has 17 km of cross-country ski trails and ice fishing in winter. In summer, visitors can explore the 2.5 km Lakeview trail, relax on the beach or cast a line for trout from shore or from your boat (non-motorized and electric motors only). The kids will enjoy the bike park and playground. Camping is on the north side of the lake.

Now some of the stories are a little harder to track down – like how Moonshine Lake got its name. According to folklore, two local men accidentally spilled their homebrewed moonshine into the water while transporting it around the lake. It had earlier been known as Mirage Lake.

There are also stories of a rich, eccentric lady burying gold coins at the bottom of the lake. There have been accounts of gold coins washing up on shore. Moonshine Lake is just one of the spots that will make you want to spend more than a day visiting the County.

Other great camping spots in the County include Cotillion Park Municipal Campground, Spring Lake Campground, Hill Top Campground, and Fourth Creek Campground.

Here are some other attractions in the County:

Flowers – The County is home to four greenhouses, which offer an excellent selection of plants for today's avid gardener. Open in May each year, the four greenhouses welcome folks from all over to enjoy their selections. Anne's Greenhouse offers u-pick strawberries from greenhouses benches in season.

Food – Our general stores offer snacks and hot food while Chinook Golf Course provides a sit-down restaurant. From the cinnamon buns at Blueberry General Store to the pizzas at the Bonanza General Store and the pasta salads at Bay Tree General Store, your appetite will surely be sated.

Recreation – Recreation in Saddle Hills County encompasses everything from golfing (Chinook Valley Golf Course) bird watching (Jack Bird Pond) to fishing (Shell True North Pond and Moonshine Lake Provincial Park). Through Cotillion Park you have foot access to the Peace River.

Communities – Bay Tree, Blueberry Mountain, Bonanza, Braeburn, Dunvegan Settlement, Gordondale, Ksituan, Northmark, Poplar Ridge, Silver Valley, Whitburn.

Saddle Hills County is home to a wide range of year-round activities including camping, fishing, hunting, hiking, cycling, boating, snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, skating and more. Experience our peaceful environment. Come on up for a daytrip or join us for a longer stay at one of our campgrounds. You'll be glad you did.



A Welcoming and Prosperous Community

In the *2022 Alberta Regional Dashboard*, the Town of Sexsmith had a population estimate of 2,857. The land area is 13.01 km² (5.02 sq mi).

Sexsmith is on Highway 2, 20 kilometres (12 mi) north of Grande Prairie. Sexsmith is one of the most fertile growing areas in the province. The town was once known as the "grain capital of the British Empire". In a 10-year period from 1939 to 1949, it shipped more grain than any other port in the empire.

History

The townsite of Sexsmith was established on the homestead of Benny Foster, a 1911 settler, and was originally named "Bennville or "Benville", but it was discovered that the name had already used by another town, so it was renamed Sexsmith after a local trapper who came to the area in 1898.

The railway arrived in 1916, and grain companies began building grain elevators in 1917. Because of the fertile soil, the area is one of the largest grain producing areas in the world, and by 1949 became the Grain Capital of the British Empire, shipping more grain than any other region. At one time, there were nine grain elevators on Elevator Road. Today, the only grain elevator in the Peace Country that is eligible for restoration, is that last standing Prairie Giant gracing the skyline in Sexsmith.

Established in 1978, the Sexsmith & District Museum Society recently partnered with Alberta Historical Resources to restore the elevator. The vision is a functioning grain museum, for everyone to experience, focusing on the era of its use.

Sexsmith is steeped in tradition with a flair for the modern day. As you wander downtown on the historic 1920s-1930s main street, you will come across charming shops, stores and a vintage clock. Sexsmith marked 90 years as a village in 2019 and continues to grow as a regional community.

Here you'll find a bustling community with many young families and contemporary amenities such as a trail that runs through the town and a newly completed water feature paying tribute to beloved former mayor, the late Claude Lagace.

Perhaps you'll stop to enjoy a coffee and cinnamon bun at Cowbella's Café, a quaint eatery, known for its home-made goods and antique décor. Just around the corner is Asia's Diner offering Western and Chinese cuisine providing another great dining choice.

Many visitors to downtown stop in for yarn at Hippy Strings, located in the old NAR Railway Station. The train station is part of the nearby Sexsmith Museum, which also features a working blacksmith shop from 100 years ago, Paszkowski House, an example of a home from the 1930s, a recently donated Orthodox Church, an historical Anglican Church, and Anderson Hall, which houses the majority of the museum's exhibits. You may wish to follow the historical walking trail with the Museum map full of interesting history.

Chautauqua Day

If visiting in June, plan to attend the large community event, Chautauqua Day, which kicks off with a pancake breakfast and includes a parade, midway, and a classic car show. There's also bingo, a petting zoo, and a face painting booth for the young and the young at heart. The day also features a farmers' market.

Summer Fun

With a splash park, playgrounds, a skateboard park, and walking trails, there is something for the whole family.

Morningview Golf Course (9 holes) and River Stone Golf Course (18 holes) in nearby Teepee Creek have both received excellent reviews on Trip Advisor. Spruce Meadows, just five minutes north of Sexsmith delivers a par 71 championship course.

Heritage Park Campground is a popular spot for campers. If you enjoy fishing, you can start your day by catching your own breakfast in the fully stocked pond at the campground. Check to see which species are for catch and release only. The campground also has horseshoe pits and a mini golf course.

The Sexsmith farmers' market is a great place to find treasures for you to take home. With an average of 35 vendors, you will find a wide range of handmade, homemade, and homegrown items.

Winter Activities

Sexsmith is a hotbed of curling and has produced athletes such as Kurt Balderston and Kristine Moore. There are two outdoor skating rinks. Robust hockey, Tae kwon do and gymnastics programs round out the winter sports activities. A Christmas Farmers' Market is held for two days in late November.



Portal to the Peace

In the 2022 Alberta Regional Dashboard, the Town of Valleyview had a population estimate of 1,849. The land area is 9.17 km² (3.54 sq mi). Valleyview is surrounded by the Municipal District of Greenview No. 16.

It is located at the junction of Highway 43 and Highway 49, between the Little Smoky River and Sturgeon Lake. Its position, in the junction of the two highways into the Peace Region, has led to the town motto, "Portal to the Peace".

History

The area around Valleyview has been inhabited by native peoples for thousands of years due to the area's rich hunting and fishing grounds. The local Cree population has lived in the region since at least the 18th century.

In the early 1800s the first visitors to the area arrived, seeking natives to exchange goods for furs. The trading was good and a Hudson's Bay Company post was established on Sturgeon Lake in 1877. Peace River Jim' Cornwall established the Bredin and Cornwall Trading Post nearby. The area was surveyed in 1900 for a possible settlement, but little developed of it. The following year the area was surveyed again by Fred Young who was particularly impressed with a piece of land on the northwest shore of Sturgeon Lake. By 1916 the first pioneers settled in the area nearby as its soil was rich for farming.

The community that formed to serve the growing population was initially named Red Willow Creek. Only when the first post office was opened in 1929 did the community change its name to Valleyview.

In late 1950 oil was discovered near the hamlet. The Whitecourt Cutoff project was completed in 1955, significantly reducing the travel time between the Peace Country and Edmonton. In 2020 the Town of Valleyview and Chamber of Commerce renamed a stretch of the highway to recognize the 65th anniversary of the cutoff's completion. By the late fifties Valleyview had firmly achieved boomtown status having been incorporated as a village in 1954 and then a town only three years later in 1957.

Activities

"Portal to the Peace" A small town with big economic opportunities, Valleyview is on the way up!

There is much to see and do right within the scenic Town of Valleyview and you don't have to go too far to find excellent camping choices, fishing, horseback riding, golfing and boating opportunities, and for the naturalists, an abundance of birds, flowers and wildlife abound. The Town of Valleyview boasts doorstep access to two picturesque Provincial Parks: Williamson (60 campsites, day-use area, boat launch) and Young's Point (124 campsites, boat launch, hiking trails, playgrounds, showers, swimming area). For the golfing devotee, there are two 9-hole golf courses located within minutes for the Town of Valleyview: Riverside Golf (15 minutes south) and Greenview Golf (20 minutes west).

For the gun/hunter enthusiast, the Valleyview and District Gun Club boasts 200 members who utilize an outdoor gun range 11 minutes east of the town for sporting rifle, black powder, pistol, archery, and shotgun shooting events (this site also supports a clubhouse with gazebo and firepit, hosts annual public shooting events and hunter education training).

For the winter sports specialists, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling trails, and the affordable Little Smoky Ski Hill and Tube Park can keep people busy and entertained within a 30-minute driving-radius from the Town of Valleyview.



Town of Wembley

Photo: Philip Currie Dinosaur Museum

In the Heart of the Action

In the *2022 Alberta Regional Dashboard*, the Town of Wembley had a population estimate of 1,665. The land area is 4.74 km² (1.83 sq mi). Wembley is approximately 23 km (14 mi) west of Grande Prairie at the junction of Highway 43 and Highway 724.

History

Land around Wembley was surveyed for homesteads in 1909, settlers beginning to arrive in 1910. The railroad survey was completed from Grande Prairie to Pouce Coupe in 1916 and the townsite of Wembley was surveyed in 1923. The railway arrived in 1924.

The present town-site is four and a half miles south of the original hamlet of Lake Saskatoon and when the railway arrived in 1924 many buildings were hauled over the four and one half miles of snow-covered trails from Lake Saskatoon to their new foundations in Wembley. The name Wembley was chosen by the Lake Saskatoon Board of Trade at the time of the British Empire Exposition at Wembley in England.

The post office opened in November 1924, the first postmaster being RB Sinclair. Wembley reached village status January 3, 1928, and town status August 1, 1980.

Activities

Wembley is a safe, caring and viable community that treasures its rural community lifestyle.

A Demolition Derby is held annually with a full day of family entertainment; kids' activities and games and of course, the demolition derby. The newest event held in the town is a two-day Mud Bog. There are two race pits, one "Hill in the Hole" pit and of course a deep mud challenge. This annual event is mud flinging, wheel spinning, adrenaline filled good time.

Wembley currently has amenities such as walking trails, a recreation centre, a skating rink, skateboard park, soccer field, lit football field, full size outdoor rink and Sunset Lake Park. The park amenities include a spacious gazebo shelter, fire pit and marshland boardwalks. Sunset also hosts a wonderful playground with multiple climbing structures, slides, swings, balance apparatus and a new Spray Park for those warm summer days. The playground is surrounded by wonderful green space which provides great places for picnics, frisbee, horseshoes and family time alike. This area is an excellent

spot for bird watchers to check many local species off their list, hosting species of both marsh lands and Boreal Forests.

Wembley is the gateway to the dinosaurs and is the home of the 41,000 square foot, state-of-the art Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum. The Pipestone Creek area, located south of the Town of Wembley, has received international attention due to the discovery of the world's largest Pachyrhinosaurus ("thick nosed" horned dinosaur) bonebed. The Pipestone Creek site contains hundreds of dinosaur skeletons and is one of the best horned dinosaur bonebeds found in North America. The Dinosaur Museum is a world class museum. The Museum and the Dinosaur Bonebed are a major tourism destination site for travelers from around the world.

According to the Northwestern Polytechnic (formerly Grande Prairie Regional College) paleontology program, it's a theory that during a migration more than 70 million years ago, a herd of the thick-nosed, plant-eating pachyrhinos tried to cross a river in a flood. The animals may have panicked and similar to the mass mortality of a Quebec caribou herd in the '80s, the dinosaurs died in the flood. It's theorized the carcasses were washed down river until they settled in a final location. Once there, the bones were disarticulated, like a puzzle. Bonebed tours are offered on a regular basis.

7.3 INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

The region encompasses Treaty Six and Treaty Eight land and is home to the following Indigenous Nations:

- Alexander First Nation
- Alexis Nakota Sioux First Nation
- Paul First Nation
- Sucker Creek First Nation
- Horse Lake First Nation
- Duncan's First Nation
- Kapawe'no First Nation
- Aseniwuche Winewak Nation
- Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation
- East Prairie Métis Settlement
- Mountain Métis

7.4 CURRENT & HISTORIC ECONOMY

In the 18th century, this region was occupied by a number of Indigenous Nations who began trading with the North West Company in the 19th century. Fort Assiniboine was established in 1823 (celebrating its Bicentennial in 2023), and was the first trading post established following the merger of the Hudson's Bay Company and the North West Company. The scarcity of furs, the centralization of company administration, and the security of the Canadian-American frontier led to the abandonment of Fort Assiniboine in 1842. It was closed in 1877 and the buildings were burned down a short time later.

In 1911, the Edson Trail from Edson to Grande Prairie was opened which was followed by the arrival of the railway from Edmonton in 1916 which opened up the region to increased settlement and expansion of farmland.

The Second World War saw the US and Canadian military establish the Northwest Staging Route for the construction of the Alaska Highway from Dawson Creek to Alaska. Though Dawson Creek was chosen as the starting point for construction, Grande Prairie was a major stop-over point for military aircraft during the war and significantly opened the area up for growth. While agriculture was the major sector through this period, the region saw the exploration of oil and natural gas in the 1950s and forestry in the 1970s.

Today the region benefits from a diversified economy relying on the sectors of oil and gas, agriculture, forestry, retail and tourism to power its economy.

The region enjoys exceptional crop quality with 13.6% (or 3.3 million hectares) of Alberta's cropland, making agriculture an important component of the economy. Forestry contributes significantly to the region's economy as northwestern Alberta produces a substantial amount of the province's pulp, oriented strand board and dimensional lumber. Oil and gas provide tremendous opportunities for companies involved in the extraction and processing of energy resources as well as for supporting companies in transportation, business management, engineering, consulting, information technology, communications, and manufacturing.

The City of Grande Prairie has also become a strategic, regional hub for retail and industrial trade and commerce with many local and multi-national retailers. Retail spending in the city represents revenues of \$4.7 billion annually.

Tourism is both an important and growing industry in Alberta and the Northern Rockies. The region is benefiting from a growing tourism industry focused on outdoor activities, sporting events, arts and culture and as an important corridor to and from the north via the Alaska Highway.



8 REGIONAL TOURISM PERFORMANCE DATA

Tourism in Alberta is a \$10.1 billion industry that supports 23,000 businesses (TIAA), employs about 82,000 people and as of 2019, attracted 34.7 million total visits annually. In 2019, tourism contributed \$8.4 billion in GDP to Alberta and approximately \$1.3 billion in tax revenue to all levels of government. Source: *Alberta Jobs, Economy and Innovation [Statistics Canada, Visitor Spending Model for Alberta – 2019 numbers]*.

Most visitors to Alberta come from Alberta (28.6M or 82.7%), other parts of Canada (3.6M or 10.5%), the United States (1.2M or 3.5%) and overseas (1.2M or 3.3%). Visitors from Alberta also have the highest total expenditures at \$5.7B, followed by visitors from other parts of Canada at \$2.1B, overseas at \$1.3B and the United States at \$1B.

There are few tourism indicators available to measure the performance of the Grande Prairie Tourism Region. The data that does exist includes domestic tourism for the Alberta North Region, which is larger than the Grande Prairie Tourism Region and is based on the 2019 *National Travel Survey* conducted by Statistics Canada. Detailed estimates for international visitors are not available at the provincial and tourism regional level due to small sample sizes and limited data from the Visitor Travel Survey (VTS).

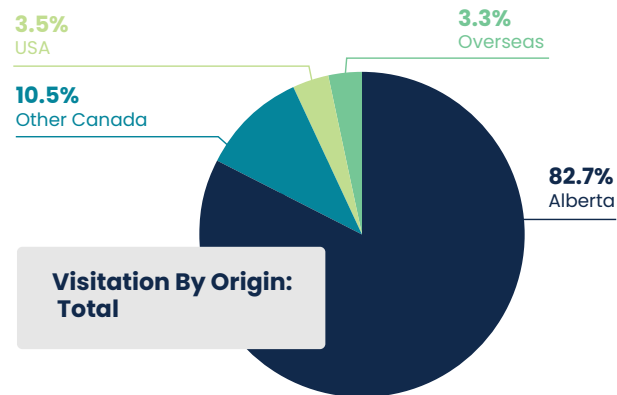
QUICK FACT Visitors from the U.S. and overseas tend to visit the province more in the summer with approximately half of total overnight person visits occurring in July, August and September.

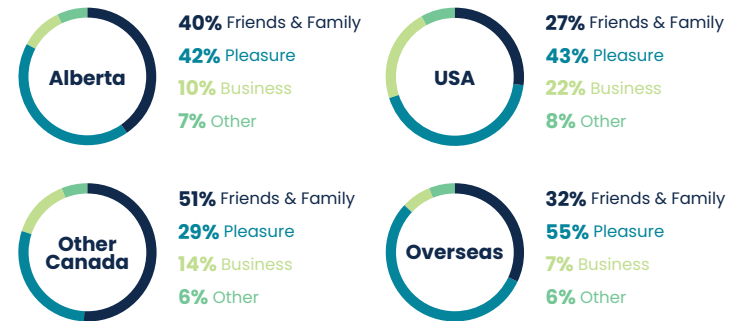
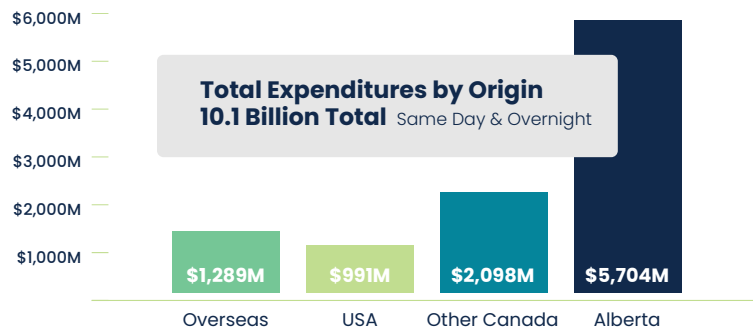
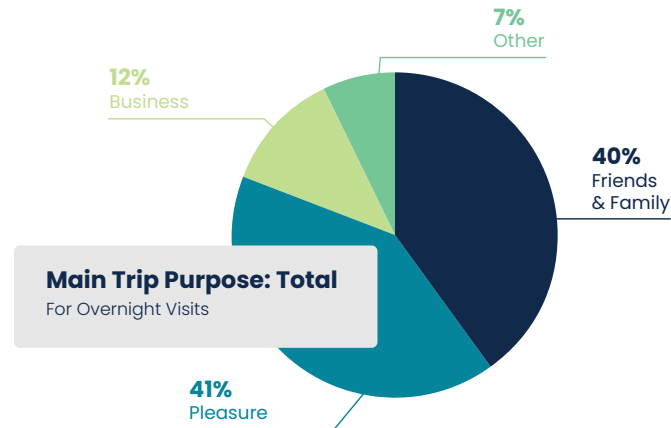
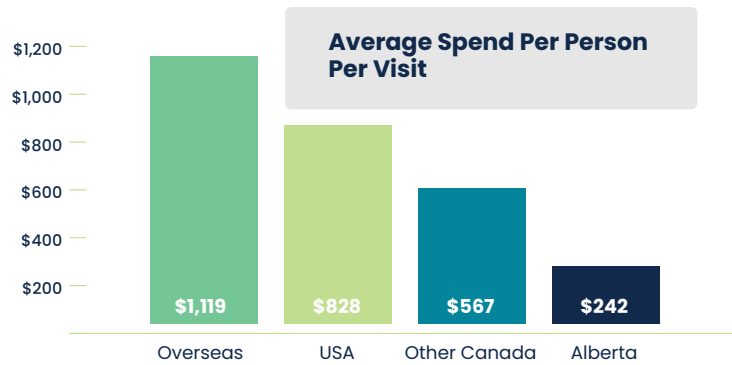
visits to Alberta) with a tourism expenditure of \$442M. Eighty seven (87%) percent of visitors to Alberta North were Albertans and sixteen percent (16%) were from other parts of Canada. On average, Albertans spent \$87 per night while visitors from other parts of Canada spend \$101 per person per night. Overseas travellers realize the highest average spend per visit however, at \$1,119 per visit vs Albertans at \$242. The majority of overnight visitors' main trip purpose is to visit friends and relatives (43%), followed by visiting for pleasure (36%), while fifteen percent (15%) visit for business. Most overnight visits occur during the summer (38%) followed by the spring (26%), fall (19%) and winter (18%).

Figure 2: Tourism in Alberta 2019

8.1 TOURISM IN ALBERTA

A 2019 Summary of Visitor Numbers, Expenditures & Characteristics:





Average Length of Overnight Stays

Domestic Visitors / # of Person Nights



Average Party Size For Overnight Visits

The following graphics illustrate domestic visitation patterns and spending in Alberta North Tourism Region.

Additional analysis by Travel Alberta specific to the Northern Rockies TDZ estimates total visitor expenditure for the zone in 2021 to be \$138,759,000 (\$137,576,000 from domestic visitors and \$1,183,000 from international travelers). [Source: Travel Alberta, 2022]

8.2 TOURISM IN NORTHERN ALBERTA

A 2019 Summary of Domestic Visitor Numbers, Expenditures & Characteristics:

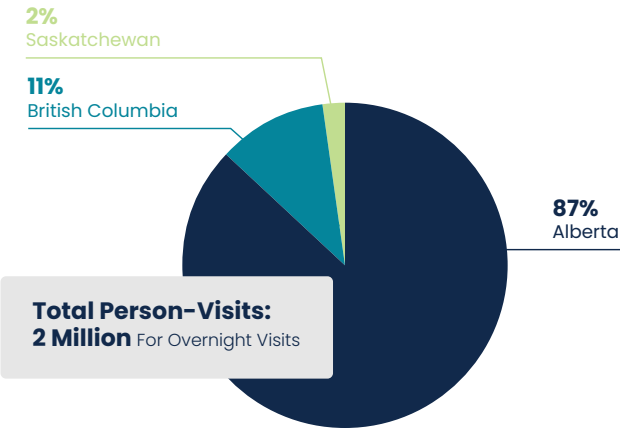
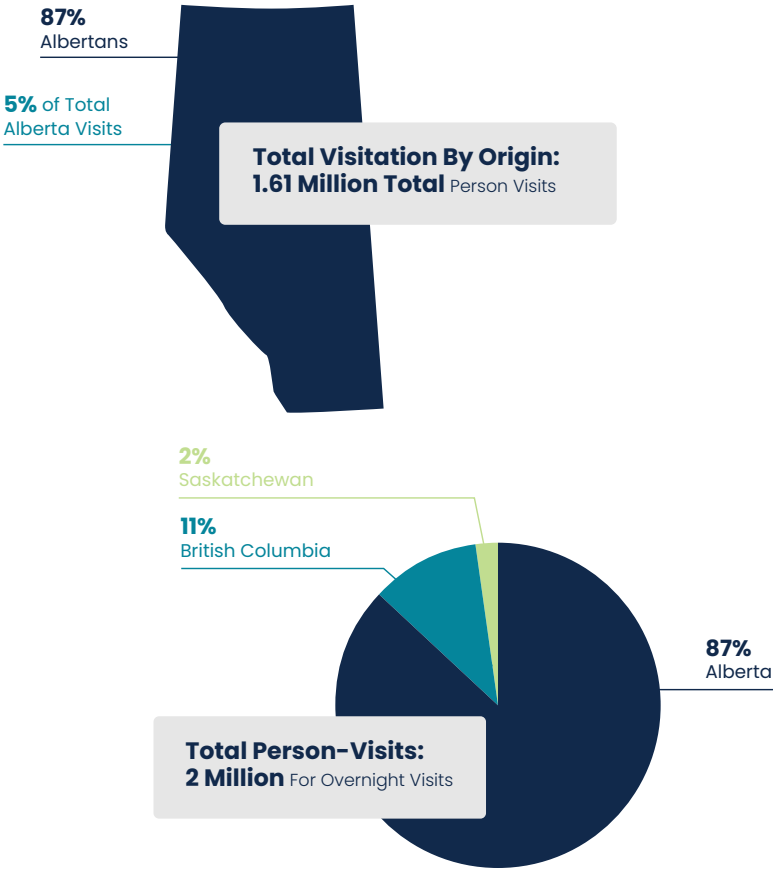
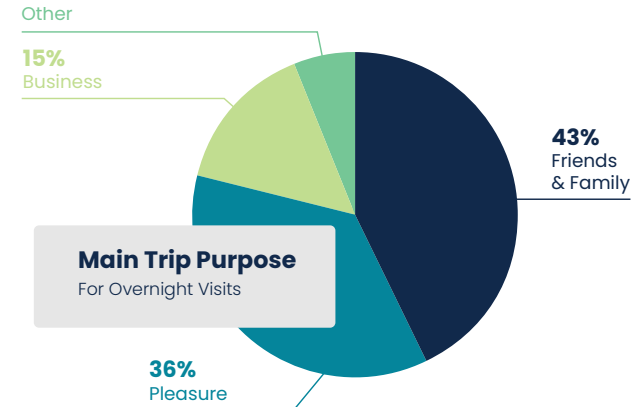
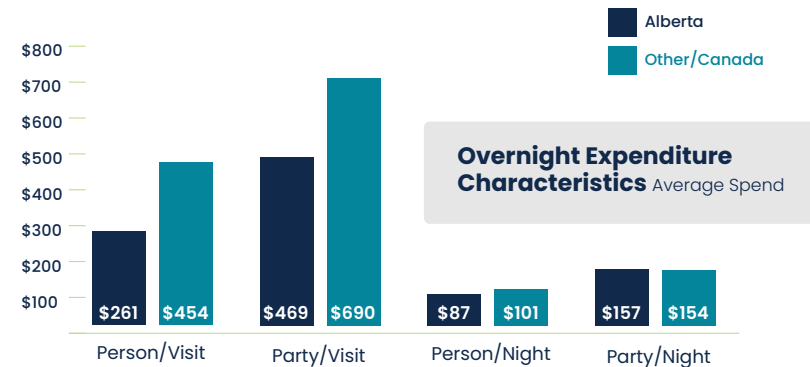


Figure 3: Domestic Tourism in Alberta North Tourism Region 2019

Average Length of Overnight Stays
Domestic Visitors / # of Person Nights



Average Party Size
For Overnight Visits



9 CURRENT BRANDS

The GPRTA and members do not currently have a destination or place brand. However, there are a number of communities within the region that are using tag lines and visuals to position themselves as tourism destinations. These include:

GPRTA – Untapped, Unfiltered, Unforgettable

Beaverlodge – A Place to Build Dreams

Fox Creek – N/A

City of Grande Prairie – N/A

County of Grande Prairie #1 – Life's Good in the Middle

Municipal District of Greenview No. 16 – Life's Great on Greenview Side of the Fence

Saddle Hills County – Discover the Peace

Sexsmith – A Welcoming and Prosperous Community

Valleyview – Portal to the Peace

Wembley – In the Heart of the Action

10 KEY TARGET MARKETS

Identifying our high-value target audience allows us to be more efficient in our marketing activities and develop experiences that are more likely to appeal to an audience that drives the most revenue to our businesses.

In the past, Travel Alberta relied on Destination Canada's Explorer Quotient (EQ) and the PRIZM segmentation system to help craft and target messages for visitors to Alberta. In 2019, Travel Alberta introduced the Ultimate Traveller segmentation and identified two primary types of travellers with the greatest potential to target and attract – Curious Adventurers and Hotspot Hunters.

Ultimate Traveller Segment

EQ remains a useful tool for understanding the psychographic profiles of our travellers. These personas go deeper into the audience to understand individual motivators and enable more focused targeting. Curious Adventurers are rooted in the Learners EQ segment, made up of Cultural Explorers, Authentic Experiencers, Personal History Explorers and Cultural History Buffs. Hotspot Hunters are rooted in the Enthusiastic Indulgers EQ segment, made up of Free Spirits, Social Samplers and Group Tourists. [Source: Ultimate Traveller Playbook, Version 1.0 May 2022, Travel Alberta]



EXPLORER QUOTIENT CONNECTION CURIOUS ADVENTURERS

For Curious Adventurers, travel is about getting a different perspective on the world. They're energized by exploring new places and inspired to learn all they can about a destination through its landscapes, authentic culture and the people they meet. Spontaneous and open-minded, they're fuelled by a sense of adventure and discovery, knowing that organic moments can provide their best experiences. They are thoughtful planners, investing time before their trip to help forge deeper connections with a place.

Curious Adventurers immerse themselves in the places they travel – leaving time for unplanned encounters and activities that allow them to truly know a destination.

Curious Adventurers can be found around the globe. The recommended market focus for Team Alberta is:



Alberta



Canada



USA



UK



Germany



Japan

PLANNERS VS. TRAVELLERS

- Planners represent a more focused and higher-value audience. They influence the travel of the entire travelling party and present a greater opportunity to move people around the province.
- Marketing to Planners means providing inspiration and informational content they can share with their travel group. Inspiration is vital whether a traveller is regional or long-haul.
- The larger the group travelling together, the less distinct the differences are between Curious Adventurers and Hotspot Hunters.

ALBERTA INTERESTS

Both Curious Adventurers and Hotspot Hunters are drawn to our products and experiences. The recommended focus for Curious Adventurers is:



Open to all seasons, but most interested in summer.



Mountains



Cities



Rural

Figure 5: Curious Adventurers Summary

Segment Overview

Age	40-55
Gender Role	Equal
Children at Home	25%
Research	Experiential
Lists	Just Ideas
Scheduling	Allowing space
Local Experiences	Organic
Lifestyle & Interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look for opportunities to learn. Spend more on outdoor excursions, home entertainment and technology.
Personal Interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Golf & NFL Live Concerts & Sporting Events Luxury Goods Musical Instruments Photography Equipment
Points of Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discovery & exploration Personal growth Immersion & Rich experiences Open to possibilities Planning is a part of the trip Constantly grazing for information Hearing from locals To know a destination, I need to spend time to understand it

Media Habits

Thinking about the personal motivations, desires and media habits of your audience can allow you to stand out from your competitors and more effectively connect. Use the below insights to guide your media tactics and supporting creative development to drive higher engagement with your audience.



- Heavy social media users, but don't post regularly. Avid listeners of podcasts and music streaming sites, and regular blog readers. Actively avoid advertising on social.



- Are interested in learning more deeply about destinations and activities. They tend to spend longer reading informational content but are pickier about which ads they engage with.



- They trust local news sources including CTV and Global networks. For international news they look to sites with global reach such as MSN.

Research & Planning

On dream list / On consideration list

- Derive pleasure from planning – the process of planning for the trip is as much a part of the journey as the trip itself.
- Start their research by getting a sense of the place, often from objective and editorial sources.
- Rely less on social media for influence and inspiration.
- Begin building an overall picture of the place led by bigger traditional tourist activities.
- Need assurance there are many smaller experiences nearby that offer depth, learning and lots to uncover.
- These smaller complementary activities play a very important role in determining if a destination is worth visiting.

Creating a vacation movie / Detailed itinerary planning

- "Plan for spontaneity," leaving time in their schedule for unplanned encounters and activities.
- Plan with flexibility, not rigidity.
- A list of Things to Do is a great starting point for their own research, not because it tells them exactly what to do, but because it shows the breadth and depth that they require.
- Likely to consider budget hotel chains (2-3 star), camping trips, and national park holidays.
- Much more likely to use vacation rental sites (Airbnb, VRBO).
- Top sites for planning and purchase include TripAdvisor, Expedia, Airbnb, Booking.com, Kayak.

Finalizing travel purchase

- Constantly grazing for information both before and during a trip, seeking local-insider information and recommendations.
- Look for organic interactions with locals to flavour and help inform their activities.

CURIOUS ADVENTURER NEEDS



GABRIELA NEEDS AUTHENTIC CONNECTION

They find cultural significance by immersing themselves in the communities they visit, making genuine connections with people and places.



XANDER NEEDS TO BELONG

They seek out deeply enriching experiences through self-guided encounters to better understand their place in the world.



ANDREA AND SUSAN NEED TO FEEL LIKE LOCALS

They curate unique experiences by discovering hidden gems that leave them feeling like they truly know a place.



SEAN NEEDS PERSONAL ENLIGHTENMENT

They slow down time to explore a destination freely, embrace their independence and stoke their enlightenment.



GRETA AND KARL NEED FULFILLMENT

They nurture their personal growth by collecting stories about the people they meet and the places they visit to feel fulfilled.



EXPLORER QUOTIENT CONNECTION HOTSPOT HUNTERS

For Hotspot Hunters, travel is about achievement and accomplishment. They want to visit the top attractions, take part in one-of-a-kind experiences and connect with local experts. They're driven to make the most of every minute, to fill their trips with as many stories and memories as possible – and they plan accordingly, leaving little to chance and deprioritizing sleep.

Hotspot Hunters live for travel – these excited, passionate travellers want to see it all, do it all and collect the stories to prove it.

Hotspot Hunters can be found around the globe. The recommended market focus for Team Alberta is:



Alberta



Canada



USA



China



Mexico

PLANNERS VS. TRAVELLERS

- Planners represent a more focused and higher-value audience. They influence the travel of the entire travelling party and present a greater opportunity to move people around the province.
- Marketing to Planners means providing inspiration and informational content they can share with their travel group. Inspiration is vital whether a traveller is regional or long-haul.
- The larger the group travelling together, the less distinct the differences are between Curious Adventurers and Hotspot Hunters.

ALBERTA INTERESTS

Both Curious Adventurers and Hotspot Hunters are drawn to our products and experiences. The recommended focus for Hotspot Hunters is:



Open to all seasons, more open to winter than Curious Adventurers.



Mountains



Cities

Figure 6: Hotspot Hunters Summary

Photo: Travel Alberta

Segment Overview

Age	30-45
Gender Role	Female-led
Children at Home	50%
Research	Logistical
Lists	What to do
Scheduling	Tightly planned
Local Experiences	Curated
Lifestyle & Interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sports fans and avid investors. Spend more on high-profile activities like live concerts, museums and sporting events.
Personal Interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Birdwatching Camping & RVing Hiking Home Entertainment Motorcycles, ATVs Motorized Watercrafts Museums Studying Genealogy
Points of Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Achievement & completion Personal status Collecting stories Want to be in control Planning enables the trip Targeted search for information Hearing from other travellers/experts To know a destination, I need to see it all

Media Habits

Thinking about the personal motivations, desires and media habits of your audience can allow you to stand out from your competitors and more effectively connect. Use the below insights to guide your media tactics and supporting creative development to drive higher engagement with your audience.



- Heavy social media users, particularly Instagram and LinkedIn, posting and engaging regularly. More receptive to advertising on social.



- They place a greater value on world news, trusting sources like CNN, BBC, Yahoo, the Globe and Mail and La Presse.



- They often use list-based and community-driven website content to build an action plan in advance of travelling. This includes sites like BuzzFeed and the Matador Network.



- They find inspiration from image-focused sites like Instagram and Pinterest, turning to these channels to quench their wanderlust.

Research & Planning

On dream list / On consideration list

- Strongly motivated by travel and always looking for inspiration, thinking about future trips and places they'd like to go.
- Social channels feature prominently.
- Begin building an overall picture of the place led by bigger traditional tourist activities.
- Need assurance there are many additional experiences nearby that are "story-worthy."
- The cost of a trip is important because they often travel multiple times a year, and each trip impacts their overall ability to travel. Will this trip mean I can't take my next trip?
- Vacation time is very precious. They don't want to waste a minute – either on things that aren't worth doing or because they're unprepared. The process of planning is therefore more administrative in nature.

Creating a vacation movie / Detailed itinerary planning

- Like to have a strong logistical grasp on their trip – what to do, where things are and how to get around.
- Strongly influenced by Best Things to Do content shared by others and are more likely to be inspired to visit by a single image or story.
- Like to take the time to shop around for the best deals before booking.
- Most likely to travel to Alberta by air. More likely to visit airline websites directly (aircanada.com, westjet.ca) and redeem travel points via rewards sites (Airmiles, CIBC Rewards, etc).

Finalizing travel purchase

- Look to connect with local professionals who they can trust to inform and ensure a great in-destination experience.

HOTSPOT HUNTER NEEDS



SKYLAR NEEDS ACCOMPLISHMENT

They do it all by collaborating with experts to know they have done everything possible in the destinations they visit.



STEPHANIE NEEDS FULFILLMENT

They embrace their unique lifestyle by collecting and curating stories to live the best life possible.



LORI NEEDS CONNECTION BY DOING

They strive to be the best possible parent by creating trip itineraries that are filled to the brim to build family connections through lasting memories.



WEI NEEDS THE BEST MOMENTS EVER

They curate the ultimate travel story with a personal narrative that shares experiences that are truly special.



MONIQUE AND FRED NEED VALUE

They leave nothing to chance by researching and meticulously planning to experience everything on their list, ensuring their money and time are well spent.



10.2 TRAVEL ALBERTA IDENTIFIED GEOGRAPHIC MARKETS

Travel Alberta identifies and prioritizes market investments by analyzing past market performance and potential based on key factors, including:

- Number of travellers by market who are predisposed to travel to Alberta in the next two years
- Past visitation and expenditures in Alberta
- Expected return of outbound travel to pre-pandemic levels
- Economic outlook
- Direct and indirect air access

Additional market context is applied to the analysis, including geopolitical situation, cultural nuances, ease of doing business, and alignment with partners to establish priority target markets. Travel Alberta continually monitors market conditions and adjusts priorities as opportunities arise.

As a result of this analysis and contingent on any safety and health restrictions, Travel Alberta plans to invest in the following geographic markets through until 2024-2025.

2022/23 • Canada
• United States*
• United Kingdom*

2023/24 • Canada
• United States*
• United Kingdom*
• Germany*

2024/25 • Canada
• United States*
• United Kingdom*
• Germany*
• Japan*
• Other International Markets*

** Under consideration and dependent on safety and health restrictions due to COVID-19. [Source: 2022-2025 Business Plan, Travel Alberta]*

Given limited marketing resources available to the GPRTA, alignment and collaboration with Travel Alberta and their marketing efforts is critical to the effective and efficient positioning of the region as a tourism destination. Understanding what geographical markets Travel Alberta is investing in will help GPRTA determine where to spend and leverage valuable marketing resources to get the best return on their investment.

Key geographical markets for the Grande Prairie Tourism Region include:

Primary • Edmonton
• Alberta South
• Alberta Central
• Alberta North

Secondary • Rest of Canada
• Western US/Border States
• Eastern US

Emerging • UK
• Germany
• Japan

Photo: Travel Alberta

10.3 IDEAL VISITOR FOR THE GPRTA REGION

Travellers to the Grande Prairie Tourism Region are fueled by a sense of adventure and discovery, willing to go the extra mile to get off the beaten track for unique experiences.

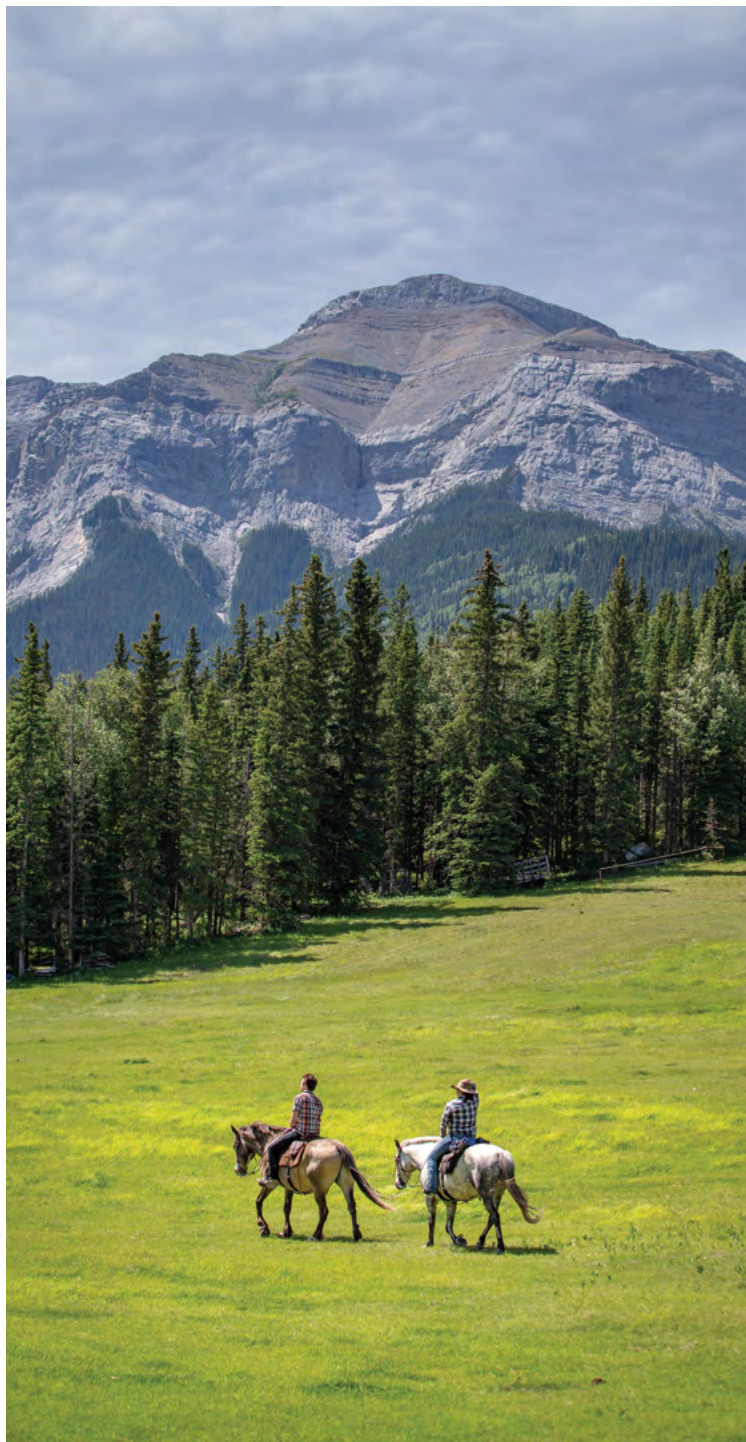
Ideal visitors to the zone include:

- Weekend overnight visitors from Edmonton and Alberta North, northeastern British Columbia and the Northwest Territories.
- U.S. and domestic long-haul travellers coming to/from Alaska.
- Dinosaur enthusiasts from domestic (AB and the rest of Canada) and international markets (UK, Germany, Japan).
- Outdoor adventure enthusiasts (AB and the rest of Canada) and Hunters/Guided Outfitting (Rest of Canada/U.S.)

In addition to the above-listed ideal visitors and the Ultimate traveller market segments, the Grande Prairie Tourism Region is well positioned to also take advantage of its exceptional facilities, air access, accommodation, meeting and convention, dining, shopping and cultural attractions to target the sport tourism events and the meeting and convention sectors.



Photo: Travel Alberta



11 GPRTA REGIONAL ASSET INVENTORY

Planning for the tourism future of our region needs to begin with an understanding of the tourism experiences we currently offer our markets as well as the tourism resources upon which our current mix of visitor experiences rely, and future experiences can be developed. Tourism resources are the built and natural assets that are at the foundation of our visitor experiences as well as the tourism settings and scenic landscapes in which they occur. Identifying, understanding, and retaining the integrity of our tourism resources is fundamental to our current and future tourism industry.

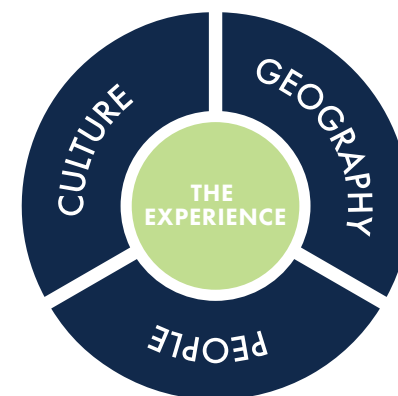
11.1 EXPERIENCES

The Grande Prairie Tourism Region is untapped, unfiltered, and unforgettable. From art enthusiasts to thrill seekers, urbanites to pioneers, and expert athletes to beginners, the region is appealing to a very broad mix of travellers. Whether it be remarkable city experiences in Grande Prairie, attending a major industry business event, participating in or spectating at a national or international sporting competition, exploring an internationally significant dinosaur museum and bonebeds, taking in a live performance or music festival, or seeking adventure on a trail or river through untapped grandeur of true wilderness, our region has it all. Simply put, the mix of visitor experiences in our region are as diverse as our landscapes and, no matter the brand of adventure, our region can appeal to almost any traveller.

Our region is both a year-round destination and a part of a much longer travel corridor and route. The region is situated between the popular seasonal destinations of Alaska, Yukon, and the Northwest Territories and much of the southern US population. As such, a very high proportion of northern-bound land travellers travel through the area on route to and from these northern destinations, in particular the Alaska Highway which begins in Dawson Creek. Significant emphasis has been placed on positioning and marketing the region as an important waypoint along Highways 40 and 43. Highway 40 is marketed as the “Scenic Route to Alaska” on the “Central” access route. Highway 43 is promoted as the easier “East” access route.

To help us understand our tourism strengths and future opportunities, we have inventoried and themed our current mix of tourism experiences. Themes emerged from the analysis of our tourism resources. The emergent themes demonstrate that our current tourism sector, and our future tourism potential, are diverse. Tourism experiences available in the region can be generally themed as follows:

- Nature-Based
- Trails and Water Routes
- Indigenous Tourism
- Culture, Heritage and the Arts
- Paleo Experiences
- Business Meetings and Conventions
- Sport Tourism
- Accommodations



“
A tourism product is what you buy, an
experience is what you remember.
– Destination Canada

”

Photo: Travel Alberta / Ryan Bray

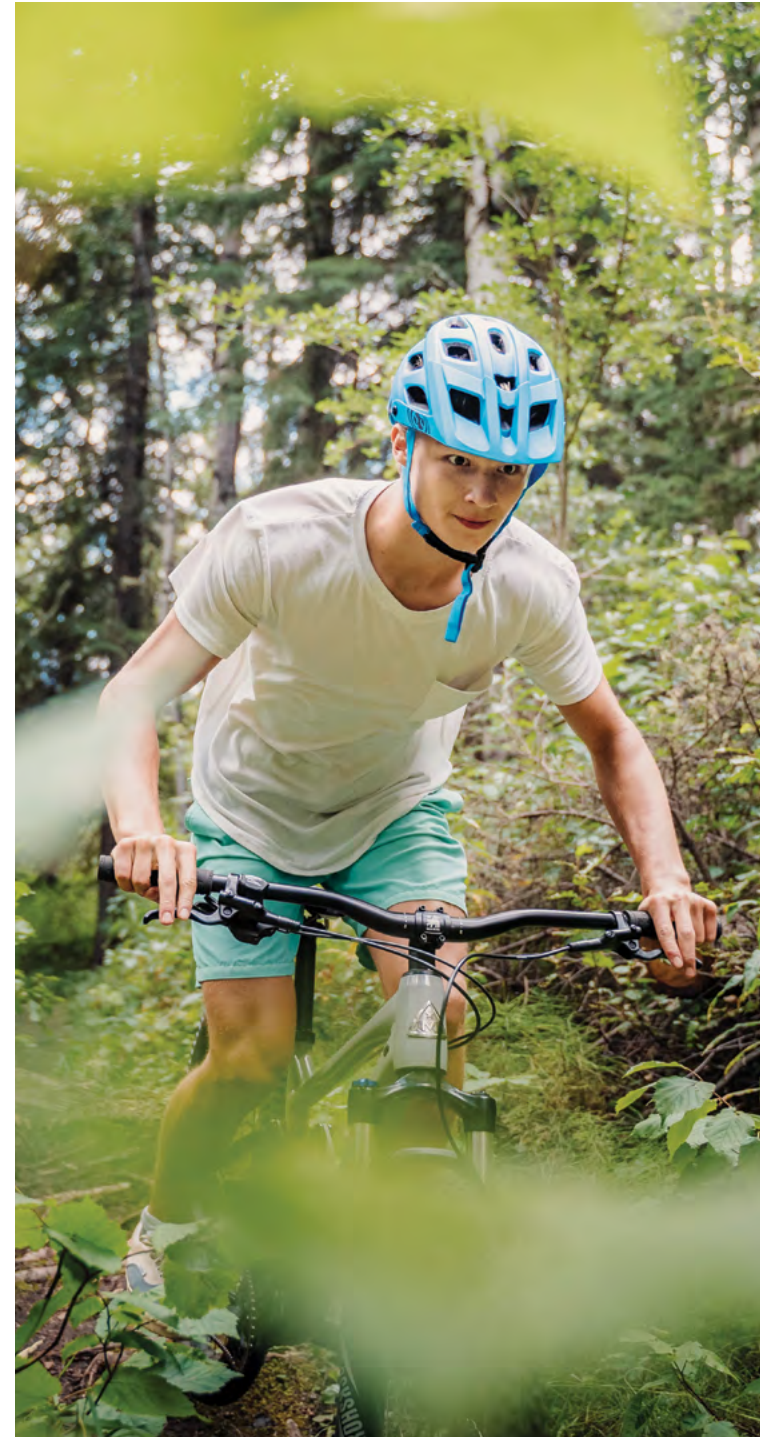
GUEST EXPERIENCES

In addition to the overall inventory completed, the members of the GPRTA generated a significant asset list of experiences that are important to the membership. All are listed below.

Guest Experiences Guided / Non-Guided:

- Rodeo
- Horseback riding
- Indigenous telling
- Bird watching
- Rafting
- Hunting
- Ice fishing
- ATV / OHV / Snowmobile
- Snowshoeing
- Cross-country skiing
- Dog sledding
- Paleontology
- Jet boats
- Raft float
- Balloon
- Walking club
- Helicopter
- Distillery
- Farm tours
- Berry picking and jam-making
- Bike tour
- Disc Golf (x3)
- Hiking
- Rock climbing
- Camping
- Swimming
- Golf-minigolf
- Horse racing
- Casino
- Theatre
- Restaurants
- Baseball – Sports
- VR and arcade
- Bowling
- Churches
- Historic sites
- Museums
- Wagon rides
- EGP Lights
- Bocci
- Alberta Parks Environmental Ed and Public Education programs
- Local trail races
- Fieldtrip / veterans' experiences
- Camp Tamarack
- Alberta Park campground guided programs
- Brewery tours
- Friendship centre tours
- Kid library program
- Pickleball and tennis
- Mountain biking
- Evergreen Park Learning Centre
- Summer Day camp guided programs
- Hythe Motor Speedway
- Champion gym, Nitehawk, college, county, City of GP
- Dino Museum
- Snow tubing
- Conservation gallery @ Dino Museum
- Downhill skiing
- Canoe wapiti kayaks
- McNaught Homestead
- Centre for Creative Arts
- Down to Earth Petting Zoo
- Wembley Heritage Society
- Historic walking tour downtown
- Ghost stories
- Vintage scotch and wine tasting
- Sexsmith museum self guided tour
- Provincial wildlife sign tours
- Original Bezanson town site
- Mud bogs
- Newcomers bus tour
- Rotary bus tour
- Self guided cemetery tours
- Saskatoon Island Trail System
- South Peace Museum
- Nature trails
- Art Gallery of Grande Prairie
- Wine tours
- Better than Freds
- "Making my way downtown"

Photo: Travel Alberta



NATURE-BASED ADVENTURE & ECOTOURISM RESOURCES

Spectacular Mountain Views

Provincial Parks & Protected Areas

Mountain Summits – Passport to the Peaks

1,500+ km of Non-Motorized & Mixed-use Trails (Cold & Warm Season)

Alpine and Sub-Alpine Mixed-use (Provincially Unique) & Non-Motorized Trails

700+ km of Water Routes

Sulphur Gates

Campgrounds – Serviced, Unserviced, Backcountry

Major Lakes, Waterfalls and Canyons

Municipal Parks

Diversity of Big Game

Diversity of Sport Fish

NATURE, ADVENTURE & ECOTOURISM

SUMMER SEASON

- Short and easy front-country walks and strolls
- Challenging mid-country hikes (part-day, full day)
- Multi-day backpacking (multi-day, extended outing) in the backcountry
- Easy and more challenging single and multi-day off-highway vehicle adventures (Wapiti Dunes, Grande Cache and Caw Ridge area)
- Trail rides (part-day, full-day) and pack trip expeditions (multi-day)
- Front-country auto-access camping
- Waterfall viewing
- Day and multi-day paddling, rafting & float adventures
- Whitewater paddling and rafting (Sulphur River, Muskeg River, Smoky River)
- Jet boating (part-day, day, multi-day)
- Mountaineering, scrambling & peak bagging (Passport to the Peaks)
- Scenic mountain flights
- Road cycling (day, multi-day)
- Mountain biking and bike pack touring (part-day, full-day, multi-day)
- Drive tours – seasonal RV, motorcycle and other drive tours enroute to Alaska
- River & lake fishing (fly fishing & spin, outfitted, self-guided)
- Big game hunting (outfitted, self-guided)

COLD & SNOWY SEASON

- Nordic skiing
- Downhill skiing & snowboarding
- Snowshoeing
- Short and easy front-country walks and strolls
- Challenging mid-country day hikes
- Fat tire biking
- Ice fishing

BUSINESS, MEETINGS & CONVENTIONS

- International, national, provincial & regional conferences, symposiums, and trade shows & exhibits
- Local event hosting

SPORTS TOURISM

- International, national, provincial & regional sporting events and competitions
- Provincial and regional races, adventure races and ultra marathons

INDIGENOUS

- 5 First Nations & the Aseniwuche Winewak Nation
- Métis Nation of Alberta Regions 4 and 6
- Indigenous Art Gallery
- AWN Indigenous culture camps

CULTURE, HERITAGE & ARTS

- Local, provincial, and headline performing arts and entertainment shows
- Regional food, music, and winter festivals
- Art galleries
- Dinosaur museum interpretive tours
- Museum tours

Tourism Resources

Tourism resources are the foundation of our current tourism offering and they represent our future tourism potential. Tourism resources are the natural, built, and cultural assets upon which and around which tourism experiences are developed, and visitors are immersed. The following sections provide a brief overview of the region's most notable tourism resources.

11.2 NATURE-BASED

Grande Prairie Tourism Region is a highly desired nature-based, adventure and ecotourism destination boasting a wide volume and diversity of nature-based, adventure and ecotourism resources. The region provides outdoor enthusiasts with incredible opportunities to enjoy high mountain peaks, rushing whitewater rivers, calm lakes, horseback riding, hiking, off-highway vehicles, snowmobiling, hunting, fishing and so much more.

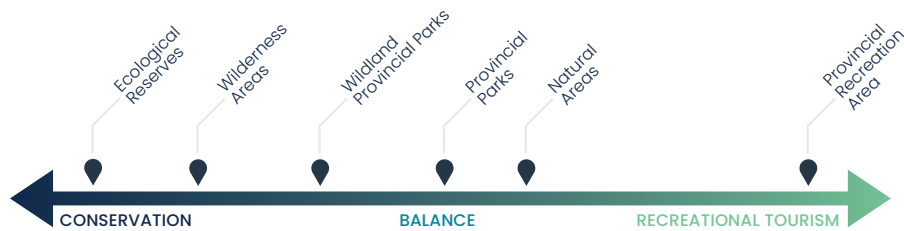


Figure 6: Parks & Protected Areas Classification & Management Objectives

Parks & Protected Areas

Our region contains or provides access to more than 40 provincial parks and protected areas as well as many different municipal parks. Our network of parks provides valuable recreation for residents and, in some cases, memorable experiences for visitors. Most of our provincial parks and protected areas are located near our major highway corridors, enabling easy access for visitors. While the provincial parks and protected areas network within the region represents just 1% of our land base, we are bordered by the world-renowned Jasper National Park as well as the Willmore Wilderness Area and Kakwa Wildland Park which are large contiguous parks that provide world-class nature-based, adventure and ecotourism opportunities. Our network of parks and protected areas are important tourism and recreation assets that deliver some of the most memorable nature-based, adventure, ecotourism, and Indigenous tourism experiences in the region and hold some of the most significant potential to elevate our tourism industry. The many campgrounds within our parks also play an important role in the supply of overnight accommodations in the region.

While important tourism assets, parks in our region are also critical to protecting our sensitive ecosystems, ecosystem processes, wildlife, and sites of cultural and spiritual importance to Indigenous peoples. Parks in this area play an important role in supporting the recovery of species at risk such as Mountain Caribou and Grizzly Bear.

Parks are managed in accordance with their respective park classification (Figure 6).

The park classification is a legislative designation that directs the primary and secondary management intents of each site as well as what can and can not occur on the site in terms of visitor infrastructure and development.





PARKS & PROTECTED AREAS In addition to many local parks and natural areas, large protected spaces bordering the region include Kakwa Wildland Park, Willmore Wilderness Area and Jasper National Park.

Provincial Recreation Areas, such as Sulphur Gates and Smoky River South, are managed to provide opportunities for intensive recreation and tourism which can be developed and delivered by both the public and private sectors. Provincial Parks like Wabamun, William Switzer, Saskatoon Island, Sundance, and Young's Point, which represent much of the total park land-base in the region, are managed to both conserve ecological and cultural values and to provide

recreation and tourism opportunities. The region also contains many Natural Areas. Natural Areas are managed to protect sites of local ecological or cultural significance and provide opportunities for low-impact nature-based recreation and nature appreciation activities.

PROTECTED & SPECIAL NATURAL PLACES

In addition to the overall inventory completed, the members of the GPRTA generated a significant asset list of areas that are important to the membership. Some of these are formal protected spaces while others are local "special places of note". All are listed below.

- Ducks Unlimited – Evergreen Learning Centre
- Kleskun Hill Natural Area / Edson Trail
- Bear Lake
- Kakwa Falls
- Red Willow Falls
- Wapiti Dunes
- Williams Lake Provincial Park
- Kelly's Bathtub
- Sulphur Gates PRA
- Wild Hay Provincial Recreation Area
- Evergreen Ranch
- Old Bezanson Trail
- Hommy Park
- Saskatoon Lake
- Simmonette
- Grovedale fish pond
- Bear Creek
- Nordic Trails
- Spring Lake
- Swan Lake
- Sportsplex fish pond / Muskoseepi Pond (fishing)
- O'Brien Park
- Lost Lake Loop
- Evergreen Park trails
- Crystal Lake trails

Photo: Travel Alberta

11.3 TRAILS & WATER ROUTES

Our trails are among the most significant and popular nature-based, adventure and ecotourism assets in our region. The region contains over 1,500 km of mixed-use and non-motorized trails and approximately 700 km of water routes. Whether it be non-motorized activities such as hiking, mountain biking, fat tire biking, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing or motorized activities such as ATVs, side-by-sides, off-road motorcycles or snowmobiling, our trail network attracts a wide range of visitors. The trail network provides the full range of experiences, from short, easy part-day strolls in the easily accessed front-country, to more challenging full-day outings into the mid-country and much more physically and technically challenging multi-day epic adventures in the remote backcountry. Our network also supports major events such as the internationally acclaimed Canadian Death Race as well as regional trail events and races (e.g., OHV races, snowmobile rallies).

The most popular travel motivating trail networks include:

Motorized Networks:

- Wapiti Dunes, Magoo & Big Mountain Networks – OHV, Off-Road Motorcycle
- Grande Cache – Grande & Flood Mountain, Mount Hamel, Caw Ridge & Beaverdam Road, town trails including Passport to the Peaks network

Non-Motorized Networks:

- Willmore Wilderness Area – Equestrian trail rides, pack trails, rugged backpacking
- William Switzer Provincial Park – hiking
- Nitehawk Adventure Park Mountain Bike Trails
- Wapiti Nordic Centre

In addition to the trails that are within the region, the highway corridors and several key communities along them (e.g., Highway 40 and Grande Cache, Highway 43 and Grande Prairie) serve as critical starting points and staging areas for accessing trails that are immediately adjacent to the region. With good planning and greater efforts, these trail networks, though technically outside of the region, represent significant opportunities to monetize the trail systems and elevate the economic benefits of trails within and adjacent to the region.

While the region holds many trail opportunities and trails are broadly marketed to visitors, it doesn't yet contain any market or export-ready signature trail experiences that put the region on the map for trail tourism. However, with some trails tourism focused attention, networks such as the Grande Cache Canadian Death Race networks (Caw Ridge, Mt Hammel, Flood Mountain and Grande Mountain, Town Trails, Lightning Ridge), Wapiti Dunes network, Golden Triangle network, hold significant potential to become primary travel motivators for longer-haul domestic and, in some cases, international visitors. Recognizing the potential of trails tourism, a Trails Tourism Strategy has been prepared for the Grande Cache trails network and trails management plans are underway for the Wapiti Dunes, Magoo and Big Mountain networks.

Photo: Travel Alberta / Ryan Bray



Water Routes

Whether it be short and easy tubing floats, part-day and full-day canoe and jet boat trips or multi-night rafting expeditions, our rivers provide a wide diversity of river experiences that are enjoyed by locals and visitors from around the province. The most popular river routes with visitors include:

- Athabasca River – paddle, jet boat
- McLeod River – paddle, jet boat, tube
- Smoky River – paddle, jet boat, whitewater rafting
- Sulphur River – whitewater rafting
- Kakwa River – paddle, whitewater rafting
- Muskeg River – paddle
- Wapiti River – paddle, tube, jet boat

Long-Distance Routes

Most notably, the region is a key hub along the Alaska Highway route for visitor driving and cycling to Alaska. This drive route experiences high volumes of visitation as Americans travel between the lower 48 states and Alaska and as Canadians travel to and from Alaska, northern Alberta and British Columbia, the Yukon and the Northwest Territories.

The region is also intersected by long-distance routes designated by third parties that parallel the Rockies and the Great Divide including the Great Divide Trail (hiking) and the Great Divide Mountain Bike Route. While they receive a relatively low volume of use at this time, these routes are promoted worldwide and travelled by visitors from across the globe.

Trails Tourism Readiness

When considered collectively, the density and diversity of our network of non-motorized and mixed-use trails and long-distance routes together with our water routes establish a critical mass of visitor activities and attractions. If purposefully built out, enhanced, supported, and actively maintained and managed, our trails and water routes hold an impressive opportunity to attract further and higher yield visitation and extend the length of stay of visitors. While some trails are regularly maintained, many of the trails in our network exist on past industrial access that was never intended to become a long-term recreation and tourism asset. The quality, condition, and sustainability of our trails as well as the amenities that support trail visitation can vary significantly.

Deliberate effort is needed to elevate the tourism readiness of our trails and water routes. Focused attention is required to ensure that visitation to the region motivated by our trails is further monetized to increase economic benefits from this visitation and better ensure the network can be well-managed and maintained.

TRAILS & TRAIL SYSTEMS

In addition to the overall inventory completed, the members of the GPRTA generated a significant asset list of Trails and Trail Systems that are important to the membership. All are listed below.

- | | | | |
|---|--|--|------------------------------------|
| • Two Lakes & the Kakwa | • Waxwing trails – south bear creek | • Saddle Hills | • Rock Lake |
| • Musreau Lake (boating, paddle boarding) | • Saskatoon Lake / Mount. Trails | • Iosegun | • Blue Lake Centre |
| • Young's Point (fishing, x-c ski trails, fat-biking) | • Dunes Trail system – recreation area | • Snowmobile trails near Fox Creek | • Spring Lake |
| • Evergreen Park – hiking, dog sled tours | • Simonette | • Wilmore Wilderness Park | • Beaver Dam Road – grading – camp |
| • Nordic Trails (summer & winter) | • Big Mountain | • Kakwa Wildland Park | • Jackbird pond |
| • Sulphur Gates | • Pipestone | • Sexsmith trails (summer/ winter) | • Hilltop Lake |
| • Kleskun Hill | • Moonshine Lake | • Big Mountain Creek snowmobile trails | • Sturgeon Lake |
| • Nitehawk to O'Brien PP | • Meadow & Swan Lake | • Old Bezanson townsite | • Wapiti River |
| • Dunvegan Prov. Park | • Red Willow Falls & Park | • Passport to the Peaks (GC) | • Cutbank Lake |
| • Muskoseepi trails | • Williamson Lake | • Pierre Grey's Lakes trail system | |
| | • Bear Lake | | |

“

Trail Tourism Readiness

Is the reliability and confidence that a destination's trail tourism ecosystem can ensure a quality and consistent experience. It is a rating of how ready a trail, or network, is to welcome visitors, to be promoted as a travel-motivating tourism attraction and to ensure a positive visitor experience.

– Trans Canada Trail's Trail Tourism Readiness Guidelines

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11.4 INDIGENOUS TOURISM

Since time immemorial, our region has been home to Indigenous peoples. In Treaty 6 and 8 Territories, the region includes reserve lands and traditional territories of the following First Nations:

- Sturgeon Lake First Nation No. 154
- Alexander First Nation No. 134A
- Alexis Whitecourt No. 232
- Alexis No. 133
- Wabamun No. 133A
- Paul First Nation
- Horse Lake First Nation
- Sucker Creek First Nation
- Kapawe'no First Nation

The region is also home to the Aseniwuche Winewak Nation and its co-operatives whose traditional territory in the region generally extends from Hinton north to Grovedale.

The region is also within the Métis Nation of Alberta Regions 4 and 6. Métis traditional territories and settlements in the region include:

- Paddle Prairie Métis Settlement
- Gift Lake Métis Settlement
- Peavine Métis Settlement
- East Prairie Métis Settlement

Métis organizations in the region include:

- Mountain Métis – Grovedale
- Métis Local 1990 – Grande Prairie and Region

First Nations and Métis communities in the region have a long, proud, and rich history that continues today. Authentic experiences that feature the historic and modern ways of life, heritage and cultures of Indigenous peoples are of great appeal to our target markets. And while the potential to grow travel-motivating Indigenous tourism experiences in the region is high, the region currently contains a limited supply of authentic Indigenous-owned and operated tourism resources.

The region's most known Indigenous tourism resources, as promoted by Indigenous Tourism Alberta, include:

- Indigenous fixed roof and mobile accommodation providers
- Grant Berg Gallery
- Indian Trail Adventures equestrian outfitters
- Open Road Adventures
- AWN culture camp
- Indigenous artisans
- Grande Prairie Pow Wow

Authentic Indigenous tourism, when delivered and supported by local Indigenous peoples, represents an opportunity to further diversify and enhance the visitor offering. There is great opportunity, and indeed a need, to further ensure that the past and current stories and ways of life of Indigenous peoples are creatively and authentically integrated into every visitor experience that is delivered in the region. However, this must be done by and with the support and approval of Indigenous peoples.

Photo: Indigenous Tourism Alberta / Roam Creative





11.5 CULTURE, HERITAGE & ARTS

Our region is steeped in heritage about the original Indigenous Nations, early settlements, fur trade and explorers, industry exploration and development. Our extensive network of museums, with our many historic places, was developed to invite visitors and share the stories of our natural, cultural, settlement and industrial heritage. As a region, we also embrace and share our passion for the arts through our many live events hosted at our performing art centres, our local artists featured in our art galleries, and our vibrant calendar of concerts and festivals.

The region contains approximately:

- 8 Performing Arts & Cultural Centres & Art Galleries
- 18 Museums
- 3 internationally and nationally significant dinosaur and fossil beds, including one of the densest dinosaur fossil sites in the world
- Fur trade history
- Largest exposure of a mass dinosaur track site in Canada
- Meteorite impact crater historic resource
- 16 provincially registered historic resources (e.g., grain elevators, churches, barns, farms, homesteads)

Culture, heritage and arts tourism resources are distributed across the region. Grande Prairie, as the major urban centre, is the region's hub for these types of offerings. Our culture, heritage and arts assets and the experiences they offer draw residents and visitors to be awed and entertained and to learn how to enrich their understanding and appreciation of our heritage. They play an important role in the tourism economy and create positive impacts within a community.

The region's culture, heritage and arts landscape is very diverse with many different groups and organizations working to protect, develop and share our experiences through a wide range of arts, culture and heritage festivals and events. The groups deliver many well-attended and locally enjoyed festivals and events throughout the region each year. However, higher-yield events and festivals that motivate travel from across the province, adjacent provinces and beyond tend to be limited.

The most popular travel-motivating and regularly occurring events and festivals include:

- Grande North Winter Festival – Grande Prairie
- Bear Creek Folk Festival – Grande Prairie
- Fiddlers Jamboree – Grande Prairie
- Grande Prairie Highland Games – Grande Prairie
- Stompede Rodeo
- Grande Prairie Pow Wow

Photo: Room Creative

CULTURE, HERITAGE & ARTS ASSETS

In addition to the overall inventory completed, the members of the GPRTA generated a significant asset list of Culture, Heritage and Arts resources that are important to the membership. All are listed below.

Arts/Culture/Heritage Resources:

- The Phillip J Currie is the home to largest horned dinosaur bonebed in the world – the home of Pachyrhinosaurus lakusta.
- The Art Gallery of Grande Prairie is one of the largest free admission galleries in Western Canada, the second largest art gallery in Alberta.
- Grant Berg Gallery is the region's premier commercial art gallery
- Grande Prairie Live Theatre is one of Canada's largest non-profit community theatre companies.
- Grande Prairie Museum and Heritage Village: Premier Art Gallery
- Old Bezanson Town Site: Local culture and History
- Forbes Homestead and Pioneer Hospital: Contains the original log structure built in 1911 that was used as the first hospital in Grande Prairie.
- McNaught Homestead Preservation Society: registered with Canada's Historic Places
- Telus Story Hive
- Eastlink TV
- Virtual Speaker Series
- Documentaries, Podcasts
- Peace Country News
- South Peace Regional Archives
- Grant Berg Gallery
- Centre for creative arts
- Art Gallery GP
- GP Live Theatre
- GP Museum / Heritage Village
- Kleskun Museum

11.6 DINOSAUR FOSSILS

In addition to our many arts and culture resources and events, the region contains several internationally and nationally significant dinosaur and fossil beds. These include the Pipestone Bonebed which is one of the densest mass fossil sites in the world. The Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum which is a world-class paleontology museum with innovative exhibit galleries, classrooms, theatre, and research lab, exposes visitors to the significance and stories of Pipestone Bonebed. The dinosaur track site, located 20 km north of Grande Cache, is the only large-scale exposure of dinosaur tracks in Canada with continuous tracks extending over 600m on a rock wall exceeding 50m in height. While there has long been interest, this site is not yet been developed to be shared with the public or integrated into existing tourism experiences and represents a tremendous opportunity for Grande Cache tourism. The trackways are located on a coal mine site, which heavily restricts access. This, and the distance of the sites from a paved roadway, is why the trackways have not yet been developed.

The physical cultural, heritage and arts attractions outside of the City of Grande Prairie are important as well and the integration of these assets into authentic and memorable visitor experiences is also underdeveloped. Our heritage and cultural stories are rich and of deep interest to our target markets and our dinosaur and fossil beds are nationally and internationally significant and of great interest to our target markets. Where supported, there is great opportunity to further ensure these stories and places are elevated and creatively and authentically integrated into every visitor experience that is delivered in the region.

Photo: Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum





11.7 BUSINESS MEETINGS & CONVENTIONS

The GPTR is also a destination for major trade shows, conventions, conferences, and other business events. Many of these major business meetings, conventions and events are hosted in Grande Prairie. Offering 115,000 square feet of meeting space, Evergreen Park in Grande Prairie is the largest and most-used full-featured exhibition and major event facility north of Edmonton. The venue hosts a wide variety of agricultural, petroleum, forestry, truck, home, sports as well as smaller conferences, symposiums and workshops and dinners each year. The site also contains a 2,700-seat grandstand and one of the best racetracks in Canada. The grounds are also capable of catering major outdoor events of up to 10,000 people. In addition to Evergreen Park, the Bowes Event Centre at Bonnetts Energy Centre provides 18,000 square feet of versatile exhibit space. Eighteen (18) of Grande Prairie's hotels offer 40 different meeting spaces ranging in size from 240 square feet up to 7,500 square feet. At 13,390 square feet, the Pomeroy Hotel and Conference Centre contain the largest total hotel-based event space in Grande Prairie. In addition to hotels, the Ingram Event Centre hosts small corporate events, conferences, workshops and private functions.

Outside of Grande Prairie, meeting and convention spaces in the region's larger municipal centres are limited.

11.8 SPORT TOURISM

Attracting and hosting sports tourism events brings important benefits to communities and businesses. Our region contains over 27 diverse sporting facilities including numerous competition quality facilities such as multi-purpose sportsplexes, NHL-sized arenas, indoor sport courts and gymnasiums, baseball and softball diamonds, synthetic and natural turf rectangular fields, track and field spaces, 18-hole golf courses, Nordic ski clubs, mountain bike parks and downhill ski and adventure parks. Among the most well-known sports tourism assets in the region include:

- Eastlink Centre – Grande Prairie
- Design Works Centre NHL-sized ice arenas – Grande Prairie
- Bonnetts Energy Centre Arena – Grande Prairie
- Northwestern Polytechnic Gymnasium – Grande Prairie
- South Bear Creek Baseball Diamond
- Complex – Grande Prairie
- Evergreen Park – Grande Prairie
- Nitehawk Year-Round Adventure Park – Grande Prairie
- Grande Cache Trail System & Canadian Death Race Trail Network
- Grande Cache Aquatics Centre

Photo: SkiNorthAB / Paul Lavoie

SPORTS EVENT FACILITIES

The Grande Prairie Tourism Region includes a total of 27 sports facilities. Highlights include:

- Eastlink Centre includes a 400-metre outdoor skating area. Inside includes a 50-metre competition pool, 25 metre program pool, Aquaterasaurus Lan (dinosaur themed water park). Hot Tub, Multi purpose room, Meeting rooms, Fieldhouse and Servus Court (used for organized sports), fitness studio and Centre, Flow-Rider (surf simulator), Indoor Walk/Run Track, Lazy River, Squash and Racquetball Courts, Steam Room and Sauna, Log Walk Tree House, Wading Pool, Waterslides, and Dive Tower.
- Coca-Cola Centre has Twin NHL-sized ice arenas; with seating for over 1,600 spectators.
- Bonnetts Energy Centre is a 2,960-seat multi-purpose arena in Grande Prairie. It is home to the Grande Prairie Storm of the Alberta Junior Hockey League.
- Crosslink County Sportsplex is one of the largest in Alberta with over 500,000 people visiting this year-round soccer facility.
- Equine City-GP Farrier Supplies Ltd. offers "Full Care" services to owners and equine enthusiasts and is one of the only providers in the area. There is a Veterinary equine with medical staff on-site.
- The Fun Park Indoor Trampoline Park is the only indoor trampoline park in Grande Prairie.
- Gordon Badger Stadium & J.D.A. Raceway – Evergreen Park is the only facility in Canada hosting equine and motorsport training and events and is considered one of the best and safest in North America. Also hosts rodeos, monster trucks, horsemanship competitions, tractor pulls, sled dog racing and many more events throughout the year.
- Hythe Motor Speedway host to highly popular weekend motorsport events including several local classes and races in various categories, i.e. Mini Sprints, Mini Stocks, Starter Stocks, Street Stocks, and IMCA Modifieds.

The City of Grande Prairie has a 2012 sport tourism strategy which is in the process of being updated and the GPRTA will be supporting those efforts. The region provides easy access to a diversity of quality facilities that attract major sporting events. Most of these major international, national, and provincial sport tourism events have been hosted in Grande Prairie including:

- | | |
|---|---|
| • Canada Winter Games | • Skating Championships |
| • Alberta Winter and Summer Games and Special Olympics Winter Games | • Provincial Boxing Championships |
| • Arctic Winter Games | • Provincial Curling Championships, Canada Cup of Curling & Scotties Tournament of Hearts |
| • Grand Slam of Curling | • Freestyle Skiing Provincial Competition & Snowboard Provincial Competition |
| • Professional Bull Riding Canada Elite Cup Series | • Regional Downhill Mountain Bike races |
| • Provincial Baseball and Fastball Championships | • Alberta Cup Nordic Ski Events and Alberta Biathlon Championships |
| • Disc Golf Provincials | • Off the Grid Adventure Race |
| • Gymnastics Provincial Championships | |
| • Canada West Short Track Speed | |

Another major sport tourism events that are regularly hosted outside of the Grande Prairie area include the Canadian Death Race – one of the world's toughest ultra marathons held in the Grande Cache area.



Photo: Room Creative

EVENTS & FESTIVALS

In addition to the overall inventory completed, the members of the GPRTA generated a significant list of Events and Festivals that are important to the membership. All are listed below.

- Bear Creek Folk Festival
- Econoline Crush
- Grande Prairie Highland Games
- Grande Prairie Stompede
- Grande Prairie Street Performers Festival
- Hunt Mania Gun & Sportsman Show
- Hythe Agricultural Fair
- Mackee Classic Car Show & Auction
- Northern Spirit Light Show
- Savanna Annual Fair
- The Horses At Evergreen Park
- The Tea Party – Black River Tour
- Universal Children's Day Celebration
- Vitaemo Ukrainian Festival
- Vegas night
- Downtown Association events
- Comic Con
- Weiner dog races
- Festival of Trees
- Ribfest
- Beer festival
- Demo Derby Wembley
- Mud bogs
- Street performers
- Northern lights show
- Festival of trees
- Night market
- Horse races
- Grande North
- AB Culture Days
- Wearable Arts
- NWP Symphonies
- Reel Shorts Film Festival
- Banff Film Festival
- Cavalcade Theatre Co
- Teepee Creek Rodeo
- Chautauqua Day, Sexsmith
- Heritage Days
- Sundays in the Park
- Round Dance
- Toyonka
- Rotary IT Day
- Paleo Palooza

INFRASTRUCTURE ASSETS

GPRTA also generated an inventory of key infrastructure that is important to the membership. All are listed below.

- Evergreen Park includes: J.D.A. Raceway and hosts rodeos, monster trucks, horsemanship competitions, tractor pulls, sled dog racing and others, concerts, popular trade shows, graduations and other events.
- Bonnetts Energy Centre – Concert venue/sports facilities
- Airport
- Rodeo grounds
- Racetrack
- Dragstrip
- Multiplex / sportsplex / Eastlink
- Valleyview multiplex
- Baseball park
 - Eastlink
 - Evergreen
- Casinos
- Bonnett's Centre
- Simonette Camp
- Bee Diagnostic Centre
- Visitor Info Centres
- Indoor Riding
- Downtown Sexsmith
- Churches
- Demmit Hall
- Equine X-country (FEI))
- Pipestone Bonebed (incl. trails)
- Community Ponds And Playgrounds
- Hwy 43 & 40
- Design Works Centre
- Disc Golf courses x3
- Knelson Centre
- Track
- Legion Field
- Source Energy Centre
- Muskoseepi Park
- Nitehawk
- Curling Rink
- Hospital x3 – big and small
- NWP – Architectural feature
- Recreation facilities
- Wapiti Nordic Ski Club
- Mini golf
- Pickleball courts
- Outdoor courts – tennis, basketball
- Dog parks
- Soccer pitch
- Beach volleyball centre or courts
- Bike skills parks
- Skate parks
- Spray parks
- Arcadia
- All rectangular field / sport fields
- Ball diamond
- Crosslink Sportsplex
- Arenas
- Saskatoon Island / YP day use shelters for rentals
- Golf courses
- Roadways
- Boat Launches
- Bridges (across the Peace River)
- Shaftsbury Ferry
- Bad Heart Straw Church
- 3 disc golf courses

11.9 ACCOMMODATIONS

Visitors to the region are diverse and they demand a diverse mix of accommodations. As such, it is important to understand our current mix of accommodation options and ensure this mix continues to, or is further developed to, meet visitor expectations.

Fixed roof accommodation capacity is mostly concentrated along the major highway corridors and within the developed communities. All hotels, motels and inns are rated at 3 stars or lower with several being 2 stars. With easy access from the busy highway corridors, a large portion of our fixed roof accommodation capacity is occupied nightly by resource industry workers and/or the transportation industry. In addition to hotels, motels and inns, approximately 60 properties are listed on AirBnB and approximately 40 properties are listed on VRBO. The western portions of the region along Highway 40 offer visitors several overnight guest ranches focused on western culture and equestrian experiences.

The supply of public and private sector campgrounds is substantial and, like fixed roof accommodation, is largely concentrated adjacent to the major highways. While provincial campgrounds are targeting tourism and recreational campers, many of the smaller, near highway, private sector campgrounds as well as community campgrounds are targeting resource development sector workers or are occupied seasonally with long-term rentals. While significant in number, the diversity of camping opportunities are limited and provide traditional low-service level offerings with few opportunities for higher-yield comfort camping. In addition, many of the campgrounds are isolated or disconnected from the region's most popular trail networks and nature-based, adventure and ecotourism attractions.

In general, the diversity of our accommodation supply is limited with much of the supply being represented by roadside fixed-roof accommodations such as hotels, motels, and inns. Authentic, unique, and higher-yield overnight accommodations such as boutique resorts are limited, as is the supply of modern, innovative, and memorable comfort camping. The limited diversity and lack of higher-yield boutique accommodation options is recognized by industry as a constraint to enabling and supporting further tourism development.



Photo: Room Creative



ACCOMMODATIONS, FOOD & BEVERAGE

In addition to the overall inventory completed, the members of the GPRTA generated the following list of Accommodations, Food & Beverage providers that are important to the region. All are listed below.

- Sheep Creek Back Country Lodge
- 30 Roofed Accommodations (13 Inns & Suites, 7 Motels, 9 Hotels, 1 Condo/Suites)
- Numerous B&B and VRBO listings in the region
- 42 campgrounds across the region, varying in amenities, size, features and activities available
- Happy Trails cabins/camping
- Glamping – Open Road Adventures
- Curling Rink Restaurant
- Better than Fred's
- Valhalla Mercantile
- Earl's
- Fourteen 14 Food Company Ltd.
- Old Smokes Coffee
- Milk Tea Corner
- Smitty's
- Petals on Main Flower Shop & Bistro, Beaver Lodge
- Sunrise Diner, Beaver Lodge
- Soto
- Aurora Sushi, Grande Cache
- Casinos
- Ramona's
- Frontier Eatery & Seafood
- German restaurant, Valleyview
- Local food trucks
- Wonderland
- Obi-wan Perogie
- Monster Lobster
- Joosed Moose Winery
- Stolen Harvest
- Off the Wheaten Path
- Owls
- The Keg
- Maddhatters
- Latitude 55
- The Office
- Jeffrey's Cafe
- Broken Tine
- Town Centre Golf
- Crooked Creek doughnuts
- Lefty's Cafe & Catering
- Bear Creek Golf
- Majors
- Nitehawk
- Grain Bin
- Scotty's Burger Shack
- Café on 43
- Crumbs Café, Sexsmith
- Padrinos
- Mother Dough Bread Co
- Cards Café
- Divine
- Tayo
- Cowbella's Cafe
- Tito's
- Wild Rose Cabin
- Farmers' Markets (regional)
- 92 Beverage Co.
- Crabbie Goat
- Purple Crumbs
- Grovedale Golf Course Restaurant
- Little Ava Pizza
- Red Rock

Photo: Room Creative

12 VISITOR AMENITIES & SERVICES

12.1 SERVICE & AMENITY CENTRES

Grande Prairie is the major visitor amenity and service centre. The community provides visitors with all the amenities and services they might require – hospital, grocery stores, fuel, retail outlets, equipment retailers and repair mechanics, financial services, vehicle and equipment (e.g., OHV) rentals and entertainment (e.g., amusement parks, theme parks, science centre). Grande Prairie's culinary scene is diverse, ranging from high-end fine dining, casual dining, pub fare at a microbrewery or fast-food take-out.

While Grande Prairie is the largest visitor service and amenity centre, all towns, as well as some of the hamlets, in the region are visitor service and amenity centres. While the range of services in these communities are less than that of Grande Prairie, most of them offer a range of food and beverage options (restaurants, cafés, fast food, grocery store, liquor and beer), fuel, small retail including outdoor gear and equipment retailers (outdoor, hunting, etc.), vehicle and equipment repair and mechanics (e.g. RV, off-highway vehicle, bicycles), laundry and showers, RV dump stations, and financial services.

12.2 GROUND TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

Ground transportation services to and within the region include car rentals, bus charters, vehicles for hire and, in the larger urban centers, public transit (Grande Prairie). Car rentals from major national companies can be acquired in Grande Prairie or Edmonton. Taxicabs service the larger urban centers in the region.

Private bus services are available daily between Edmonton and Grande Prairie and is provided by Cold Shot and Ebus. Depending on the provider, the service includes stops in Fox Creek and Valleyview. There is bus service twice a week between Grande Cache and Grande Prairie, and Sun Dog provides transport services between Edmonton-Edson-Hinton-Jasper.

12.3 GUIDING & TOUR OPERATOR SERVICES

Visitors to the region can access a diversity of guiding services and tour operators including:

- Hiking Guides & Tours
- River (paddling, rafting, whitewater) Guides & Tours
- Equestrian Outfitters and Guides, Tours & Expeditions
- Off-highway Vehicle Guides
- Fishing & Hunting Guides
- Sled Dog Guides

Much of these services are focused in and around Grande Cache and Grande Prairie.

Recreational Equipment Rentals

The availability of recreational equipment rentals such as bicycles, mountain bikes, e-bikes, off-highway vehicles (ATV, side-by-sides), canoes, paddle boards, and kayaks varies widely between the visitor service and amenity centers in the region. Grande Prairie provides the broadest supply of recreational equipment rental services in the region.



Photo: Room Creative



13 ACCESS

By Road

The major visitor gateways into our region include Edmonton in the east, Jasper National Park in the west and the famous Alaska Highway and British Columbia border in the north. By vehicle, most visitors access and travel throughout the area on Highways 16, 43 and 40. Next to the Trans Canada Highway, Highway 16, also known as the Yellowhead Highway, is Alberta's busiest east-west corridor connecting central and northern Alberta to British Columbia and Saskatchewan via Edmonton. A mostly four-lane highway, daily traffic volumes on Highway 16 range from approximately 14,000 (weighted annual average daily traffic (WAADT)) near Wabamun Lake to the east of Edmonton to just over 6,000 WAADT just outside of Hinton. The western portions of the highway are very scenic with impressive mountain views while the remainder of the highway travels through Alberta's Foothills and Parkland natural regions.

Highway 43 connects Edmonton to Fox Creek, Valleyview, Grande Prairie and then on to northern British Columbia and the famous Alaska Highway. Twinned from the Highway 16 junction to Beaverlodge, daily traffic volumes vary significantly across the Highway ranging from approximately 12,000 WAADT near the Highway 16 junction to 6,500 just east of Grande Prairie to just 3,500 at the British Columbia border. While largely developed in nature, the highway provides visitors with views of Alberta's boreal and parkland natural regions.

Highway 40 is the most significant roadway in the western portion of the region and is the least travelled, but potentially most scenic, highway in the region. Highway 40 traverses the front ranges of the Rocky Mountains and the foothills natural regions. Daily traffic rates range from 1,200 WAADT near Hinton, to 1,300 WAADT at Grande Cache to 3,800 WAADT south of Grande Prairie. Traffic volumes along this highway are heavily influenced by industrial traffic associated with the resource sector.

By Air

Serving as the aviation gateway to Alberta's and British Columbia's Peace Region, the Grande Prairie Regional Airport is the only major airport in the region. The airport provides daily direct flights to Edmonton and Calgary offering one-stop connections for long-haul domestic and international visitors. While not directly in the region, the Edmonton International Airport is a short 1-hour drive from the eastern portions of the region and serves as a gateway for long-haul domestic and international visitors. Local air strips in Valleyview, Grande Cache (decommissioned), and Fox Creek offer general and private aviation and commercial charter operations. Tourism specific aviation tours are marketed and available in Grande Prairie.

Photo: Room Creative

14 TOURISM SETTINGS

Understanding the distribution of tourism settings in the region is fundamental to understanding our supply of tourism experiences. It is also critical to ensuring we plan tourism experiences in settings that are most desired by our visitors and can help them find those settings. Some markets are looking for remote backcountry areas that offer opportunities for isolation, the ability to disconnect with few services and encounters with other visitors. Other visitors are looking for relatively natural settings that are easier to access, closer to services and offer the opportunity to interact with greater numbers of people, while others desire a highly urban developed setting with all the comforts and conveniences of home. These demands are known as recreation and tourism settings. Alberta's Recreation and Tourism Opportunity Spectrum is a system for classifying and displaying the distribution of the recreation and tourism settings available in the province.

No matter the desired setting, the Grande Prairie Tourism Region offers them all. In fact, 75% of our region is classified as front-country, 19% is mid-country, and 6% is backcountry. The eastern and northern portions of the region along Highways 16 and 43 are dominated by developed and front-country settings where visitors encounter more developed, busier, and less natural landscapes. The western portions of the region along the Highway 40 corridor and Willmore Wilderness Area are dominated by mid-country and backcountry settings where visitors have an opportunity for greater isolation and the landscapes are much less developed and more intact.

15 SCENIC RESOURCES

Scenery imprints a destination in visitors' minds. These scenic resources and viewsapes are the essential backdrop of so many of the region's tourism offerings. The western portions of the region are among the most scenic and beautiful in the province providing expansive views of the front ranges of the Rocky Mountains and undulating rugged foothills. The eastern portions immerse visitors in the scenery of Alberta's parklands, dominated by agriculture and rural residential development. However, much of the interior portions of the region are heavily modified by forestry and oil and gas developments which dominate these viewsapes.

Alberta's Scenic Resource Assessment indicates that nearly 10% of our region is ranked as having high to very high scenic value. These areas are around Grande Cache, the Highway 40 corridor and around the region's larger lakes and river valleys (e.g., Athabasca, Smoky, Wapiti). In keeping with heavily modified landscapes in the east, over 40% of the region is classified as moderate scenic value. 47% of the region is classified as low to very low scenic value reflecting areas of intensive industrial development.

Our scenic resources are a critical pillar of our current tourism industry and fundamental to our tourism future. We understand and recognize that our scenic resources must be actively and wisely managed to ensure they are able to continue to deliver everlasting memories and wow factor impressions on our visitors.

Photo: Travel Alberta / Victor Aerden





16 RESIDENT SENTIMENT & SUPPORT FOR TOURISM IN THE REGION

Inconsistent findings are identified when investigating resident sentiment towards tourism in the Grande Prairie Tourism Region. Travel Alberta's *2021 Resident Sentiment Survey* and subsequent *2022 Resident Sentiment Summer Pulse Report* surveyed residents of the "Rural North" region of which the Grande Prairie Tourism Region is a large part. The results were somewhat contradictory but clearly expose a gap in the perception of many residents towards tourism in their region. On one hand, residents in the region were significantly less likely than average Albertans to feel that tourism creates traffic congestion, makes it harder for residents to enjoy local attractions, and increases the cost of living for residents. Residents were also more likely than average Albertans to welcome visitors to their region from elsewhere in Alberta, elsewhere in Canada, the USA, or other countries.

66% would like the tourism numbers in the region to **Increase**.

Most importantly, most residents (66%) would like tourism numbers in the region to increase, with 69% wanting to see more summer visitors and 65% wanting to see more visitors arrive in winter. Reflecting some of the negative perceptions residents have of tourism, the same respondents were more likely than average Albertans to feel that tourism causes higher taxes, makes it harder to find affordable housing and may threaten local infrastructure.

While all the residents saw tourism as important to the Alberta economy as a whole, only 56% saw tourism as important to their own community. Where the gap really becomes striking is their attitude towards perceiving their community/region as a legitimate tourism destination that has strong tourism values. While the residents of this region were the most likely (95%) to say good things about their community and were twice as likely to do so without being asked, only 17% of the residents in the region said they would recommend to others to visit their community. These same residents also gave their region the lowest rating of any region in the province when it came to having unique experiences. This gap in "pride in place" is a key challenge for the GPRTA.

Residents are inevitably the best, or worst, ambassadors for a destination. Resident sentiment remains one of the great challenges to tourism development across the province. It should come as little surprise that the survey also showed that the more awareness of tourism and knowledge residents had of the benefits of tourism the more predisposed they were to have a positive view of tourism in their region. Stakeholders in the region have stated repeatedly that there is support for tourism development amongst most residents if it can be shown to result in a vibrant visitor economy and adds to the residents' overall quality of life.

To that end, there are several action items in the Strategy that attempt to address this gap and educate residents, increasing their knowledge of the tremendous tourism opportunities in their communities, with the hope that this will inspire a greater belief that the region is a valued tourism destination.

Photo: Travel Alberta



Photo: Travel Alberta / Roth & Ramberg



17 DESTINATION ECOSYSTEM

Successful tourism destination development recognizes that we all have a role to play. The GPRTA is not intended to work in isolation or disregard the existing strategies, plans, policies or planning framework that already exists. Rather, this planning process brought tourism stakeholders to the table to work within the context of wider policies and planning efforts.

Successful networks represent clusters of businesses and organizations that are encouraged to collaborate and work together to capitalize on an opportunity and bring the plan to fruition. As such, this plan has been built on a foundation of alignment and collaboration with federal, provincial, regional and local organizations, and available resources. It is only through working collaboratively in the continued planning and implementation of the plan can the true potential of the zone be realized.

Table 1 lists the organizations that are part of the tourism ecosystem for the Grande Prairie Tourism Region and represent potential partners who may help to execute the action plan items found later in this report:

18 GOVERNANCE

In the development of this plan multiple stakeholder engagements were held that lead to a series of action items to achieve the goals and grow tourism in this region. Core to achieving success for the region will be the ability of various stakeholders, entities and/or groups to work together to collectively execute each action item. In the Grande Prairie Tourism Region, the new Northern Rockies Tourism Advisory Committee, the Grande Prairie Regional Tourism Association and the MD of Greenview have been identified as the organizations to lead the execution of the action items and the identification of key stakeholder organizations from the adjacent Table 1 deemed necessary for their implementation.

Photo: Room Creative

TABLE 1: TOURISM DESTINATION ECOSYSTEM ORGANIZATIONS INFLUENCING TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE GRANDE PRAIRIE TOURISM REGION**NATIONAL**

- Government of Canada:
 - Destination Canada
 - Western Economic Diversification
 - Parks Canada
 - Canadian Heritage
 - Public Works and Government Services Canada
 - Prairies Economic Development Canada
- Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada
- Tourism Industry Association of Canada
- Canadian Inbound Tourism Association
- Tourism HR Canada
- Canadian Federation of Independent Business
- Canadian Restaurant and Food Services Association

INDIGENOUS

- The Northern Rockies falls on Treaties Six and Treaty Eight land and is home to the:
- Alexander First Nation
 - Alexis Nakota Sioux First Nation
 - Paul First Nation
 - Sucker Creek First Nation
 - Horse Lake First Nation
 - Duncan's First Nation
 - Kapawe'no First Nation
 - Aseniwuche Winewak Nation
 - Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation
 - East Prairie Métis Settlement and Mountain Métis

PROVINCIAL

- Government of Alberta:
 - Travel Alberta
 - Forestry, Parks and Tourism
 - Affordability and Utilities
 - Agriculture and Irrigation
 - Culture
 - Energy
 - Environment and Protected Areas
 - Indigenous Relations
 - Infrastructure
 - Jobs, Economy and Northern Development
 - Technology and Innovation
 - Trade, Immigration and Multiculturalism
 - Transportation and Economic Corridors
- Alberta Bed & Breakfast Assc
- Alberta Chambers of Commerce
- Alberta Country Vacations Assc
- Alberta Farmers' Market Assc
- Alberta Hotel and Lodging Assc
- Alberta Outfitters Association
- Alberta Recreation and Parks Association (ARPA)
- Business Council of Alberta
- Economic Developers Alberta
- Indigenous Tourism Alberta
- Invest Alberta

REGIONAL

- The County of Grande Prairie #1
- Saddle Hills County
- Municipal District of Greenview No. 16
- Northern Alberta Bilingual Tourism Network
- Alberta Northern Rockies Tourism Alliance
- Community Futures West Yellowhead
- Edmonton International Airport Authority
- Tourism Jasper
- Explore Edmonton Corporation
- Northern Rockies Tourism Advisory Committee

LOCAL

- Grande Prairie Airport
- The City of Grande Prairie
- Town of Beaverlodge
- Town of Valleyview
- Town of Wembley
- Town of Fox Creek
- Town of Sexsmith
- The Downtown Association of Grande Prairie
- Grande Prairie Sport Connection
- Local Business Owners & Operators
- Willmore Wilderness Foundation
- Northwestern Polytechnic
- Grande Cache Chamber of Commerce
- Trail Operators & Organizations
- Recreation Organizations



19 DESTINATION ANALYSIS

19.1 LAND ACCESS, USE & MANAGEMENT

As we chart a future path for tourism, we must do so with keen attention to the land management direction that has been set by federal, provincial, municipal and Indigenous governments and with awareness of other land uses and patterns in the region. We must also focus directly on addressing and resolving known land access and land use constraints that can serve as a barrier to the success of the tourism industry. To inform our planning, an analysis of existing land management direction and land use patterns was undertaken from a tourism development perspective and critical land use and access constraints were identified and are summarized below.

19.2 PROVINCIAL

Key findings from the analysis of provincial land management direction and land use patterns include:

- Nearly 80% of the GPTR is Crown Land which is owned and managed by the government of Alberta for the benefit of all Albertans. 79% of the region is managed as Public Lands under Public Lands Act and the remaining 1% are managed as parks, recreation areas or ecological reserves under the Provincial Parks Act or Wilderness Areas, Ecological Reserves, Natural Areas, and Heritage Range Lands Act.
- Public Lands in the region support a wide range of other values such as conservation, Indigenous traditional use and resource development. Resource development in the region is intensive. Much of Public Lands are subject to industrial disposition for oil and gas, coal, sand and gravel extraction and subject to forest management agreements.
- Tourism and recreational use and development of Public Lands in the region are managed in accordance with the following provincial Integrated Resource Plans and Regional Integrated Decisions and Management Plans:
 - A Policy for Resource Management of the Eastern Slopes Policy
 - Bear River-Wapiti Local Integrated Resource Plan & Wapiti Sand Dunes Land Use Zones
 - Coal Branch Sub-Regional Integrated Resource Plan
 - Sturgeon Lake-Puskwaskau East Sub-Regional Integrated Resource Plan

79% of the region is public land managed in accordance with the **Public Lands Act**.

The most notable implications on tourism from these plans include:

- The Eastern Slopes Policy indicates the highest “priority in management of the Eastern Slopes is watershed management. Recreation and tourism benefits from private and public sectors are also extremely important”.
- The vast majority of the region’s Public Lands have been zoned as “multiple use” by the Eastern Slopes Policy which “provides for the management and development of the full range of available resources while meeting the objectives for watershed management and environmental protection”. This zoning means that any tourism development within it will occur with the full range of other resource sectors which may or may not be compatible with tourism.
- The Eastern Slopes policy designates “General Recreation Zones” on the Athabasca, Smoky, Kakwa and Little Smoky Rivers, Obed Lake, Sundance Lake, Crooked Lake, Grande Cache Lake, Victor Lake and lands on the eastern boundary of Jasper National Park. The intent of General Recreation Zones is to retain a variety of natural environments within which a wide range of outdoor recreation opportunities may be provided, including commercial development which serves the general public.

Photo: Travel Alberta

- The development of commercial tourism and recreation facilities / activities, particularly by the private sector, on public land is one of the primary objectives of the Wapiti Dunes as established in the Bear River-Wapiti Local Integrated Resource Plan & Wapiti Sand Dunes Land Use Zones. The plan and subsequent provincial land use zoning provide strong support for well-managed OHV trail use and development in the planning area. Protection of unique, representative, and sensitive ecological features and systems are also a key objective.
- The Sturgeon Lake-Puskwaskau East Sub-Regional Integrated Resource Plan recognizes Sturgeon Lake as the best recreational lake in the Peace Country. The plan directs the encouragement and provision of a diverse range of private and public sector tourism facilities, attractions, accommodation types and services year-round and through the disposition of Crown Land. But the plan gives agricultural use priority use in all areas suitable for agricultural production. The plan recognizes Sturgeon Lake, Highway 734 corridor and river corridors (Smoky, Wapiti, Simonette, Little Smoky) as the primary areas for private-sector recreational development. The plan does not establish a land use zone for recreation or tourism.
- Tourism use and development in Parks and Protected Areas in the region are managed in accordance with the respective park classification and existing management plans where management plans have been completed.
- To support Caribou recovery, the province has initiated development of the Berland and Upper Smoky Sub-Regional Plans. These plans intersect the Grande Prairie Tourism Region and have the potential to support or create additional barriers to tourism development. Drafts of the plans were not available at the time of preparing this plan.

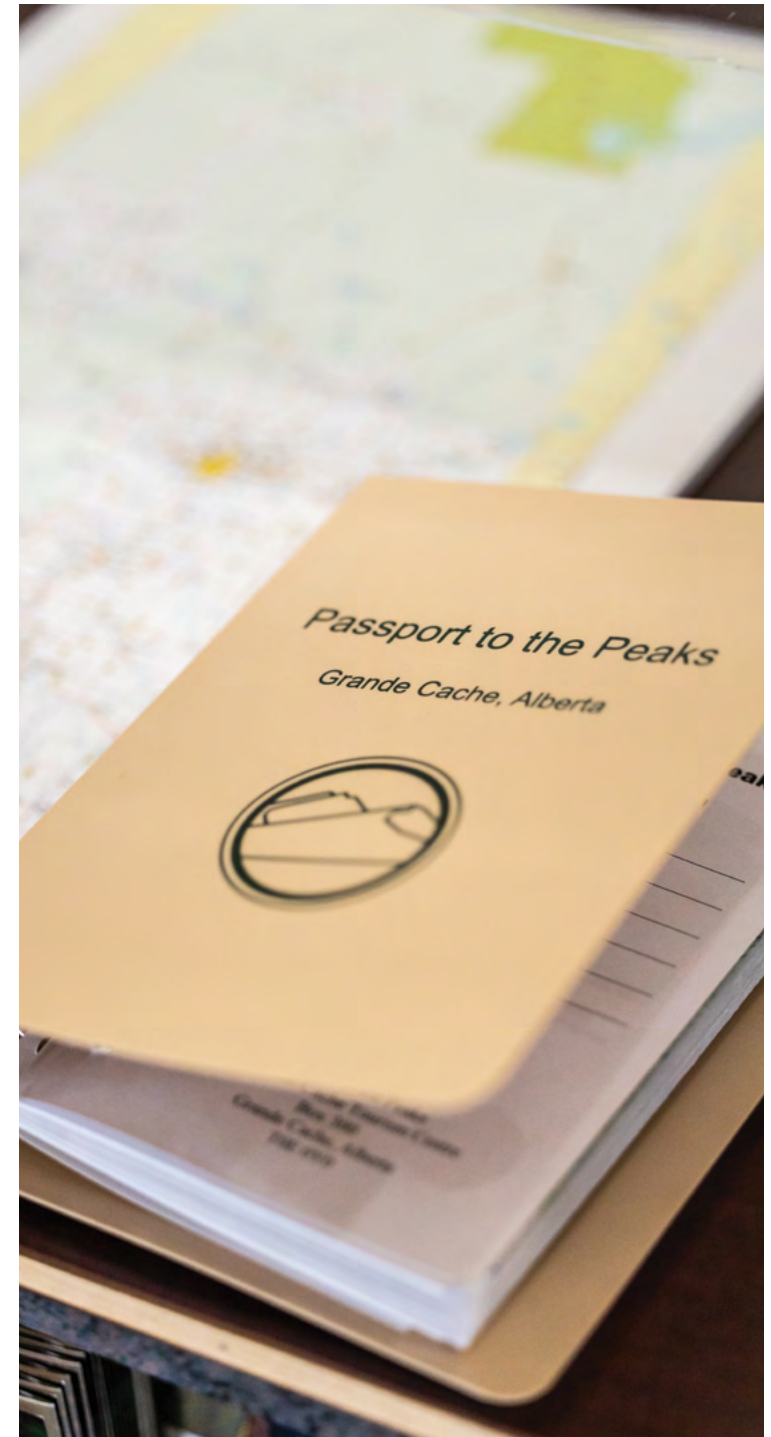


Photo: Darrel Comeau

19.3 MUNICIPAL

Municipal growth and land development, including tourism, is managed in accordance with each municipality's statutory plans such as the Municipal Development Plan (MDP) and area structure plans and its land use zoning bylaw. Focused on municipality's that contain a higher proportion of identified tourism assets, Table 2 identifies the extent to which MDPs recognize and are supportive of pursuing tourism and land use bylaws that establish clear zoning in support of tourism and commercial recreation.

TABLE 2: TOURISM DIRECTION IN MUNICIPAL PLANS & LAND BYLAWS

GRANDE PRAIRIE	
MDP Identifies Tourism as a Priority Industry	NO
MDP Provides Direction Regarding Development of Tourism	NO
Land Use Bylaw Observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No tourism or commercial recreation zone in Land Use Bylaw (LUB)
COUNTY OF GRANDE PRAIRIE	
MDP Identifies Tourism as a Priority Industry	NO
MDP Provides Direction Regarding Development of Tourism	NO <ul style="list-style-type: none"> MDP identifies "natural areas", including Wapiti Dunes, and indicates that subdivision and development may be limited on and near natural features unless subdivision or development can be integrated so as not to harm the preservation of the natural feature. This could be a barrier to realizing tourism potential in the Wapiti Dunes. MDP identifies Bear, Saskatoon, Clarimont, Little, Flyingshot and Cutbank Lakes are significant recreation lakes. MDP establishes stringent management and development controls for Saskatoon and Little Lake.
Land Use Bylaw Observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land use bylaw contains intensive recreation zone, but no tourism or commercial recreation zone. Land use bylaw zones Wapiti Dunes (highest potential for OHV tourism) as "Agriculture" and "Hwy Industrial Direct Control". Rezoning of agriculture, Hwy Industrial Direct Control, and extractive industrial areas is required to support the intensive OHV recreation and associated tourism development potential in the dunes. Rural future land use area in the MDP and Agriculture zone in the LUB allows from some non-agricultural uses (e.g., bed and breakfast, public and private recreation, and limited commercial use)
M.D. OF GREENVIEW	
MDP Identifies Tourism as a Priority Industry	LIMITED <ul style="list-style-type: none"> MDP indicates that the M.D. supports eco-tourism and agritourism as a means to create employment and diversify the municipalities economy.
MDP Provides Direction Regarding Development of Tourism	LIMITED <ul style="list-style-type: none"> MDP identifies that the M.D. will promote and accommodate developments that contribute to a diversification of the area's economy including tourism. MDP recognizes wealth of recreational and environmental resources and tourism and recreation as acceptable uses. Directs development of a Recreation and Open Space Master Plan to direct recreation and tourist planning including identification of recreation sites and of all-terrain vehicle and snowmobile trail systems. Development deemed to be compatible within or adjacent to areas that are deemed to be environmentally sensitive are those that "promote the area to remain in its natural state"
Land Use Bylaw Observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LUB contains a recreation land use zone. LUB does not contain a tourism specific land use zone though tourism developments are permitted in various commercial zone types.
BEAVERLODGE	
MDP Identifies Tourism as a Priority Industry	LIMITED <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tourism is identified as playing an important role in growing and diversifying the economy.
MDP Provides Direction Regarding Development of Tourism	NO
Land Use Bylaw Observations	N/A

SADDLE HILLS COUNTY

MDP Identifies Tourism as a Priority Industry	YES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progressive land use and open for business policies that support economic development and encourage a positive and innovative environment conducive to fostering growth in tourism and recreation.
MDP Provides Direction Regarding Development of Tourism	YES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The County supports eco-tourism and agritourism as a means to create employment opportunities and diversify the County's economy. The County may conduct a comprehensive inventory to identify tourism Destination and Asset assets to identify strengths and gaps. The County may recognize the tourism potential for off-road (e.g. snowmobile and ATV trail activities, and work with existing trail groups to establish opportunities for improving regional trail access within the County that do not conflict with other uses, the natural environment, or nearby residents. The County may support the development of bed and breakfasts and guest ranches as a means to diversify income from agricultural production and to offer alternative accommodation arrangements for travelers and workers throughout the area.
Land Use Bylaw Observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No tourism land use zoning identified. Bed and Breakfast and Campground bylaws identified.

SEXSMITH

MDP Identifies Tourism as a Priority Industry	NO <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft under development.
MDP Provides Direction Regarding Development of Tourism	NO <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft under development.
Land Use Bylaw Observations	N/A

VALLEYVIEW

MDP Identifies Tourism as a Priority Industry	VERY LIMITED <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifies drawing visitors into the town from the highway – capitalize on the Town's great character and ease of access for northbound travellers.
MDP Provides Direction Regarding Development of Tourism	NO
Land Use Bylaw Observations	N/A

WEMBLEY

MDP Identifies Tourism as a Priority Industry	NO
MDP Provides Direction Regarding Development of Tourism	VERY LIMITED <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support for Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum is identified in policy. The museum is a key tourism and education facility in the community and its long term sustainability is important to the economic development of the Town. The Town will continue to work closely with the Museum on promotion and marketing efforts.
Land Use Bylaw Observations	NO

FOX CREEK

MDP Identifies Tourism as a Priority Industry	LIMITED <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One of the community priorities is to market the Town as a tourist destination. The high-quality recreation options available within and around our Town can be a strong draw for local and regional tourism. Promoting our community as a location for outdoor sports and recreation, and incorporating this identity into the brand of our Town can help to support new economic opportunities. No zoning or identified tourism development priorities.
MDP Provides Direction Regarding Development of Tourism	LIMITED <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning Opportunities section identifies natural amenities and outdoor recreation. Fox Creek is close to a number of natural amenities including forested areas and trails, Iosegun Lake, Smoke Lake, and the Golden Triangle Snowmobile Trail. The Town can capitalize on these outdoor resources by expanding and improving Fox Creek's recreation and tourism infrastructure to attract tourism revenue and offer an increased quality of life to residents. There is an opportunity to utilize space effectively by locating trails and recreation amenities within identified firebreak buffers. Goals and Policy identifies promotion of local economic diversity through the attraction and recruitment of businesses in underrepresented economic sectors, including retail, services, and tourism.
Land Use Bylaw Observations	N/A



19.4 LAND USE & ACCESS CONSTRAINTS

In accordance with the findings of the planning and policy review and insights gathered during engagement, the following are considered to be among the most significant land use and land access constraints that will continue to challenge tourism investment and maturing of the tourism sector in the region:

Eastern Slopes Policy & Integrated Resource Plan, Sub-Regional Plan Objectives & Zoning

While the Eastern Slopes Policy clearly identifies that recreation and tourism is one of the overriding land use objectives in the region, lands zoned in the policy as “General Recreation” do not necessarily reflect the areas with the highest tourism potential. Many areas of high tourism potential are zoned as “Multiple Use” meaning these high potential areas may be subject to other less or non-compatible resource developments (e.g. mining, oil and gas, forestry) which may negatively impact the tourism resources in those areas thereby detracting from the tourism potential of these areas. These non-compatible developments limit the appeal of these lands to tourism investors and create uncertainty for investors – all of which are barriers to attracting investment. Further, policy direction and definition of what is meant by commercial recreation development and intensive recreation is unclear and can create confusion about what types of tourism uses can be permitted in prime protection zones which exist on the western periphery of the region. The Upper Smoky and Berland Sub-Regional Planning processes contain limited attention to and representation on the planning teams from tourism. While critical to supporting Caribou recovery, the content of these plans has the potential to create further barriers to supporting tourism in areas of the regions that hold the greatest tourism potential.

Support for Tourism Investment in Parks and Recreation Areas

Provincial Parks and Recreation Areas in the region, such as Sulphur Gates, have the potential to support expanded tourism product development such as new attractions (e.g. foot bridge over the Sulphur River near Sulphur Gates) and diversified higher-yield accommodations (e.g., boutique resort, comfort camping). Other provincial recreation areas, such as the Smoky River South PRA, are underutilized and could be repurposed to better integrate into, support and help monetize the OHV trails tourism potential of the area with higher yield overnight accommodations (e.g., comfort camping). However, future tourism development within these Parks and Recreation Areas will require clear support and efforts from Alberta Parks to enable and proactively pursue a private sector investor.

Trail Designation & Formalization

The region’s Public Land trail networks, especially those in the Wapiti Dunes, and Grande Cache (Caw Ridge, Grande Mountain, Flood Mountain, Mt. Hammel) hold significant tourism potential. Local planning has occurred, or is underway, (Grande Cache Trail Planning Initiative, Grande Cache Old Town Trails Master Plan, Wapiti Corridor Recreation and Trail Management Plan) to significantly advance the quality and sustainability of these trails and trail tourism. However, most of the trail networks are not formally recognized and most are not designated under the Alberta Trails Act. As such, the trails have limited recognition and protection from land use development which is a barrier to enabling good management of the trails and to providing certainty and attracting investment in the trails.

Photo: Travel Alberta

Municipal Development Plans & Land Use Zoning

Efforts to coordinate and align provincial land use policy direction and municipal planning in support of tourism as well as infrastructure investment planning (e.g., roads, servicing) is critical to supporting and attracting future tourism investment. Unlike agriculture, oil and gas, mining and forestry, MDPs in the region do not consistently identify the development of the tourism industry as an economic and land use priority for municipalities. Current municipal land use zoning in areas of the highest tourism potential often do not support or enable the type of tourism development those areas have the potential to support and, in some cases, current zoning limits or prohibits tourism. The current municipal zoning of high-potential tourism areas, and the need to undertake a rezoning process in some high-potential areas, will be a disincentive to investors. Where direction regarding tourism development is provided in MDPs, the direction is typically focused on lower-yield local and regional-focused tourism developments (e.g., Bed and Breakfasts). MDP direction regarding tourism rarely contains specific direction to enable and support the development of higher yield market and export-ready products, sport tourism, business meetings and conventions.

Extensive Use Tourism Management

While many tourism operators are required to obtain an access permit to operate on Public Lands in the region, the province does not have a clear policy on extensive use tourism (e.g. hiking guides, OHV guides, events) that directs how extensive use tourism operations will be managed in the region in order to ensure a quality product and limit conflict, crowding and, where necessary, overlap between operators. As extensive use tourism operations grow in this region, greater policy direction, management attention and proactive planning will be required to ensure business certainty for operators and sound visitor use management.

Photo: Travel Alberta



20 SWOT ANALYSIS

The name SWOT is an acronym for the four components the technique examines; Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.

Strengths and weaknesses are considered internal factors, while opportunities and threats are usually considered external factors. The degree to which the internal strengths of the region matches with the external opportunities is often referred to as alignment and strategic fit.

Internal factors are viewed as strengths or weaknesses depending upon their effect on the region's potential performance objectives. These elements may include labour, natural resources, access to capital, etc.

The following strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats were identified from the input from the January 10th workshop as well as several meetings with key stakeholders in the region as well as research completed by the Legacy Tourism Group.

STRENGTHS

Characteristics of the Grande Prairie Tourism Region that give it an advantage over others.

- Dinosaur tourism assets
- Diverse geography
- Four seasons
- Real winter season
- Long summer daylight hours
- Accessible/urban Wildlife
- Population diversity & demographics
- Diversity of Indigenous Nations
- Agritourism potential
- Successful events & festivals experience
- On the Alaska highway route
- Gateway to the North
- Strength of oil & gas, forestry, agriculture sectors
- GPRTA – strong regional DMO
- Enthusiastic and accomplished arts and culture scene
- Premiere arts, entertainment and heritage facilities
- Excellent hospital, schools and other supporting infrastructure
- Small town feel with big amenities
- Visitors don't have to "rough it"
- Grande Prairie Airport
- Excellent sport infrastructure
- Retail Hub for Northwest & NWT and strong retail infrastructure
- Multi-use Trails (incl. OHV) and outdoor experiences
- High average income/entrepreneurial/well educated population
- Local people are tenacious, innovative, welcoming and entrepreneurial

WEAKNESSES

Characteristics that place the GPTR at a disadvantage relative to others.

- Conflicting resident sentiment re: tourism
- Reputational issues related to industry, crime perceptions
- Distant location relative to proximity to urban centres and National Park attractors
- Lack of quality night life
- Lack of cultural awareness despite huge diversity
- Lack of cohesive brand for the region
- Fragmented arts and culture sector
- Increasing lack of affordability
- Labour shortages
- Lack of wayfinding signage
- Lack of interest from the private sector for capital investment in tourism development
- Lack of market and export ready product/ experiences that align with the key themes of the destination and that target the high yield traveler
- Lack of secondary/complimentary and supporting products and services (ex. tours, restaurants, attractions, etc.)
- Road infrastructure needs enhancements pullouts, washrooms, heritage signage etc.
- Limited travel trade knowledge of the region and its tourism experiences
- DMOs and municipalities lack resources to support significant destination development

OPPORTUNITIES

Elements in the environment that the GPTR could exploit to its advantage.

- Systematic approach to centralized experience delivery
- Increase to digital footprint/search engine optimization
- Increased festivals/events/conferences
- Conversion of northern retail business to tourism visitation
- Increased number and diversity of experiences
- Development of experiential paleontology experiences
- Increase to Indigenous owned/operated experiences
- Increase collaboration opportunities and grow overall partnerships
- Increased scheduled service to Grande Prairie airport
- Tour Train experience from Grande Prairie to Jasper
- Grow agritourism collaboration and packaged experiences
- Experiences that can't be done in the National Parks
- Identification of pillar attractors for smaller communities
- Collaboration and packaged marketing of smaller community experiences
- Enhanced sports tourism destination
- Enhanced OHV experiences
- Room for strategically planned growth in the tourism sector
- Develop new Indigenous products and experiences in partnership with Aseniwuche Winewak Nation and other partners
- Educate and partner with heavy industry associations (ex: forestry) to develop tours and experiences
- Develop family friendly accommodation experiences surrounding Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum
- Develop new agritourism and western heritage experiences and itineraries (behind the chutes rodeo experiences, farm-to-table tourism etc.)
- Leverage Dark Sky Preserve status to develop dark sky tours surrounding Jasper National Park
- Leverage annual 'Death Race' and Grande Cache area to attract outdoor enthusiasts
- Develop accommodations and tours supporting "Passport to the Peaks" 21 mountain hiking incentive program
- Potential partnership and long-term alignment with Explore Edmonton and the Edmonton International Airport

THREATS

Elements in the environment that could cause issues for the GPTR, restricting growth and impeding other objectives.

- Increased competition from similar destinations, unique selling proposition?
- As industrial sectors prosper, importance of and interest in tourism wanes
- Federal, provincial, and municipal support and funding can be tenuous
- Potential future pandemic impacts
- Crown land access limitations
- Lack of wayfinding signage
- Lack of capital for tourism development
- Lack of tourism facing accommodations that allow bidding on particular events
- Increased crown land use conflicts
- Increased reputational/market perception issues
- Loss of lift capacity/scheduled services to GP airport
- Oil & gas volatility - impact on disposable income for tourism experiences
- Increasing demand for and lack of volunteers
- Increased difficulty in recruitment and retention of staff
- Reliability of winter product affected by systemic changes to weather patterns



21 REGIONAL GAP ANALYSIS

The following Gap Analysis describes various elements of the current state of the visitor economy in the Grande Prairie Tourism Region versus the desired state of the same, identifying the gaps between both realities. This analysis has been written based upon data provided by Travel Alberta, the Grande Prairie Regional Tourism Association, the MD of Greenview, the regional member/stakeholders, the research completed and summarized earlier in the report including the SWOT analysis, and the discussions that were held with local stakeholders. Below are the major gaps that were identified multiple times by different stakeholders during the GPRTA engagement which are also aligned with the gaps identified in the Northern Rockies TDZ report. The Regional Action Plan items included in this report have been identified in part, to address these gaps.

Conversion of Retail Customer Base

Grande Prairie currently enjoys a total market size of approximately \$4.7B CAD in retail spending annually, primarily based on a growing trade area that includes northwestern Alberta, northeastern British Columbia and the Northwest Territories. These areas combine to create a total catchment of approximately 300,000 people. Grande Prairie stakeholders often speak anecdotally to the distances and lengths that shoppers from these regions took to ensure they could purchase goods available in the city.

The fact that Grande Prairie has the largest single level, Canadian Tire and the largest Ford dealership in the province is testament to this reality. The issue and subsequent gap in this scenario is that so often retail shopping is the primary reason for the trip to the exclusion of the enjoyment of any other tourism related experiences in the city or the region. There should be an opportunity to capitalize on this visitation and increase its yield by collaborating with specific retail providers as well as creating a fuller tourism experience that include experience and accommodation packages for these visitors as well as those visiting for sport and event tourism, encouraging them to stay longer and spend more.

Small Community Pillar Attractions

Through discussions with the majority of the member communities of the GPRTA it became clear very quickly that each community has a number of attractions that would be considered compelling reasons for guests to take the time to stop in that particular community. What was also clear was that, with a few exceptions such as the Phillip J. Currie museum in Wembley, most communities have either not selected the pillar attraction on which their marketing efforts would be built around or that attraction still needs to be developed.

There are a tremendous number of lovely, small communities in the Province of Alberta and the residents of each one would likely tell you that any guest to their region simply must stop in their community. The gap and hence opportunity for the smaller communities in the GPTR is to identify one, truly compelling reason for guests to stop and then collectively create a compelling itinerary/narrative that links these must-do experiences to create the critical mass necessary to compel a guest to visit multiple communities on a day or multi-day outing. These pillar experiences should be attached to a superlative of some sort, i.e., the biggest, the largest, the most delicious...something. In some cases, this superlative will be part of a larger story embedded in the history and heritage of the community. In others it will quite literally be created out of nothing – but if presented properly, it will be incredibly compelling. Either way this attractor either needs to be monetized in some way, or lead guests to other opportunities to spend their money within the community. It is absolutely remarkable the types of bizarre elements that can capture the imagination (and discretionary dollars) of the travelling public. (Google “Peabody Hotel Ducks” to get an idea of just such an attraction.)

Photo: ZenSeekers/Paullavoie

A Cohesive Brand Identity/Narrative

The Grande Prairie Tourism Region is by far the most diverse in the entire Province of Alberta. This diversity is reflected in the fact that the region is remarkable, including mountains, boreal forests, grasslands, Indigenous communities, agritourism, cowboy tourism, outdoor adventures in pristine wilderness, the arts and retail hub of Grande Prairie, lovely rural towns, a world-class centre for dinosaur tourism and a tourism corridor that is part of the famous route to Alaska. The very fact that it represents nine, regional member/stakeholders speaks to this remarkable diversity.

This diversity however has created a challenge for the region as stakeholders mentioned over and over that the region lacked a cohesive brand identity. In fact, as one member pointed out during the Jan. 10th stakeholder meeting, the very name Northern Rockies, used for the new Travel Alberta TDZ is the third or fourth iteration of the region's name in the past several years, with Alberta's Northern Rockies, Canadian Northern Rockies and Northern Canadian Rockies all having been used at one time or another. This has created a gap in market awareness.

The recent report completed for Travel Alberta by Twenty31 titled *Assessing Perceptions of Alberta's Tourism Development Zones. A Market Research Survey of Alberta Traveller Consumers* showed that when Albertans were asked to prioritize which of the tourism development zones they were most familiar/aware of the Northern Rockies was listed only #5 out of ten zones. Fortunately, when asked what their overall impressions were of each zone the Northern Rockies were listed as having the best overall impression of all the zones.

Over the course of the planning process for this report at one point it was suggested that the paleontological opportunity was such a major strength of the region that perhaps it might be considered as a pillar attractor for the region and a possible differentiator to build the brand around. However, most stakeholders agreed that because of the existence of Drumheller and other dinosaur attractions this was actually not a true differentiator and was not representative of enough of the total region to build the brand around.

Eventually, one potential option for the brand positioning emerged that really gained consensus. It was suggested and agreed to by many key stakeholders that perhaps we need to stop trying to fight the realities of being such a diverse destination and embrace this diversity instead. The fact is that for a person visiting the province, the GPTR is a place where a guest can experience all of the things that make the province so special – all in one region. The brand pitch would be that we would love to tell our guests what to pack for their trip to the GPTR – but we can't – because there are simply too many amazing things to do here.

Addressing this brand positioning gap and the challenge of creating a regional brand identity while continuing to support and respect the specific brands of the many communities that make up the region is addressed as an action item in the report.

Photo: ZenSeekers/PaulLavoie





Resident Sentiment

Earlier in the report it was identified that resident sentiment and support towards tourism in the region is somewhat mixed. Travel Alberta's *2021 Resident Survey Sentiment Survey* and subsequent *2022 Resident Sentiment Summer Pulse Report* surveyed residents of the "Rural North" region of which the Northern Rockies TDZ and GPTR is a large part. The results were somewhat contradictory but clearly expose a gap in the perception of many residents towards tourism in their region.

Residents in the region were significantly less likely than average Albertans to feel that tourism creates traffic congestion, makes it harder for residents to enjoy local attractions and increases the cost of living for residents. Residents were far more welcoming than average Albertans to welcome visitors to their region from elsewhere in Alberta, elsewhere in Canada, the USA, or other countries. Most importantly, a majority of residents (66%) would like tourism numbers in the region to increase with 69% wanting to see more summer visitors and 65% wanting to see more visitors arrive in winter.

Reflecting some of the negative perceptions residents have of tourism however, the same respondents were more likely than average Albertans to feel that tourism causes higher taxes, makes it harder to find affordable housing and may threaten local infrastructure. While all the residents saw tourism as important to the Alberta economy as a whole, only 56% saw tourism as important to their own community. Where the gap really becomes striking is their attitude towards perceiving their community/region as a legitimate tourism destination that has strong tourism values. While the residents of this region were the most likely (95%) to say good things about their community and were twice as likely to do so without being asked, only 17% of the residents in the region said they would recommend to others to visit their community. These same residents also gave their region the lowest rating of any region in the province when it came to having unique experiences. This gap in "pride in place" is a key challenge for the GPRTA and its members.

Residents are inevitably the best, or worst, ambassadors for a destination. Resident sentiment remains one of the great challenges to tourism development across the province. It should come as little surprise that the survey also showed that the more awareness and knowledge residents had of the benefits of tourism, the more predisposed they were to have a positive view of tourism. Stakeholders and operators in the region stated repeatedly that there is support for tourism development amongst most residents in the region IF it can be shown to result in a vibrant visitor economy and adds to the residents' overall quality of life. To that end, there are action items in the report that attempt to address this gap and educate residents, increasing their knowledge of the tremendous tourism opportunities in their communities, with the hope that this will inspire a greater belief that the region is a valued tourism destination.

Indigenous Tourism Experiences

The GPTR is blessed with many Indigenous communities including both First Nations and Métis Nations that all possess remarkable culture and heritage attributes that have the potential to be a key differentiator for the region's tourism sector. The gap that exists presently is that there are simply very few Indigenous tourism experiences available and to date the engagement with these Indigenous groups has been minimal.

It is critical for the region that these groups are engaged and it is determined which groups are interested in pursuing tourism as an economic and cultural opportunity. The coordinated assistance from the Indigenous Tourism Alberta, Travel Alberta and the GPRTA in facilitating this engagement should significantly help to advance this opportunity. It is critical to acknowledge that not all Indigenous communities will wish to engage in the tourism sector. It is also critical to acknowledge that there are Indigenous groups who do provide tourism experiences presently. The action plan addresses this need to seek engagement with, and provide assistance to, any of the region's Indigenous groups who wish to participate in the Grande Prairie Tourism Region's visitor economy.

Photo: Travel Alberta / Roth and Ramberg

Regional Data Compilation and Analysis

Throughout the entire GPRTA Destination Development Strategy planning process, the lack of relevant and accurate data regarding asset inventories, visitation statistics, regional market demand and labour issues has been a significant issue. Staff members for Travel Alberta, GPRTA, GOA and many of the region's operators lamented both the lack of data and the lack of programs to remedy this issue. This is a substantiative constraint to strategic planning and collaborative efforts amongst all these organizations will be required to fill these data gaps.

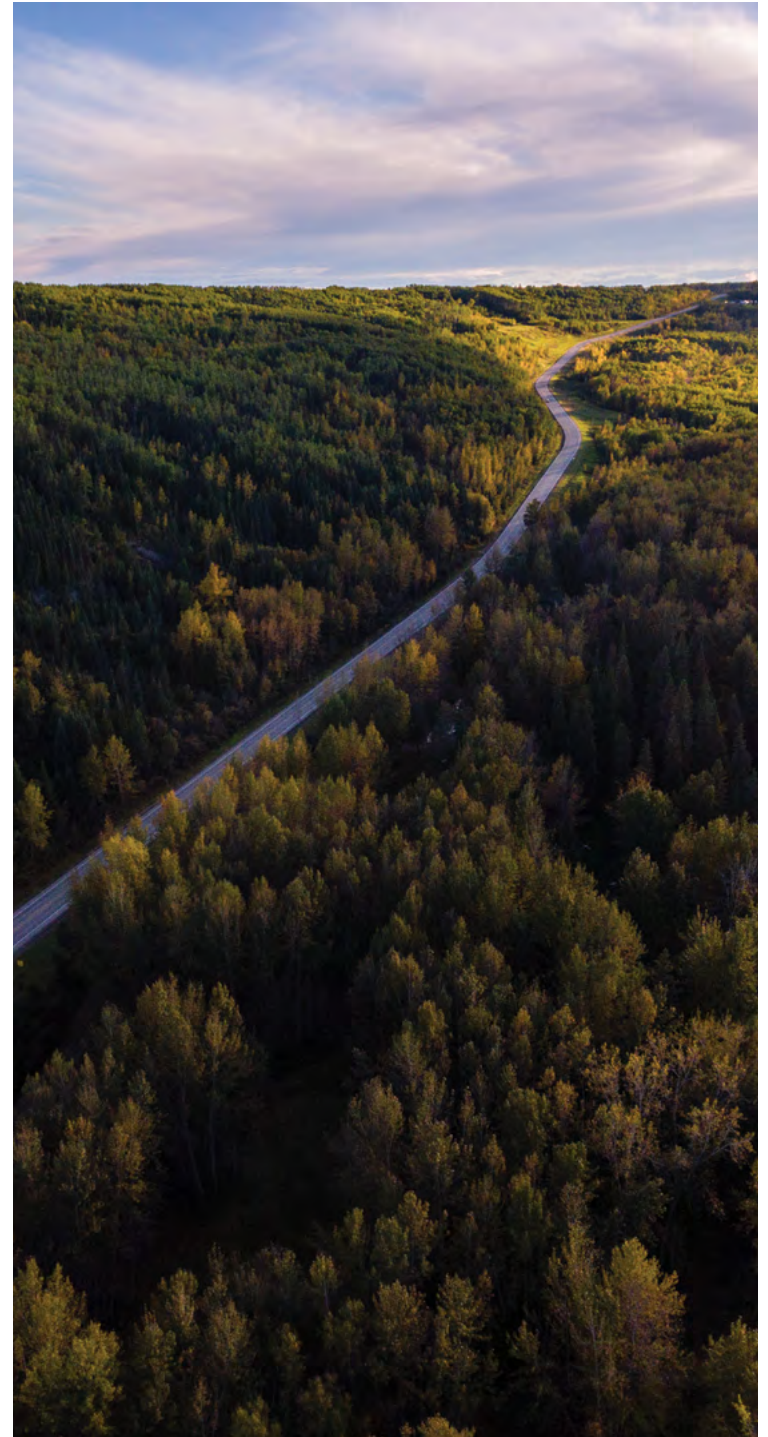
Access to Public Lands for Commercial Tourism Development

At first glance, based upon the fact that 79% of the region are public lands managed in accordance with the Public Lands Act, one might assume that there are unlimited lands and subsequent opportunities for future tourism development. However, after discussions with GOA land managers and local operators, it becomes immediately apparent that identifying areas for development in many areas of the region, free from land use conflicts or restrictive land use regulations and permitting issues, is a particularly difficult task and represents a major gap that needs to be addressed.

Guests who visit Jasper National Park and want to be able to say they experienced all Alberta has to offer will be attracted to the Grande Prairie Tourism Region. The diversity of the region makes it an obvious choice for visitors who want to have more than strictly a mountain experience. Access to lands, local permitting issues and unilateral government changes to regulations and regulatory enforcement have been identified as a significant gap that is restricting tourism growth to address this demand, eliminating previous access and approvals, and, in some cases, making some experiences impossible to deliver.

All stakeholders in both the private and public domain understand the need for rigorous conservation measures to ensure that the precious resources that tourism is built on remain intact and protected. That said there appears to be consensus that an updated crown lands regional planning process, which includes tourism as an important element, is a priority in order for the region and its operators to realize their aspirations.

Photo: Jeff Bartlett @photojbartlett





Infrastructure

- Highways 16, 40 and 43 are the prime arteries of the region and are crucial in the delivery of visitors to the key towns, hamlets and city that are at the epicentre of tourism in this area. While the viewsapes and natural assets of each route are remarkable, the roadside amenities, signage, historical recognition, access to trailheads and day-use areas and overall safety is, in places, lacking.
- Any destination can have a wealth of experiences to offer, however without the capability of “lift”, that is the ability to get long-haul visitors to the destination via air travel, the destination’s ability to attract that coveted, high-yield, long-haul traveller is severely restricted. In the case of the GPTR, this gap in the region’s lift is critical. Grande Prairie has an outstanding regional airport but having at minimum, long-haul Canadian flights and at best, international flights land here will be necessary for the region to ultimately realize its long-term tourism aspirations. The first reality is that funding sources such as cities, municipalities and the province need to recognize that funding of regional airport expansion is an investment NOT just a capital cost. There is a very real business case to be made to support these investments, and growth to the tourism industry is just one of the benefits resulting from this funding. The second reality is that while operators in every region of Canada tend to lament the need for more routes to their regional airport, this will only occur if the local tourism industry supports the airport by creating the compelling products and itineraries necessary to support the business case that will generate the load factors necessary for airlines to decide to add such routes to their offering.
- Accommodations in Grande Prairie appear at first glance to be numerous with occupancy directly related to the current state of the oil and gas industry. The gap that exists is the quality of the accommodation relative to guests coming for leisure and not those staying because of work and the fact that occupancy levels are high during the week because of industrial travel but low on the weekends. Some accommodation options in Grande Cache are in need of updating, lack amenities, and cannot adequately service the travel market. Both Grande Prairie and Grande Cache as well as Hinton and the hamlets located on Highway 43 generally are in significant need of a greater supply and diversity of tourism-facing accommodation to the point that in some communities this gap has become a barrier to tourism growth.
- The reality is that a great deal of the current accommodation inventory in the region was built to accommodate work crews, not tourists. And yet when potential accommodation providers look at the region as a potential place for new investment, the existing hotel room inventory and occupancy data do not necessarily speak to a pressing need for additional rooms. Flagged hotel properties have particularly high visitation thresholds required to incentivise them to build new accommodation. New, tourism-centric accommodation is needed and will most likely be realized if guest experiences are created that integrate with the need for that accommodation. Guests rarely base their vacation decision primarily on where they will stay. Usually, they decide on a place to visit based on the experiences they can enjoy there. Unique accommodation will help to sway their final decision but the experience set is what is most critical. A new boutique lodge only relies on its own visitation not the overall occupancy/demand of a larger population base. And the term boutique speaks to the smaller scale of these developments that make the challenges of attaining high occupancy rates significantly easier than a 200-room hotel. This type of accommodation needs to be pursued.
- There are currently several tourism operations that may be getting closer to exploring an exit strategy. Due to the current land-use constraints it makes sense to engage and evaluate these businesses as potential acquisitions that could be purchased to be invested in and transitioned and enhanced into new offerings.
- Trails are among our region’s most significant tourism assets – especially our trails on Crown Lands (Public Lands and Parks). The Golden Triangle Snowmobile Trail, which has grown organically into a prominent tourism asset, the equestrian trails in the Willmore, the Passport to the Peaks program and the Canadian Death Race trails are good examples of trails being recognized and leveraged for their tourism potential. While our trails tourism potential is among the best in the province, our region lacks a network of travel-motivating signature trail experiences and a deliberate approach to ensuring other trails provide quality, safe and memorable visitor experiences.

Photo: Travel Alberta

- While our trails hold significant tourism potential, much of the region's Crown Land trails exist on legacy industrial access and have not been deliberately planned and designed to be long-term sustainable recreation and tourism assets and some contain safety and/or environmental issues. Many are not yet formally designated under the Trails Act meaning they have limited land status and may not be recognized in land use decisions. Lack of designation also means that there are limited rules surrounding the use of trails and limited enforcement capabilities. Further, because of their informal nature, many of our trails on Crown Lands are not actively managed and, those interviewed noted, that many are not being maintained and, if maintenance is occurring, it is limited to the work of volunteers or tourism operators at their own expense. While some of our region's trails could become export-ready experiences, the issues above, together with the lack of trip planning, wayfinding and visitor services on the trails (e.g., accommodations, guiding) mean that very few of our trails are considered "visitor-ready" while, in many cases, many are considered to be "not yet visitor-ready" from a tourism perspective.
- Recognizing the region's trails tourism potential, in 2022 Grande Cache stakeholders together with the Government of Alberta led the preparation of the "Grande Cache Trail Planning Initiative: A Vision for Trail on Public Lands". The plan lays out a vision for trails and trails tourism on Public Lands in the region (parks were not in scope). It identified actions that need to be taken to elevate trails and trails tourism including investigating the feasibility of and detailed planning for the creation of Grande Cache as a "trails town" and the following multi-day signature trail experiences that elevate spending and the benefits of trails for the region:
 - Grande Cache to Beaverdam Road to Caw Ridge Alpine OHV experience (unique in AB)
 - Grande Cache, Grande Mountain and Flood Mountain OHV Experience
 - Mt Hammel Alpine Mountain Bike Optimized Experience
 - Kakwa Falls and Horn Ridge OHV Experience
- The plan also outlined the opportunities to improve the connectivity of the regional trail system, staging areas, signage / wayfinding and trip planning, accommodations, activation of the trails, management of visitation, marketing and coordination and governance of the trails tourism ecosystem. All of these opportunities were identified as being needed by stakeholders and the committee in this planning process.
- Efforts are also underway to improve the quality, sustainability, and management of the mixed-use and non-motorized trails in the Wapiti River corridor - especially the Wapiti Dunes and Big Mountain mixed-use trail networks. On Grande Prairie's doorstep and boasting incredible sand dune, wetland and river valley views, the over 300 km of trails in the Wapiti Dunes are recognized as an opportunity to establish one of, if not Alberta's best, off-highway vehicle signature trail destination, adventure park and accommodation experience.
- In addition to the trail networks around the Grande Cache and Grande Prairie, the "Golden Triangle Snowmobile Trail" is a tremendous tourism asset for the subregion of Woodlands County and the key communities of Fox Creek, Swan Hills and Whitecourt. This trail system and the brand attached to it has grown organically over the years due to the commitment of the County and communities and the three major snowmobile clubs the Northlands Sno-Goers, Whitecourt Trailblazers and the Swan Hills Sno-Goers. The gap that currently exists is that the route and experience have the potential to be further developed and monetized into a greater, commercial tourism opportunity and provincially significant signature trail experience.
- The other gap most frequently brought up was that many of the trails need better wayfinding/signage. They need to be inventoried, better signed and then integrated into the most popular trail apps such as Trailforks and All Trails. Lastly, once these trail improvements are completed there should be an opportunity to brand, market and monetize some of the major trail networks into signature trail experiences.

Photo: Room Creative



22 REGIONAL GOALS AND ACTION ITEMS 2023-2028

The following goals and action items represent efforts to address the issues raised in the SWOT and Regional Gap Analyses. These are the detailed actions that are recommended to be supported and/or executed by the GPRTA that are specific to the GPTR and align with the goals and action items identified in the Travel Alberta, Northern Rockies TDZ report. It is assumed that for the majority of these actions, the GPRTA will actually be a supporting organization and that the Northern Rockies Tourism Advisory Committee created to represent the Northern Rockies TDZ, with support from Travel Alberta, will be leading these efforts.

CONVERSION OF RETAIL CUSTOMER BASE

GOAL Maximize the conversion of retail customers to the Grande Prairie Tourism Region into tourism guests, increasing their length of stay and dollars spent in the region.

ACTION → 1-2 Years Collaboration between local retailers and tourism operators to promote packages that link retail visitors from the north/north-western catchment area with tourism experiences and accommodation.

Lead GPRTA, Grande Prairie Retailers, Local Tourism Operators

Support Grande Prairie Chamber of Commerce

KPI Creation and in-market campaign for retail/tourism packages by 2025

SMALL COMMUNITY PILLAR ATTRACTIONS

GOAL Identify, develop and promote pillar attractions for communities in the GPRTA who wish to engage in the promotion.

ACTION → 1-3 Years Work directly with the appropriate community/municipal bodies to identify/create the pillar attraction for each community. Facilitate the creation of a marketing campaign aimed at creating experiences that encourage guests to visit multiple communities for a day or multi-day trip, based on experiencing these attractions.

Lead GPRTA member communities, Local Community Councils and Economic Development Agencies

Support Travel Alberta

KPI The creation of a marketing campaign aimed at day or multi-day trips, based on experiencing the pillar attractions of the participating communities by 2026

A COHESIVE BRAND IDENTITY/NARRATIVE

GOAL To establish a cohesive regional brand for the entire Grande Prairie Tourism Region and Northern Rockies TDZ that integrates the diverse tourism experiences and their own current brand offered by each municipality and county while still embracing the overall diversity of the region and it's experiences as a key differentiator.

ACTION →
1-3 Years Create a visual brand logo, imagery and campaign that reflects the Grande Prairie Tourism Region, creating awareness and highlighting the region's tourism opportunities and compliments the current branding efforts of the GPRTA.

Lead Northern Rockies Tourism Advisory Committee

Support GPRTA, Travel Alberta

KPI Brand created by 2026

ACTION →
3-5 Years Once the regional brand is established, create a regional brand toolkit package that will assist operators and organizations with the integration of the brand into their marketing efforts.

Lead Northern Rockies Tourism Advisory Committee

Support GPRTA, Travel Alberta

KPI Regional brand toolkit created for operators and organizations by 2026

RESIDENT SENTIMENT

GOAL Strengthen resident pride in place through increasing awareness of tourism initiatives.

ACTION →
6 Months Develop 'try it' days for local residents to experience offerings at a reduced rate. Conduct 'operator open houses' so that operators know what each other are offering. Create 'Stay and Play' packages with hoteliers and tourism operators that encourage residents to have a 'staycation' while participating in 'Stay and Play' packages.

Lead NRTAC, GPRTA

Support Grande Prairie Chamber of Commerce

KPI First "try it" days implemented by fall of 2023. New packages developed for Stay and Play options by spring of 2024

ACTION →
1-2 Years Create a strategic plan, including details on how to engage with residents virtually and in-person to build connections in the community. Participate in local events to bring awareness to residents.

Lead NRTAC, GPRTA

Support Travel Alberta

KPI Strategic plan to engage residents completed by fall of 2024

GOAL To encourage community engagement and improve resident support for tourism initiatives in the region.

ACTION →
1 Year Host an annual Tourism Open House for residents in each of the major tourism centres within the Northern Rockies TDZ/GPTR that provides an update on tourism initiatives from the previous year, reinforcing the benefits to the community from these initiatives. Open houses will be followed-up with a short survey to track and measure resident sentiment, ideas and concerns.

Lead NRTAC, GPRTA

Support Travel Alberta

KPI First tourism open house held in each of the major centres by spring 2024

INDIGENOUS TOURISM EXPERIENCES

GOAL Respect and support the development of authentic Indigenous experiences by local Indigenous communities with an interest in participating in tourism.

ACTION → 1 Year	NRTAC and GPRTA to work with Indigenous Tourism Alberta to develop recommended approaches for operators to develop relationships with local Nations.
Lead	ITA, GPRTA, NRTAC
Support	Travel Alberta
KPI	Recommended operator guidelines/approach developed and available for GPRTA operators by spring 2024
ACTION → 1-2 Years	NRTAC and GPRTA to work with Indigenous Tourism Alberta to host an Indigenous Tourism Summit for all interested Indigenous communities, entities and operators in the Northern Rockies region.
Lead	ITA, GPRTA, NRTAC
Support	Travel Alberta
KPI	Summit to be held by spring 2025
ACTION → 2-10 Years	NRTAC and GPRTA to work collaboratively with Indigenous Tourism Alberta, current Indigenous communities engaged in tourism as well as any of the Indigenous communities or operators from the region that express an interest and want to participate in tourism to help expand current experiences or create new experiences. Current experiences include but are not limited to those provided by the Alexis-Nakota Sioux Nation; Aseniwuche Winewak Nation; Alexander First Nation; and Mountain Métis. Potential opportunities include but are not limited to an Indigenous experience at Evergreen Park in Grande Prairie, Pipestone Creek and a development at Grande Cache Lake.
Lead	ITA, GPRTA, NRTAC
Support	Travel Alberta
KPI	Increase in export-ready Indigenous tourism experiences by 2025

HIGHWAY INFRASTRUCTURE

GOAL Improve roads, maintenance and access for traveling public and visitors.

ACTION → 1-3 Years	Determine which areas along Hwy 40 & 43 that would accommodate rest areas with washroom facilities, picnic areas, historical relevance, and scenic viewpoints (paired with Historical Interpretive Panels or a small walking trail). Engage with GOA transportation to determine what is currently planned.
Lead	NRTAC, GPRTA
Support	MD of Greenview, Grande Prairie, other interested parties
KPI	Areas identified in collaboration with GOA, plan developed and implementation underway by 2026
ACTION → 1-3 Years	Inventory and assess current provincial highway and wayfinding signage to determine required changes and improvements from a tourism perspective, creating a travel experience. Work with Alberta Parks, and Department of Transportation to create a strategy to update and improve signage around the area on and off Highway 40 and 43.
Lead	NRTAC, GPRTA
Support	MD of Greenview, Alberta parks, GOA Dept. of Transportation
KPI	Inventory and assessment completed, signage plan approved and implemented by 2026

REGIONAL DATA COMPILATION AND ANALYSIS

GOAL To increase and enhance the data gathering and distribution related to all aspects of the visitor economy within the Grande Prairie Tourism Region.

ACTION → 1-5 Years	Create a data collection and distribution plan that engages all participants of the visitor economy and results in timely access to relevant data for GPRTA, its members and the entire visitor economy.
Lead	GPRTA, NRTAC
Support	Travel Alberta
KPI	Completion of the plan and initial execution by 2026

GRANDE PRAIRIE REGIONAL AIRPORT

GOAL Develop the business case, tourism experiences, marketing initiatives and passenger/tourism data compilation to support an increase to flights and routes into Grande Prairie Airport.

ACTION →
3-10 Years

Develop a business case to support recovery to 2019 revenues and weekly number of flights plus the addition of new flights including regional connectivity from international flights to Calgary and Edmonton and eventually strategic, international long-haul flights into the Grande Prairie airport, incorporating the following elements:

- Form a GPRTA Tourism/Transportation Committee to provide support, and oversight into destination development marketing initiatives in support of the airport's efforts to attract more airline flights/routes.
- Provide sector support for the new 20 year Airport Development Plan.
- As part of the support for the Plan, provide specific support for the airport's lobbying efforts to find funding necessary to build the CBSA facilities and attract CATSA services that are required to provide international guests with border services at the GP airport.
- Provide support and assist with the advocacy required to ensure that a regional funding model is created that will provide the necessary capital for the airport to implement its Master Plan.
- Advocate with Travel Alberta and the GOA to create a regional air carrier service strategy that addresses the challenges and constraints faced by all regional airports within the province.
- Pursue the return and addition of air capacity into the airport on existing and desired routes through air service incentive programs supported by regional inbound marketing programs.
- Investigate and enhance ground transportation service options for visitors/tourists arriving at the airport, as on the ground connectivity is crucial to a large destination like GPTR.
- Help to improve the visitor experience/promotions at the airport to facilitate greater demand and regional dispersion for tourism experiences.
- Pursue new tourism experiences that help support/attract air service for increased regional connectivity from international flights between Calgary, Edmonton and Grande Prairie. These potential new experiences should be strategized in collaboration with airport management to ensure that they are a match with the market demand/segments projected to be attracted from the countries/states/provinces that the new flights will connect to.
- Collaborate to gather and share the findings of tourism/passenger data - summer and winter season passenger/tourism visitation surveys and ongoing data collection.

Lead GPRTA, NRTAC, Grande Prairie Airport

Support Travel Alberta

KPI Advocacy, business case, marketing initiatives developed in collaboration with airport management by 2026.

ACCESS TO PUBLIC LANDS FOR COMMERCIAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

GOAL Improve commercial tourism access to crown lands within the Grande Prairie Tourism Region.

ACTION →
1-3 Years

Meet with government land managers to develop improvements to access and lease/license system/applications related to Crown Lands.

Lead NRTAC

Support GPRTA, Travel Alberta

KPI Improvements to crown land systems for tourism operators made by 2026

ACTION →
3-5 Years

Engage government to ensure the completion of an updated crown lands regional plan for Northern Rockies to reflect government, tourism sector and public priorities for commercial tourism development.

Lead NRTAC

Support GPRTA, Travel Alberta

KPI GOA approves new crown land plan for the region that includes tourism priorities by 2028



23 GPRTA PRIORITIZED GROWTH STRATEGIES

The Regional Gap Analysis included key gaps in the tourism landscape that were identified for GPTR and aligned with the SWOT and gap analysis completed for the Northern Rockies TDZ. As a result of the GPRTA SWOT analysis exercise and discussions during the January 10th Stakeholder meeting, and with other key stakeholders including GPRTA management, it was determined that this strategy needed to drill down deeper and provide GPRTA management with a much more detailed road map that would focus on the growth opportunities for tourism in the region.

As such, eight areas with opportunities/need for strategic growth and enhancement were identified. These are:

- Governance and Collaboration
- Arts and Culture
- Sports Tourism
- Culinary and Agritourism
- Events, Meetings, Conferences
- Dino Tourism
- Outdoor Adventure Experiences
- Infrastructure

The Action Items included below collectively represent a strategy for growth and enhancement for each of these strategic opportunities. They have been vetted with key stakeholders in each tourism sector, however it is assumed that once GPRTA management begin the process of implementing the strategies that they will be further refined. Supporting Groups represent individuals and organizations that may be approached for assistance or will simply be consulted during the implementation of the Action Item.

It is also recognized that:

- a) GPRTA has finite human resources and this capacity constraint means the organization will be looking for assistance from stakeholders to assist in the Strategy's execution;
- b) Each strategy will benefit immeasurably from the engagement and input of individuals and organizations that have specific expertise in each of the growth sectors, and
- c) To harness this expertise, it will likely require GPRTA to create a number of sub-committees, each one focused on providing advice and effort towards realizing the goals for each strategy.

Photo: Room Creative

23.1 GPRTA STRATEGIC ACTION ITEMS 2023-2028

GOVERNANCE AND COLLABORATION

GOAL Ensure that industry stakeholders with particular expertise in specific tourism sectors are engaged in the execution of the strategic action items.

ACTION →
1 Year Recruit industry stakeholders in order to create GPRTA, sub-committees to assist in the execution of the action items attached to each of the strategic growth areas. These committees should include private sector operators from each sector as well as public sector stakeholders.

Supporting Groups Tourism operators, municipal and provincial employees

KPI The creation of the sub-committees by the end of 2023

ACTION →
1-5 Years GPRTA to host an annual meeting including all the sub-committee members, and Travel Alberta, Indigenous Tourism Alberta and Tourism Industry Association of Alberta representatives to review the progress made on the implementation of the Regional and Strategic Action Items. Implementation priorities and related action items for the following year will be established collaboratively during this meeting as well.

Supporting Groups Travel Alberta, ITA, GPRTA sub-committee members, TIAA

KPI Hold the first annual meeting by spring 2024

GOAL Ensure tourism industry needs are included in the GPRTA member Community Development Plans.

ACTION →
1-5 Years Develop a GPRTA specific presentation to ensure that tourism industry needs are contemplated during the review and completion of all aspects of the community development planning process. Identify local tourism stakeholders to co-present to each local planning department as required.

Supporting Groups Municipal governments of GPRTA community members

KPI Municipal Development Plans consider and include tourism industry needs and new plans reflect these needs as plans are developed

GOVERNANCE AND COLLABORATION

ACTION →
1-5 Years Lobby GPRTA member communities to ensure representation from the tourism sector is incorporated specifically in all land use and planning decisions that have an impact on the tourism industry.

Supporting Groups Travel Alberta, GOA land management departments, TIAA

KPI GPRTA member communities ensure tourism is included and considered in land use and planning decisions.

GOAL Improve opportunities for commercial tourism development within the GPTR.

ACTION →
1-3 Years GPRTA and its members to work with key GOA departments (Alberta Environment and Protected Areas, Alberta Forestry, Parks and Tourism etc.) and appropriate municipalities to collaboratively identify tourism investment opportunities and create a competitive process to attract and approve sustainable tourism investment in areas of the GPTR that have high tourism potential.

Supporting Groups NRTAC, Alberta Forestry, Parks and Tourism, Alberta Environment and protected Areas, Travel Alberta, TIAA

KPI A competitive Request for Proposals or Expression of Interest process is publicly released by GOA by 2025

ARTS AND CULTURE

GOAL Increase arts and culture tourism experiences & opportunities in the GPTR.

ACTION →
1 Year Hold an arts and culture tourism workshop for the region to enhance connectivity and collaboration in the region and determine a strategic direction for the development of the sector as well as develop a GPRTA arts and culture sub-committee.

Supporting Groups The GPTR Arts community including but not limited to: private artists representing all mediums and performances, private art galleries, Art Gallery of Grande Prairie, Grande Prairie Guild of Artists, Grande Prairie Arts Council, Grande Prairie Live Theatre, Centre for Creative Arts Society, Grande Prairie Performing Arts Guild, North-western Polytechnic, City of Grande Prairie, GPRTA member communities etc

KPI Arts and Culture Workshop held by spring of 2024

ARTS AND CULTURE

ACTION → 1 Year	Review and ensure alignment with the City of Grande Prairie Arts and Culture Strategy.
Supporting Groups	City of Grande Prairie
KPI	Complete review and engage City management for discussions ensuring alignment between GPRTA and City by fall 2023
ACTION → 1 Year	Create an inventory of existing and potential arts and culture tourism experiences/products that are/or can be market ready.
Supporting Groups	GPTR Arts community
KPI	Inventory completed, and report compiled by spring 2024.
ACTION → 1-2 Years	Hold a follow-up arts and culture tourism workshop for the region's operators/artisans that provide educational programming to discuss efficiencies, opportunities and challenges and future priorities and actions.
Supporting Groups	Arts groups/individuals that provide educational programming within the region
KPI	Arts and Culture Educational Programming Workshop held by spring of 2025
ACTION → 1-2 Years	Hold a follow-up arts and culture tourism workshop for the region that discusses and identifies funding opportunities and grant-writing skills development and develop future priorities and actions.
Supporting Groups	GPTR Arts community
KPI	Arts and Culture Funding and Grant Writing Workshop held by spring of 2025

ARTS AND CULTURE

ACTION → 1-3 Years	Hold a follow-up arts and culture tourism workshop for the region that helps artists identify the full range of options to sell/promote their art and build a loyal following and develop future priorities and actions.
Supporting Groups	GPTR Arts community
KPI	Arts and Culture Promotion Workshop held by spring of 2026
ACTION → 1-3 Years	Provide expertise and mentorship workshops to assist new/potential artisans and organizations to become market/export-ready.
Supporting Groups	GPTR Arts community
KPI	Hold three Market/export-ready Workshops by spring of 2026.
ACTION → 2-5 Years	Identify which current or new artisans and cultural providers are interested in exploring opportunities to create additional/enhanced tourism experiences for visitors related to arts and culture. Support these groups in their efforts by helping to identify emerging markets, opportunities, funding and providing ongoing market-ready mentorship.
Supporting Groups	GPTR Arts community
KPI	Increase 2024 inventory of the number of artisans and cultural tourism experience providers by 5% annually from spring 2024 to spring 2028.
ACTION → 2-3 Years	Create new arts and culture digital content that will be integrated into the GPRTA tourism app including the video profile content for each artist or organization.
Supporting Groups	GPTR Arts community
KPI	Increase and improve the digital content for arts and cultural providers by 2026

ARTS AND CULTURE

ACTION →
2-5 Years Explore opportunities to create arts and culture itineraries within the region that combine various artistic elements into compelling, overall experiences and day and multi-day itineraries for guests.

Supporting Groups GPTR Arts community, Travel Alberta

KPI Create four new arts and culture itineraries by spring 2028

SPORTS TOURISM

GOAL Support the City of Grande Prairie's efforts to create an updated (2012) Sport Tourism Strategy in order to increase sporting events, visitation and visitor spend.

ACTION →
1-2 Years Engage both GP Regional Sport Connection and GPRTA to ensure synergy, identify opportunities and reduce any redundancy in sport tourism product delivery by:

- Helping to identify ways to maximize visitation on the weekend and holidays when local hotels and food and beverage suppliers are not at peak occupancy.
- GPRTA and Sport Connection conducting a study to determine whatever data the two organizations might have related to economic impact, visitor profiles, lost business, and opportunities that might be of assistance to the City's planning efforts.
- Assisting the City of Grande Prairie by engaging all smaller communities outside of Grande Prairie to determine their resources, challenges and opportunities for sport tourism as well as ways to integrate those opportunities into the City's strategy.
- Assisting the City of Grande Prairie in engaging local businesses, and the Chamber of Commerce to garner support and resources for the execution of the City's updated strategy.
- Researching and creating an inventory pre/post event tourism experiences. Based upon this data determining what gaps exist in those experiences, particularly in respect to being compared to what competitive jurisdictions offer. Based on these gaps, identifying opportunities for new operators to create appropriate experiences and find the means to incentivise them to do this.

Supporting Groups City of Grande Prairie, GPRTA member communities, GP Regional Sport Connection, local sport organizations

KPI Completion of the aforementioned items ensuring that City of Grande Prairie is fully supported in their efforts to update the City's sport tourism strategy

CULINARY AND AGRITOURISM

GOAL Increase culinary and agricultural tourism experiences and opportunities in the GPTR.

ACTION →
6 Months Hold an agritourism summit for the region to enhance connectivity and collaboration amongst providers in the region and determine a strategic direction for the development of the sector as well as potentially develop a GPRTA agritourism sub-committee.

Supporting Groups GPTR agritourism producers/suppliers, Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Alberta Open Farm days, Agritourism Alberta, Travel Alberta

KPI Agritourism Summit held by fall of 2023

ACTION →
6 Months Hold a culinary tourism summit for the region to enhance connectivity and collaboration amongst providers in the region and determine a strategic direction for the development of the sector as well as potentially develop a GPRTA culinary tourism sub-committee.

Supporting Groups GPTR culinary operators and suppliers

KPI Culinary-tourism Summit held by fall of 2023

ACTION →
1 Year Create an inventory of existing culinary and agricultural tourism experiences/products (including distilleries, breweries, wineries, manufactured agricultural products and guest experiences) that are/or can be market ready.

Supporting Groups GPTR culinary and agritourism stakeholders

KPI Inventory completed, and report compiled by spring 2024

ACTION →
1-3 Years Support operators in the development of new culinary and agritourism experiences and products that can attract more visitation to the GPRTA.

Supporting Groups GPTR culinary and agritourism stakeholders, Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Alberta Open Farm days, Agritourism Alberta, Travel Alberta

KPI 6 new experiences created by spring 2026

CULINARY AND AGRITOURISM

ACTION → 1-3 Years	Engage agritourism and culinary specialists to help develop a strategic plan for this sector and work with the existing and potential operators to develop/enhance all of the agritourism/culinary products in the region so as to ensure their market and export readiness, looking for higher efficiencies, mitigating liability, increasing yield, exploring other product options.
Supporting Groups	Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Alberta Open Farm days, Agritourism Alberta, Travel Alberta
KPI	Strategic plan created by 2026
ACTION → 2-5 Years	Explore opportunities to create culinary and agritourism itineraries within the region that combine various elements into compelling, overall experiences and itineraries for guests.
Supporting Groups	GPTR culinary and agritourism stakeholders
KPI	Create two new culinary and two new agritourism itineraries by spring 2028
ACTION → 3-5 Years	Identify current and potential culinary experiences that have the ability to take the guest experience above and beyond simply eating at a restaurant. Integrate those experiences into the GPRTA marketing narrative.
Supporting Groups	GPTR culinary operators and suppliers
KPI	6 new/enhanced experiences identified/created by spring 2028
ACTION → 3-5 Years	Provide digital expertise and mentoring workshops for identified suppliers in both culinary and agritourism, to assist in the creation of their digital positioning on all social media. In particular, create a visual brand for these sectors across all social media platforms for the entire region.
Supporting Groups	Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Alberta Open Farm days, Agritourism Alberta, Travel Alberta
KPI	3 workshops completed by fall 2028

CULINARY AND AGRITOURISM

ACTION → 3-5 Years	Create product/supplier/culinary narratives which should be captured by video footage for various uses. Integrate these videos into the video kiosk found at the GPRTA VIC that allows guests to explore possible experiences they might want to visit. Integrate these videos and itineraries into the GPRTA tourism app.
Supporting Groups	GPTR culinary and agritourism stakeholders
KPI	30% of current culinary/agritourism GPRTA members have completed narratives and uploaded by spring 2028
ACTION → 3-5 Years	Create a map/app both printed and digitally that shows where all the culinary and agritourism experiences are in the region and explains what each experience provides.
Supporting Groups	GPTR culinary and agritourism stakeholders
KPI	Mapping and app created and available by spring 2028
ACTION → 3-5 Years	Based on the identified inventory explore possibilities/advantages/disadvantages of a regional agritourism brand for the GPRTA region.
Supporting Groups	GPTR culinary and agritourism stakeholders, Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Alberta Open Farm days, Agritourism Alberta, Travel Alberta
KPI	Brand options evaluated and brand strategy developed by 2030

CULINARY AND AGRITOURISM

ACTION → 3-5 Years	<p>Develop the marketing/sales strategy is to promote the experiences, itineraries and brand related to the culinary/agritourism sectors. Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creation of b-roll, background video footage for use by GPRTA and TA. Hold a quarterly, seasonal experience that includes long table meals that showcase regional products. Create product/supplier narratives which should be captured by video footage for various uses. Engage famous chefs to create signature dishes with regional products. These recipes to then be distributed via the culinary media. Hold a marketing event once a year at harvest time in a unique setting that engages famous chefs working with local suppliers and raises funds for a charitable enterprise/cause that will attract celebrities and high-yield patrons. Explore a cooperative marketing program that allows all suppliers to combine their marketing dollars to achieve meaningful marketing campaigns.
Supporting Groups	GPTR culinary and agritourism stakeholders, Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Alberta Open Farm days, Agritourism Alberta, Travel Alberta
KPI	Develop the marketing and sales strategy by 2030

EVENTS, MEETINGS, CONFERENCES

GOAL Increase the number and yield for events, meetings and conferences in the GPRTA region.

ACTION → 1 Year	Conduct an events, meetings, conventions and festivals tourism workshop including all organizations and businesses that are involved and benefit from this sector. The participants will discuss the elements of the sector strategy and reach a consensus regarding its execution as well as potentially develop a sub-committee for the sector.
Supporting Groups	All Events, Meetings and Conferences providers in the GPTR, City of Grande Prairie, Chamber of Commerce, Travel Alberta
KPI	Workshop held by spring 2024

EVENTS, MEETINGS, CONFERENCES

ACTION → 1 Year	Inventory all of the festivals that occur in the region, create a calendar that identifies lingering capacity for the addition of new festivals. Determine what gaps exist in terms of types of festivals and therefore what new opportunities should be pursued. Priority should be given to those festivals that are in alignment with the region's brand.
Supporting Groups	All Events, Meetings and Conferences providers in the GPTR, City of Grande Prairie, Chamber of Commerce, Travel Alberta
KPI	Inventory completed by spring 2024
ACTION → 1-2 Years	Complete the research necessary to inventory all events and meeting/conventions currently occurring in the region to determine what opportunities have been lost and why they were lost ie: lack of appropriate venues, etc.
Supporting Groups	All Events, Meetings and Conferences providers in the GPTR, City of Grande Prairie, Chamber of Commerce
KPI	Research completed by spring 2025
ACTION → 1-2 Years	Complete research into what human resource capacity (volunteers and paid staff) the region/city has in order to determine what the capacity and potential is for the addition of new events.
Supporting Groups	All Events, Meetings and Conferences providers in the GPTR, City of Grande Prairie, Chamber of Commerce
KPI	Research completed by spring 2025
ACTION → 1-2 Years	Complete a competitive analysis of both the current competition regarding events and what the competition will become, if the events strategy is executed successfully.
Supporting Groups	All Events, Meetings and Conferences providers in the GPTR, City of Grande Prairie, Chamber of Commerce, Travel Alberta
KPI	Analysis completed by spring 2025

EVENTS, MEETINGS, CONFERENCES

ACTION →
2-3 Years Ensure that all local social media platforms (Chamber, regional municipalities, radio stations, hotels, other tourism businesses etc.) have the GPRTA calendar of events available to their consumer base. Create an efficient system for GPRTA to efficiently update digitally those calendars continuously.

Supporting Groups City of Grande Prairie, Chamber of Commerce

KPI Analysis and calendar available by spring 2025

ACTION →
2-3 Years Determine the effectiveness of the calendar by completing a periodic survey of all the participants of the calendar program to determine what the usage of their calendar has been and therefore what market penetration has been achieved.

Supporting Groups City of Grande Prairie, Chamber of Commerce

KPI First survey completed by spring 2026

GOAL

Support, build and promote existing rodeo events within the GPRTA region (Stompede, Teepee Creek Stampede & Rio Grande Rodeo, Debolt Cranberry Lake Rodeo, etc.)

ACTION →
1 Year Working with the local and amateur rodeo associations and the regional rodeo circuit, create an inventory of existing and potential rodeo events throughout the region and start promoting these events more heavily.

Supporting Groups Regional Rodeos and Associations, Travel Alberta

KPI Inventory completed and cooperative marketing developed for the regional rodeo circuit by 2024

ACTION →
1-2 Years Working with the local and amateur rodeo associations, host a rodeo events workshop for the region to enhance connectivity and collaboration between rodeo events in the region and determine a strategic direction for the development and enhancement of these events.

Supporting Groups Regional Rodeos and Associations, Travel Alberta

KPI Rodeo events workshop held to determine potential synergies and opportunities to work together by spring 2025

DINO TOURISM

GOAL

Further develop and promote Dino-Tourism in the GPTR

ACTION →
Annual Continue to hold Palaeo-Palooza annually, including guest speakers and influencers. Work towards attracting larger attendance and enhancing the guest experience, including a dino-parade, dino-races, a dino-themed fair, etc.

Supporting Groups Town of Wembley, Travel Alberta, Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum

KPI Increased attendance and activities annually

ACTION →
Annual Support the growth of dino-related food trucks in both Wembley and Grande Prairie. Dino-themed vehicle and menus, get “dino-thentic” recognition from the museum.

Supporting Groups Town of Wembley, City of Grande Prairie, Phillip J. Currie Museum

KPI Increase the dino-themed food trucks to at least 5 within the region by 2028

ACTION →
1-3 Years Support the development of exclusive, high-yield, experiential paleontological experiences provided by the Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum that include unique accommodation and excellent food and beverage service.

Supporting Groups Town of Wembley, Travel Alberta, Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum

KPI 3 new high-yield dino experiences developed and piloted by 2026

ACTION →
1-3 Years Creation of non-proximate Wayfinding/signage that directs you to the museum (Caution – dinosaurs ahead 60km!). Work with signupalberta.com for highway signage. Town of Wembley to support off-highway signage, including banners.

Supporting Groups MD of Greenview, Town of Wembley, Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum

KPI Signage designed and installed by 2026

DINO TOURISM

ACTION → 1-3 Years	Support the improved security and management of non-guided access to current dig sites. This is part of a funded plan to improve the only “public” access site – including improving the mini-museum at Pipestone, adding audible signage along the trail and protective measures around the worksite.
Supporting Groups	MD of Greenview, Town of Wembley, Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum
KPI	Dig sites are secure from inappropriate activities by 2026
ACTION → 1-3 Years	Work with the owners of the dome in the town of Wembley to paint it to look like a “hatching” dinosaur.
Supporting Groups	Town of Wembley, Travel Alberta, Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum
KPI	Agreement to paint the dome, designed and painted by 2026
ACTION → 1-3 Years	Support the current development of the virtual dinosaur exhibit at the Grande Cache VIC.
Supporting Groups	Grande Cache, Travel Alberta, Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum
KPI	Virtual experience installed and operational by 2026
ACTION → 1-3 Years	Work with Travel Alberta, Government of Alberta and the Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum to gain guided public access to the trackwall in Grande Cache at the CST minesite.
Supporting Groups	Travel Alberta, Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum
KPI	Guided experiences developed and offered by 2026

DINO TOURISM

ACTION → 1-3 Years	Support the Phillip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum’s collaborative efforts to expand the “Dinosaur Trail”, including Grande Cache, Drumheller, Tyrell, Beringia Centre. Current program launches March 24, 2023.
Lead	Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum
Supporting Groups	Travel Alberta
KPI	Expanded program marketed and executed by 2024
ACTION → 1-3 Years	Support the improvement of the animation of the Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partner with Dinosaur Provincial Park to deliver a live feed of their mummified hadrosaur, building on the one found at Nose Creek in 2022. • Create a vibrant on-line presence with interactives (3D bonebed, 3D scanned collection, virtual speaker season, April Archosaur Absurdity) • Host a temporary exhibition annually to drive shoulder season attendance • Repurpose ACA room to original vision of an outdoor gallery.
Lead	Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum
Supporting Groups	GPRTA, Town of Wembley
KPI	Increased museum attendance of 15% annually
ACTION → 1-3 Years	Support the Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum’s collaboration efforts with producers of dinosaur-related toys and product. Current discussions underway with a German manufacturer.
Lead	Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum
Supporting Groups	GPRTA, Travel Alberta
KPI	Expanded partnerships and collaborative promotions by 2026

DINO TOURISM

ACTION → 3-5 Years	Support the installation of 3D life-sized dinosaurs at the intersections with Highway 43 turn-off to the museum. Support funding application that has been made for a museum-grade outdoor landscape with dinosaur statues, treed landscape, rocky riverbed, etc.
Supporting Groups	MD Greenview, Wembley, Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum, Travel Alberta
KPI	Designed, approved and installed by 2028
ACTION → 3-5 Years	Support the re-branding for Wembley related to dinosaurs. Wembley is investigating street name changes, a landmark for the town, adjustments to the town logo. Additional examples include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local parks re-themed with dinosaur slides Business re-branding toolkit related to dinosaur theme Dinosaur footprints that lead you to dinosaur related products or experiences Dino statues and murals all over town, as well as social media "post spots"
Supporting Groups	GPRTA, Travel Alberta, Phillip J. Currie Museum
KPI	Branding strategy is completed and implementation underway by 2026 with many changes completed by 2028
ACTION → 3-5 Years	Support the feasibility to make the business case for the development of accommodation next to the museum or at nearby Sunset Lake. (glamping or Great Wolf Lodge – dinosaur version). Potential for dinosaur themed adventure park under discussion with nearby landowners.
Supporting Groups	Town of Wembley, Travel Alberta, Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum
KPI	New dinosaur themed accommodation option developed at or near the museum by 2030

OUTDOOR ADVENTURE

GOAL Increase and enhance the guided and self-guided experiences available in the region to generate higher yield (more experiences, longer stays, etc.)

ACTION → 1-2 Years	Complete a market analysis that specifically determines who the current visitor for outdoor adventures is in the region, what the competitive landscape looks like, what is the Unique Selling Proposition for outdoor adventure in the region, where are potential visitors going instead of the GPRTA and what the key challenges and constraints to growth in outdoor adventure tourism in the region are currently.
Supporting Groups	Travel Alberta
KPI	Research report completed by spring 2024
ACTION → 2-3 Years	Identify the most motivated experience providers with existing or potential market-suitable experiences to the market. Develop a program to work with each of those providers to create their own Experience Development Plans eventually leading to them being export ready.
Supporting Groups	Outdoor experience providers in the GPTR, Travel Alberta
KPI	Experience providers identified and program developed and implemented by 2026
ACTION → 1-2 Years	Inventory the regional guided experiences and determine their state of market readiness, desired development goals and market suitability.
Supporting Groups	Outdoor experience providers in the GPTR, Travel Alberta
KPI	Research report completed by spring 2024
ACTION → 1-2 Years	Inventory self-guided experiences, describe quality of user-friendliness, market suitability, and, if applicable, estimate investment required to bring these experiences to market.
Supporting Groups	Outdoor experience providers in the GPTR, Travel Alberta
KPI	Research report completed by spring 2024

OUTDOOR ADVENTURE

ACTION → 2-3 Years Where the completed inventory reports expose gaps in the experiences currently being delivered, identify those gaps where there are no current providers and engage and incentivize new providers to enter the market, filling those gaps.

Supporting Groups Travel Alberta

KPI Gaps identified and 3 new providers engaged to develop the experiences by 2026

ACTION → 3-5 Years Identify the self-guided experiences that will provide the highest return on investment and communicate that information to the entities (organization, governments) with the ability to develop that experience into a market-ready experience. Encourage the entity to create an Experience Development Plan.

Supporting Groups Travel Alberta

KPI The top 3 self-guided experiences identified and successfully lobbied entity(s) to develop the experience by 2028

GOAL

Enhance promotion of Passport to the Peaks (hiking incentive program) as a potential anchor recreational product in the M.D. of Greenview, Grande Cache and Willmore Wilderness Park area.

ACTION → 1 Year Work with the Passport to the Peaks committee to launch a newly edited version of the book with new, attractive logo branding.

Supporting Groups Grande Cache, MD of Greenview

KPI New passport published and available for 2024.

ACTION → 1-2 Years Strategically promote the Passport to the Peaks program on social media platforms. Advertise the program in effective printed publications. Run a campaign targeting Alberta hiking groups.

Supporting Groups Grande Cache, MD of Greenview

KPI New marketing campaign launched by 2025

OUTDOOR ADVENTURE

GOAL

Increase and enhance the consumptive tourism experiences (fishing, hunting) available in the region to generate higher yield (more experiences, longer stays, etc.)

ACTION → 1-2 Years Complete a market analysis that specifically determines who the current visitor for consumptive adventures is in the region, what the competitive landscape looks like, what is the Unique Selling Proposition for outdoor adventure in the region, where are potential visitors going instead of the GPRTA and what the key challenges and constraints to growth in outdoor adventure tourism in the region are currently.

Supporting Groups Travel Alberta

KPI Research report completed by spring 2024

ACTION → 2-3 Years Identify the most motivated consumptive tourism experience providers with existing or potential market-suitable experiences to the market. Develop a program to work with each of those providers to create their own Experience Development Plans eventually leading to them being export ready.

Supporting Groups Consumptive tourism experience providers in the GPTR, Travel Alberta

KPI Consumptive experience providers identified and programs developed and implemented by 2026

INFRASTRUCTURE

GOAL

Further leverage the tourism potential of Sulphur Gates and the Sulphur Gates Provincial Recreation Area.

ACTION → 1-3 Years Undertake a feasibility study and concept plan to determine how the tourism potential and visitor experience at Sulphur Gates, the Provincial Recreation Area and connections into Grande Cache could be realized (e.g. access into/across Sulphur River canyon).

Supporting Groups M.D. of Greenview, Grande Cache

KPI Feasibility study and concept plan completed by 2022

INFRASTRUCTURE

GOAL Increase and enhance accommodations along Highways 40 and 43 loop – within the GPRTA region.

ACTION →
1-2 Years Complete an inventory of current assets and make the business case while collaborating with existing business and potential investors to encourage an increased mix of accommodations opportunities and unique stays that match the market demand.

Supporting Groups Travel Alberta

KPI Inventory completed; gaps identified. Report available for potential investors by 2025.

ACTION →
3-5 Years Complete an inventory of all campgrounds (public and private) on Highway 40 and 43. Compile demand and occupancy statistics. Identify opportunities and/or the need for expansion or creation of new facilities. Lobby GOA to continue the work on improving public campgrounds.

Supporting Groups MD of Greenview, Travel Alberta

KPI GPRTA recommended improvements to public campgrounds by 2028. List of potential private opportunities made available to investors

GOAL Grow the region's trails-based visitor economy and associated benefits.

ACTION →
Immediate Actively participate in the Wapiti Recreation and Trail Management Plan planning process (underway) to ensure the mixed-use trail system within the Wapiti Dunes and Big Mountain network is prioritized to become Alberta's best, and most sustainably managed, off-highway vehicle focused signature trails destination. Support approval of the plan, proceed with implementation of the recommendations, and formal designation of the trail system under Alberta's Trails Act to enable improved management, maintenance, and trail sustainability.

Supporting Groups Travel Alberta, Alberta Forestry Parks and Tourism

KPI Plan completed by 2024

INFRASTRUCTURE

GOAL Increase awareness and sales of experiences within the GPRTA via visitors to the GPRTA Visitor Centre.

ACTION →
1-2 Years Create a video kiosk of 12 screens that will show video vignettes of the amazing experiences found in the region. Each presentation will include a QR Code at the end that guests can actuate providing them with the contact/booking information for that experience as well as directions from the VIC to that location.

Supporting Groups GPRTA members

KPI Kiosk constructed and initial content completed by spring 2025

GOAL Improve roads, maintenance and access for traveling public and visitors.

ACTION →
1-3 Years Inventory and assess current provincial highway and wayfinding signage to determine required changes and improvements from a tourism perspective, creating a travel experience. Work with Alberta Parks, and Department of Transportation to create a strategy to update and improve signage around the area on and off Highway 40 and 43.

Supporting Groups Travel Alberta, Alberta Parks, Alberta Transportation

KPI Inventory and assessment completed, sign plan approved and implemented by 2026

ACTION →
1-3 Years Collaborate with Alberta Parks and other levels of government to increase access, road maintenance and signage to Kakwa Falls and the Day Use Area.

Supporting Groups Travel Alberta, Alberta Parks, Alberta Transportation

KPI Approved plan to maintain road and signage to an agreed upon standard by 2026

INFRASTRUCTURE

ACTION →
3-5 Years Lobby provincial government and show the need for improved safety along Highway 40 N and the benefits to tourism and residents that can be created by widening this highway and creating safe pull-outs and passing lanes.

Supporting Groups MD of Greenview

KPI Highway improvement plan completed and approved by GOA, construction underway by 2028

GOAL Establish strategically placed electric vehicle charging stations throughout the GPRTA.

ACTION →
3-5 Years Work in partnership with all municipalities to establish an EV Charging network.

Supporting Groups MD of Greenview; Invest GP (Highway 43)

KPI A functional and practical network of charging stations installed and operating by 2028.

GOAL Increase the number of tourism-facing, higher yield accommodations in the region, inventory and review existing properties in the GPTR that are potentially sunsetting and could be purchased by a new private operator and converted into an enhanced offering.

ACTION →
1-5 Years Inventory and review potential sunsetting properties in the region. Approach the owners to determine if there is a desire to divest of the asset(s). Create a prospectus of potential properties to be able to provide for potential investors whom enquire about development opportunities.

Supporting Groups Local real estate Board and companies, Chambers of Commerce

KPI Creation of a tourism, real estate prospectus of properties by 2024 that is updated bi-annually

INFRASTRUCTURE

GOAL Help to attract new operators and tourism investors to the Grande Prairie Tourism Region.

ACTION →
1-2 Years Create an Operators Investment Attraction Committee. Create a committee of successful operators from all sectors of the regional tourism industry that would make themselves available to support positive discussions with potential new investors/operators thinking of establishing a business in the GPTR. This would include collaborating with municipal governments in the creation of a tourism specific investment package that would reinforce the advantages of locating a tourism business in the GPTR.

Supporting Groups All municipal members of GPRTA, Chambers of Commerce

KPI Creation of the committee and investment package by 2025

GOAL To increase the quantity and/or quality of tourism-focused accommodation in the corridor, including accommodations that provide access to or offer a range of amenities to offer unique guest experiences.

ACTION →
1-5 Years Identify locations where the current or potential guest experiences justify the creation of new accommodations that are integral to those guest experience. Utilize incentives from the municipality to attract tourism operators (speed-up permits, tax deductions, grants, etc.). Prioritize efforts on previously identified opportunities in the TDZ investment opportunities (i.e. comfort camping offered by private providers in Public Recreation Areas, glamping added to the Nite Hawk facility, accommodation near the Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum).

Supporting Groups Travel Alberta, MD of Greenview, regional municipal governments

KPI Assessment complete that supports the development of new facilities by 2026



24 STRATEGIC MARKETING PLAN

This report is primarily focused on the supply side of the tourism equation. Most of the Strategic Action Items are aimed at either increasing the number of new experiences or enhancing the current experiences found in the GPTR. However, the GPRTA is a Destination Management Organization, which means it is responsible for both product development as well as marketing those same products.

This final section of the Destination Development Strategy focuses on GPRTA's marketing function. It is a marketing plan that outlines some of the broad strategic goals and delves into the more detailed marketing tactics that are recommended to achieve those goals.

KEY MARKETING STRATEGIES

Below are listed some of the key strategies that overall the marketing effort should embrace:

1. Digital vs. offline/mass media advertising

Most of the media-related tactics will revolve around digital advertising. In general, it is more effective, less expensive, more targeted and easier to track data than offline tactics such as print media, radio etc.

2. Utilize and exploit the "Influencer Effect"

The digital platforms referred to above, are the perfect medium to promote positive influencers. Bloggers, vloggers and social media celebrities all have engaged audiences that trust their recommendations. Engaging these folks to make the GPRTA pitch to their specific niche audience is a highly effective means of reaching GPRTA's most productive markets.

3. Based upon empirical data

In general the tactics that are eventually executed should be determined in part upon empirical data such as visitation statistics, real and projected market segmentation, in-country guest surveys, digital campaign analytics and shared, operator performance metrics. While key markets have been identified and described in this report, this data should be utilized to determine and refine which are the primary domestic and international markets for GPRTA's marketing efforts.

4. Engage in the mobile device space

Guests are booking tourism products via their mobile devices in ever-growing numbers. Whenever possible, digital efforts should be rolled into mobile applications that are optimized for smart devices.

5. Leverage cooperative partnerships

One of the reasons it is so important that this Strategy is aligned with the Travel Alberta TDZ research is that market alignment in particular, should ensure that marketing dollars spent by TA will benefit operators in the GPTR. This alignment should allow for GPRTA to buy-in to cooperative marketing programs, reducing costs and leveraging this spend exponentially.

6. Analyze and exploit competitor marketing

For marketing to be truly effective it cannot exist in a vacuum. Competitive destinations attracting similar market segments should be analyzed to determine what their marketing mix is and its effectiveness. Wherever possible, GPRTA should provide an alternative destination pitch next to these competitive advertisements. Instances where this can be accomplished cooperatively are even better.

Photo: Room Creative

7. Focus on the brand

This report has emphasized the need for a cohesive brand for the region. The brand will highlight what makes the region and its guest experiences so unique.

It is critical that this brand be properly developed and then represented consistently throughout the execution of the entire marketing plan.

8. Pandemic-proof marketing

One of the few positives that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic is that tourism operators and marketers were forced to recognize the importance of appealing to both the domestic and international markets in the chance that some catastrophic event restricts either market's performance. Marketing efforts therefore need to address both markets and aim for a relatively balanced market mix.

9. Bespoke marketing that targets specific visitors

Mass marketing is rarely a cost effective way for small-market entities such as GPRTA to reach their most productive markets. Today's digital platforms allow for extremely surgical marketing campaigns that focus on a very niche market segment made up of potential guests who are most likely to actually visit the region.

10. Aim to appeal to repeat customers

Really outstanding marketing serves not only to attract more customers, it also lays the foundation for those customers to return for additional experiences. Fortunately, one of the key attributes of the GPTR tourism offerings is the diversity of those experiences. Returning for new experiences because you were unable to enjoy all the region has to offer on your first trip should become a key message in most marketing efforts.

11. Utilize marketing campaigns to engage local residents and improve resident awareness of the benefits of tourism

Whenever possible, marketing campaigns should engage the local residents. Marketing surveys, contests and the use of prominent local residents as models and brand ambassadors go a long way to raising resident awareness of tourism in their community and increasing pride in place.

MARKETING TACTICS PLAN

The following are the specific marketing tactics recommended to be implemented by GPRTA as part of the larger marketing plan. It is recognized that resources and capacity will ultimately determine the number of tactics to be executed. It is further recognized that some of these tactics will not provide an acceptable ROI until a critical mass of experiences in the region can be combined to create a compelling package. GPRTA management will need to prioritize what tactics are deployed first as well as determine what in-house vs. contracted services will be engaged.

A. Prepare Compelling Destination Branding

Before any creative is written a compelling brand for the GPTR needs to be developed. The tagline *"Untapped, Unfiltered and Unforgettable"* is perfectly chosen to represent a region whose brand revolves around the authenticity and diversity of experiences it provides. This is strictly a tagline however, and the full branding process needs to be completed. Using a consistent branding and a story telling approach will quickly bring customer confidence, loyalty and international attention to the Grande Prairie Tourism Region.

- Determination of the Unique Selling Points and brand promise
- Development of the total Brand Package
- Logo Development and graphic standards (completed)
- Develop Marketing Tag-line ie. "Untapped, Unfiltered and Unforgettable" (completed)
- Create a Brand Toolkit to be provided to all operators and stakeholders to ensure the correct brand messaging is consistently presented to the marketplace

B. Website development

(Completed but will need to be updated to incorporate brand positioning).

- Gather Digital Assets
 - Photography
 - Video
 - B-Roll footage should be developed for distribution to media for earned travel stories on television and the internet.
- Prepare all rates & packaging for direct bookings
- Create the call to action on the website (and all online and printed materials)
- Prepare a comprehensive, search engine optimization (SEO) strategy and ensure that this process is completed
- Engage a comprehensive digital analytics strategy/program so that this data can be used in determining future digital programming

C. Create "have to attend", by invitation only, Brand Launch Event

Key Invitees might include key political leaders, key local media as well as travel trade reps, product buyers and owners of inbound tour operator/travel agents. This will establish that the key stakeholders will have an emotional "buy in" to the brand and destination and feel a personal commitment to the success of the destination from day one.

D. Develop Social Media Channels

User created content has become the most critical element of any digital marketing effort. Particular attention should be paid to social networking sites, (specifically by encouraging potential guests to post comments and questions to build consumer knowledge quickly). Content will also be provided to all stakeholders for sharing to their own communities via their own social media. Below is a list of several of the more effective social media channels available today. Each has a particular following and will be particularly effective for engaging specific market segments.

- | | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| a) Facebook | j) YouTube Channel | t) WeChat |
| b) Facebook Messenger | k) LinkedIn | u) Viber |
| c) Facebook Marketplace | l) Reddit | v) Foursquare |
| d) Instagram | m) Flickr | w) MeetUp |
| e) Twitter | n) Vimeo | x) Mix |
| f) Snapchat | o) Skype | y) DeviantArt |
| g) Tumbler | p) Next Door | z) Behance |
| h) Tik Tok (while it lasts) | q) Quora | aa) Bloglovin' |
| i) Pinterest | r) Xing | ab) Influenster |
| | s) WhatsApp | ac) All Recipes |
| | | ad) Flipboard |

E. Video and Virtual Reality Marketing

Video Marketing and virtual reality marketing can be used extremely effectively to boost GPRTA's overall marketing efforts. Video content should be specifically created to be easily shared across various digital platforms (many of which are identified in the preceding list). Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and You Tube are some of the platforms most often used. Virtual Reality Marketing takes this concept to the next level, allowing potential guests the opportunity to experience aspects of the destination from their own home. 360 degree, virtual tours of experiences, accommodation and attractions can provide powerful encouragement to convert these folks to actual visitors.



F. Offline Promotional Strategies

While digital marketing provides the most cost-effective way to reach the greatest number of potential visitors, a destination like GPTR that relies significantly on the proximate, domestic market should not overlook the potential of some key, offline promotional opportunities. In particular, printed collateral such as the Grande Prairie Region Visitor Guide and billboards in key marketplaces such as the Edmonton International Airport should be continued and considered as new opportunities respectively.

G. GPRTA Visitor Centre Booking/Promotion

The GPRTA Visitor Information Centre (VIC) is a beautiful building that could enhance its contribution to the sale of regional experiences. Just inside the main entrance to the facility there could be an area where there is a wall of a dozen 18"X 24" screens, each one loaded with a number of short videos of market-ready tourism experiences provided in the GPTR. The screens would be next to a large map of the region. When a visitor presses the button on the screen the titles of each business/experience with its location and a brief description of the experience would scroll down the screen. Once the visitor selects a particular experience the video of that experience plays and lights on the map are illuminated to show where in the region the operation is located as well as which roads would lead the visitor to that specific destination from their current location at the VIC. A QR code that can be scanned by the visitor's phone would appear at the end of each video that provides a link with that operator's contact and booking information and also allows the guests to book that experience directly online via the booking portal that is provided by GPRTA. The visitor may also ask the Centre staff at the kiosk for more information about any of the experiences and the staff may also help facilitate the use of the QR code for folks that require assistance. It is hoped that not only will this provide a way to increase awareness of and visitation to operators across the region, but that it also serves as a catalyst to encourage operators to become market-ready and capable of booking their experiences on line. It is also assumed that GPRTA would provide assistance to these businesses in becoming market-ready. A flat fee or percentage of sales fee charged by the Centre to the operator per booking, could be implemented to create a revenue stream for GPRTA.

H. Prepare and implement a robust and frequent Social Media "Drip" Campaign

Utilizing all the social media platforms listed above (compelling short videos and photography would be used as key component). Frequent interaction with, (building International followers) Trade, Media and direct consumers will become a consistent element of the campaign. Focus would be on generating 'friend of mine awareness' by insuring the destination content is informative and compelling – not only focused on the singular experiences but also on traveling to and in the GPTR overall. Travel Alberta's involvement should be critically leveraged during this process.

I. Monthly e-Newsletter campaigns (including dynamic video footage)

Should be distributed to a wide data base of all industry partners and international travel trade & travel media. GPRTA will need to start compiling a consumer database of all the interested parties and all the e-newsletters and video that have been distributed to date.

Monthly email campaigns will build strong partnerships, and provide information and confidence within the tourism industry, travel trade, media, transportation partners and direct consumers.

J. Prepare and conduct ongoing online, digital advertising campaigns

The GPRTA will likely be working directly with Google to develop in-depth Google AdWords and keyword campaigns. Facebook boosting and cost-per-click campaigns, and Instagram strategies along with other options could become key components for successfully driving web traffic that ultimately converts into direct sales. Each of these options need to be analyzed to determine which will provide the greatest ROI. These campaigns may also be offered to partners as a GPRTA cooperative marketing opportunity. Two options often used for campaign platforms are listed below.

- a) Google AdWord and Google display ad campaigns should be aimed at extremely targeted audiences in key markets internationally
- b) Facebook – Paid – Boost Facebook Posts and Promote Business Ads should be executed in key markets using visitor profiling / demographics

K. Industry Engagement & Partnership Development

Travel Alberta, Destination Canada, Indigenous Tourism Alberta, Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada, City of Grande Prairie, all GPRTA member communities and all member operators, Grande Prairie Airport and Edmonton International Airport, these are all potential partners for GPRTA to engage with. Partnerships with local and regional tourism partners, as well as national organizations such as Destination Canada, will ensure that the destination enjoys joint marketing and cooperative sales efforts with these partners to bring more domestic and global attention to the region as a whole. Participation in media and trade familiarization tours in-market should be confirmed with GPRTA's partners. This will include "hard hat" tours of actual properties and those being built as well as sharing the GPRTA messaging with select buyers in market.

L. Media Plan – Travel Writers / Earned Media

The marketing plan should have a strong focus on public relations that target earned media and a robust online advertising and social media strategy for the highest return on investment. As a rule, a media report on a destination or experience is said to be valued up to 10 times more than that of a paid advertisement, as it is considered an unbiased, third-party endorsement. It is also said that if marketing is a share of the mind then PR is share of the heart. An authentic destination is all about creating experiences that are memorable and emotional, that build long term loyalty and pride. To that end the GPRTA should engage an experienced PR firm to ensure that earned media opportunities are created and exploited to their fullest. As part of the PR efforts, the creation of consistent, story content development should be employed when preparing a robust "drip" campaign of stories, blogs and media outreach that will be sent monthly to key writers and partners worldwide.

M. Familiarization Tours with Media and Tour Operators

The GPRTA in conjunction with Travel Alberta/Destination Canada will invite these key partners to the GPTR, partnering with an appropriate accommodation supplier and a transportation partner such as WestJet. These should be invited trips coordinated specifically by the GPRTA marketing team, as well as those tours that are added onto Travel Alberta/DC familiarization trips already planned in market.

N. Sales & Marketing Road Trips

Face to face meetings and networking build long term relationships and confidence in the GPTR brand and ultimately bring bookings. To realize this goal, the senior management and marketing staff, working in collaboration with Travel Alberta, should provide presentations to key media and travel trade accounts that work with the key markets for the GPTR. These presentations would introduce the region and key experience packages to these key distribution channels. Once these meetings have been held, a schedule of "maintenance meetings" should be arranged to ensure that these relationships remain strong.

O. Canadian Receptive Operators

Key receptive, reservations and global sales teams should eventually be approached by GPRTA marketing staff once the critical mass of experiences is developed in the region. This should be developed with the help of Travel Alberta's marketing team. Presentations will be required every 6 and 12 months to begin with in order to provide product knowledge and training to these receptive operators. This is GPRTA's extended global sales workforce as these companies have sales teams who travel worldwide to promote specific regions within Canada and they can become some of GPRTA's best representatives to the international travel trade.

- a) Jonview, Discover Holidays, Entrée Canada, JAC, Asian inbound operators etc. are all examples of the operators that GPRTA might target.

P. Trade Show Participation

Although there are hundreds of Travel Shows that are held both domestically and internationally, GPRTA will need to narrow the field down to the best of the best shows in the markets with the opportunities for the best return on investment based upon actual bookings and increased brand awareness. GPRTA has significant experience attending provincially located shows and will build on that knowledge for the domestic markets. Eventually as regional product is developed, opportunities should be explored to leverage Travel Alberta, ITA and ITAC's marketing activities including potential GPRTA participation as a stakeholder/partner at Rendezvous Canada, Adventure Travel World Summit, Adventure Elevate, ITB, WTM and Asia Showcase. In some instances, funding can be found to offset the costs of attending these major events but they are expensive, so priorities should be given to the top two or three with the greatest ROI.

25 APPENDIX

25.1 APPENDIX I: ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY TABLE

Date	Engagement	Participants	In-Person	Virtual	People
18-Oct-22	Grande Prairie Regional Tourism Association	Ken Loudon, Executive Director		✓	1
24-Oct-22	Nitehawk Recreation Area	Jonathan Clarkson, GM	✓		1
24-Oct-22	Open Road Adventures	Lenore Tochor and Leona Small, Owner/Operators	✓		2
25-Oct-25	Philip J Currie Dinosaur Museum	Dr. Emily Bramforth	✓		1
25-Oct-22	Elevation Sled Dog Adventures	Aaron Peck, Owner/Operator	✓		1
25-Oct-22	The Stanford Inn	Sandi Neville, GM	✓		1
25-Oct-22	Canadian Motorcycle Tourism Assn	Renee Charbonneau, Executive Director	✓		1
25-Oct-22	Grande Prairie Regional Sport Connection	Karna Germsheid	✓		1
25-Oct-22	Grande Prairie Stampede	Dave Anderson	✓		1
25-Oct-22	Grande Prairie Regional Tourism Association	Ken Loudon, Executive Director	✓		1
25-Oct-22	MD of Greenville, Aseniwuche Winewak Nation	Jenny Daubert, Supervisor Tourism; Gary McDonald	✓		2
03-Nov-22	Philip J Currie Dinosaur Museum	Linden Roberts, Executive Director		✓	1
04-Nov-22	Wild Blue Yonder Rafting Company	Gina Goldie, Owner		✓	1
21-Nov-22	Stakeholder Working Group	Garry McDonald, Jenny Daubert, Johnathan Clarkson, Karna Germshied, Ken Loudon, Linden Roberts, Brian Grant, Gina Goldie, Renee Charbonneau, Sandi Neville		✓	10
23-Nov-22	Operator Engagement	Scott Eady, Sundog Tours; Paul Hardy, Jasper Tours		✓	2
24-Nov-22	GOA, Transportation Representatives	Danny Jung, Michael Pylko		✓	2
24-Nov-22	Operator Engagement	Aaron Peck, Brandon Kotulak		✓	2
08-Dec-22	Stakeholder Working Group	James Tessier, Grant Berg, Kim Randall, Darcy Coughlin, Jordan Tidley, Laura McGowan, Tanya Oliver, Kim Pinnock, Sandi Neville, Ken Loudon, Daniel Becker		✓	11
13-Dec-22	Stakeholder Working Group	Wendy Poseluzu, Scott Sunderwald, Greg Nelson, Stefan Felsing, Shari Berner, Melanie Widenmaier, Kundi, Kendra Middleton, Jenny Daubert, Jan Vassbotn		✓	10
14-Dec-22	Stakeholder Working Group	Jenny Daubert, Gina Goldie, Linden Roberts, Renee Charbonneau, Ken Loudon, Brian Grant		✓	6
05-Jan-23	Stakeholder Working Group	Sue Leonard, Heather DeBoer, Brian Gallant, Jake O'Reilly, Melanie Hallock		✓	5

Date	Engagement	Participants	In-Person	Virtual	People
10-Jan-23	GPRTA Stakeholder Session	List provided separately in Appendix II	✓		58
11-Jan-23	GPRTA Stakeholder meeting	Grant Berg, GP Councillor & Grant Berg Gallery	✓		1
11-Jan-23	GPRTA Stakeholder meeting	Art Gallery, Daniel Becker	✓		1
11-Jan-23	GPRTA Stakeholder meeting	Evergreen Park,, Kim Randall & 2 staff	✓		3
11-Jan-23	GPRTA Stakeholder meeting	GP Live Theatre, Vicki Potter	✓		1
12-Jan-23	GPRTA Stakeholder meeting	Kreg Alde	✓		1
12-Jan-23	GPRTA Stakeholder meeting	Catherine Ridgeway, Bonnetts Energy Centre	✓		1
17-Jan-23	Stakeholder Working Group	Gina Goldie, Garry McDonald, Jenny Daubert, Linden Roberts, Karna Germshied		✓	5
27-Jan-23	Stakeholder Working Group	Gina Goldie, Jenny Daubert, Linden Roberts, Ken Loudon, Sandi Neville, Renee Charbonneau		✓	6
27-Jan-23	Canadian Motorcycle Tourism Assn	Renee Charbonneau		✓	1
15-Feb-23	GPRTA	Ken Loudon, Executive Director		✓	1
20-Feb-23	MD of Greenview	Duane Didow, Tyler Olsen		✓	2
21-Feb-23	County of Grande Prairie	Steve Zimmerman, Bob Marshall		✓	2
24-Feb-23	Town of Wembley	Noreen Zhang, CAO; Mayor Peterson; Councillor Ketchum		✓	3
28-Feb-23	Town of Sexsmith	Mayor Kate Potter, Councillor Bruce Black		✓	2
28-Feb-23	Town of Fox Creek	Mayor Sheila Gilmour, CAO Kristen Milne		✓	2
02-Mar-23	GPRTA Steering Committee	Daniel Becker, Ken Loudon, Lucille Hooper, Hetti Huls	✓		4
03-Mar-23	Stakeholder Working Group	Gina Goldie, Linden Roberts, Sandi Neville, Renee Charbonneau, Ken Loudon, Jenny Daubert, Brian Grant	✓		9
08-Mar-23	Stakeholder meeting	Karna Gernsheid, GP Regional Sport Connection		✓	1
13-Mar-23	City of Grande Prairie	Stephanie Cajolias, ED Recreation and Culture; Katie Biberdorf, Community Recreation Supervisor for Sports Development, Wellness and Culture		✓	2
14-Mar-23	Stakeholder meeting	Kim Randall, Evergreen		✓	1
16-Mar-23	Stakeholder meeting	Grant Berg, GP Councillor & Grant Berg Gallery; Mayor Jackie Clayton		✓	2
27-Mar-23	Stakeholder meeting	Ken Loudon, Kreg Alde, Kim Randall, Jordan Tidey, Jason Halwa, Councillor Ketchum, Alana Bergeron, Hetti Huls, Heather Jones, Daniel Becker	✓		10
Totals			20	24	182

25.2 APPENDIX II: WORKSHOP ATTENDEE TABLE

GPTA Stakeholder Workshop Held January 10, 2023

First Name	Last Name	Company
Alde	Kreg	Broken Tine Orchard
Anderson	Dave	Grande Prairie Buckwild PBR
Bamforth	Emily	Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum
Becker	Daniel	Art Gallery of Grande Prairie
Biberdorf	Katie	City of Grande Prairie (Community Recreation Development)
Bildson	Brian	Grande Prairie Airport
Black	Bruce	Town of Sexsmith (County Council)
Blais	Ryan	nine10
Bosch	Wendy	Downtown Association Grande Prairie/City of Grande Prairie (City Council)
Bressey	Dylan	City of Grande Prairie (City Council)
Brown	Simone	Sandman Hotel Grande Prairie
Butler	Paulette	Sandman Hotel Grande Prairie
Cajolais	Stephanie	City of Grande Prairie (Sports Development, Wellness & Culture)
Charbonneau	Marie (Renne)	Canadian Motorcycle Tourism Association
Clayton	Jackie	City of Grande Prairie (City Mayor)
Clarkson	Johnathan	Nitehawk Year-Round Adventure Park
Corbett	Cyndi	Town of Beaverlodge (Town Council)
Coughlin	Darcy	County of Grande Prairie (Economic Development)
Dowling	Kristeva	Stolen Harvest Meadery
Ducklow	Naomi	Best Western Grande Prairie
Endresen	Kara	The Sand Zone
Frayn	Amanda	County of Grande Prairie (County Council)
Germsheld	Karna	Grande Prairie Regional Sports Connection
Goldstein	David	Travel Alberta
Griffith	Colin	Grande Prairie Curling Club
Huls	Hetti	County of Grande Prairie (Economic Development)
Ketchum	Rebecca	Town of Wembley (Town Council)
Kimpe	Kimberly	Grande Prairie Regional Tourism Association
Loudon	Ken	Grande Prairie Regional Tourism Association

First Name	Last Name	Company
Martens	Bob	Grande Prairie Golf & Country Club
Martens	Crystal	South Peace Centennial Museum
Mayo	Nancy	Government of Alberta (Alberta Parks)
Neville	Sandi	Stanford Inn
O'Connor	Mike	City of Grande Prairie (City Council)
Oliver	Tanya	Grande Prairie & District Chamber of Commerce
O'Toole	Kevin	City of Grande Prairie (City Council)
Park	Cindy	Minhas Group
Peterson	Brian	County of Grande Prairie (County Council)
Pilat	Wade	City of Grande Prairie (City Council)
Pinnock	Kim	City of Grande Prairie (Economic Development Invest Grande Prairie)
Potter	Kate	Town of Sexsmith (Town Mayor)
Pura	Tom	Grande Prairie & District Chamber of Commerce
Randall	Kim	Evergreen Park
Rhodes	Chelsey	Government of Alberta (Alberta Parks)
Ridgeway	Catherine	City of Grande Prairie (Event & Entertainment Manager)
Roberts	Linden	Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum
Rojas	David	Swan City Football Club
Sears	Maiya	Philip J. Currie Dinosaur Museum
Smith	Christopher	Travel Alberta
Sorgen	Holly	Community Futures
Tochor	Lenore	Open Road Adventures
Wong	Ray	JP Grill & Bar
Zimmerman	Steve	County of Grande Prairie (County Council)
Zhang	Noreen	Town of Wembley (Chief Administrative Officer)
Daubert	Jenny	MD of Greenview (Grande Cache Tourism & Interpretive Centre)
Berg	Grant	City of Grande Prairie/Grant Berg Gallery (City Council)
Chrenek	Bob	County of Grande Prairie (County Council)
Hook	Candace	Centre of Creative Arts



