

FRASER VALLEY

DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

HIGHLIGHTS



DESTINATION
BRITISH COLUMBIA™



THANK YOU

The Fraser Valley Destination Development Strategy is the outcome of a 21-month, iterative process of gathering, synthesizing, and validating information with tourism partners about the status and future direction of tourism in the Fraser Valley planning area.

We thank the First Nations on whose traditional territories we gathered for our community meetings including the Stó:lō Nation, In-SHUCK-ch Nation, and Nlaka'pamux Nation.

Thank you to our tourism partners who participated in the process by attending planning workshops, conducting interviews, hosting site visits, and responding to surveys. Special thanks to the members of the Working Group, as well as the facilitators of the destination development process.

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1 INTRODUCTION

WHY A STRATEGY?

The Fraser Valley Destination Development Strategy was developed to enhance the competitiveness of the Fraser Valley planning area over the next 10 years and beyond. The strategy was developed as part of Destination BC's Destination Development Program to support and guide the long-term growth of tourism in British Columbia. This document presents the key highlights of the Fraser Valley destination development strategy.

WHO IS IT FOR?

The Fraser Valley Destination Development Strategy is a guide for tourism partners as they work collaboratively to grow the visitor economy. The strategy will be reviewed and updated to reflect changing tourism objectives, priorities, and market conditions. Results will be tracked and learning outcomes will inform future implementation activities, thereby optimizing their effectiveness in increasing economic, social, cultural, and environmental benefits for the entire Fraser Valley planning area.

WHERE IS IT FOR?

The Fraser Valley planning area includes Langley and Pitt Meadows to the west, Hope to the east, the US border to the south, the peaks of Golden Ears Provincial Park and Harrison Lake to the north, and all parts in

between. It includes portions of the Fraser Valley Regional District (FVRD) and Metro Vancouver Regional District, including Langley (City and Township), Mission, Maple Ridge, Pitt Meadows, Abbotsford, Chilliwack, Harrison Hot Springs, Kent, and Hope, as well as smaller communities in FVRD Electoral Areas A to H. It also includes Indigenous communities and entrepreneurs in the Stó:lō Nation, In-SHUCK-ch Nation, and Nlaka'pamux Nation.

WHERE DOES IT FIT?

The Fraser Valley is one of 20 planning areas across BC for which destination development strategies are being developed. Each planning area represents a logical destination for visitors in and around the province. As planning areas span across multiple jurisdictions, the importance of adopting an integrated approach with a shared vision and coordinated investment is critical. The Fraser Valley Destination Development Strategy is one of six being prepared for the Vancouver, Coast & Mountains tourism region. The other five include Metro Vancouver, Sunshine Coast, Sea-to-Sky Corridor, Gold Rush Trail, and Highway 3 Corridor. In time, informed by the outcomes of all relevant planning area destination development strategies, regional strategies will be developed. These will, in turn, inform the creation of a provincial strategy thereby ensuring a truly integrated and cohesive combination of bottom-up and top-down destination planning.

A KEY IMPERATIVE

The recommendations contained within the Fraser Valley Destination Development Strategy form the foundation for additional, focused, and aligned discussions regarding implementation. It will be important to ensure that the strategy becomes embedded in local, regional, provincial, and federal decision making processes. It is only by working collaboratively in an integrated way with a shared agenda that the full potential of the Fraser Valley planning area will be realized.

AT A GLANCE

In what follows, the distinctiveness of the destination is summarized, and its vision for tourism is introduced. While acknowledging the challenges the sector faces, its potential for growth is set out in terms of key opportunities and experience development potential. A consideration of each development priority and associated actions then follows. While further detail on each of these elements is available in the full strategy, they are brought together "At A Glance" to demonstrate the scope of the integrated nature of the approach being taken.

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REALIZING THE POTENTIAL

A DISTINCTIVE DESTINATION

Central to the significance and appeal of the Fraser Valley planning area is the Fraser River.

As it streams rapidly south towards Hope, it is funnelled through rocky canyons and narrow gorges, but once released south of the town, it heads westwards and becomes a wide meandering waterway, bordered by large floodplains of fertile farmland.

Hemmed by the Coast Mountains to the north and the Cascades to the south, numerous lakes shelter within the folds of the landscape with the largest being Pitt, Stave, and Harrison to the north, and Cultus and Chilliwack to the south.

The Fraser Valley has stunning landscapes that run the spectrum from prairie-like vistas across the valley to soaring mountains with alpine meadows. Along its length the river supports all manner of wildlife from salmon, sturgeon, and trout, to moose, black bear, and beaver. Towns, forests, and parks line its shores.

Two major highways cut east-west routes through the Fraser Valley, and link Vancouver with Hope. Highway 7 traverses the North Fraser Valley, parallel with the Fraser River. As Highway 1 heads east from Vancouver, it crosses the Fraser River via the Port Mann Bridge and heads through the South Fraser Valley. The planning area is accessible by car, airplane, floatplane, train, public transit, and motor coach.

Tourism and recreation have long been a part of the economy in the Fraser Valley planning area. As lifestyle migration has continued, a once largely agricultural and natural resource-based economy has become more diversified with the development of agritourism, viticulture, heritage tourism, manufacturing, and tech start-ups. The planning area is home to some 504,334 residents distributed among nine incorporated municipalities, 30 First Nations, and eight unincorporated Electoral Areas.

A SHARED VISION

The vision for tourism development in the next 10 years and beyond reflects the distinctiveness of the planning area and the ambition of its communities:



THE FRASER VALLEY IS
A VIBRANT, ACCESSIBLE,
WORLD-CLASS

DESTINATION THAT IS WELL MANAGED
AND ENHANCES THE VISITOR
ECONOMY AND DESTINATION APPEAL.
AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF A RICH
CULTURE AND HISTORY, THE MIGHTY
FRASER RIVER AND WILD MOUNTAIN
VISTAS, WE OFFER WORLD-CLASS
OUTDOOR ADVENTURES, FARM-FRESH
EXPERIENCES, AND OPPORTUNITIES TO
FLOURISH AND EXPERIENCE OUR WAY
OF LIFE AROUND EVERY CORNER.

2

REALIZING THE POTENTIAL

KEY OPPORTUNITIES

While the destination faces a number of distinct challenges such as the availability of efficient transportation options; a decline in shoulder and off-season visitation; a lack of visitor-ready, year-round experiences; staff constraints; and inconsistent local support for tourism; key opportunities still exist:

- Arts, culture and heritage tourism, including festivals and events
- Interest in agritourism and culinary tourism
- Interest in backcountry and frontcountry use
- Investment in trail-based tourism and the Experience the Fraser plan
- Growth at Abbotsford International Airport
- Indigenous tourism
- Cooperative tourism management

EXPERIENCE POTENTIAL

The current and future experiences that will motivate travel and differentiate the destination include:

- **EXPERIENCE THE FRASER (ETF)** One of the premier tourism opportunities, with over 550 km of trails (43% of which are already in place) and blueways connecting communities along the Fraser River from Hope to the Salish Sea, the ETF will act as a catalyst to encourage and strengthen tourism and economic development initiatives.
- **OUTDOOR RECREATION** Outdoor recreation is a growing travel motivator for the Fraser Valley, with emerging product experiences, strong community support, robust planning work, and strategies and actions that are underway. These include new trails and routes for hiking, cycling, and mountain biking, as well as new water-based activities. These efforts should continue to be enhanced and supported.
- **FOOD AND FARM EXPERIENCES** The destination has built a reputation for agricultural experiences, local foods, and culinary tourism which aligns to the growing consumer interest in food experiences. Additionally, the Fraser Valley has developed a

cross-regional Circle Farm Tour Program which includes self-drive routes highlighting farm-based products, services, and events. Further developments should be directed towards continuing to offer and enhance year-round local, sustainable food experiences that benefit visitors as well as residents.

- **INDIGENOUS EXPERIENCES** Indigenous cultural tourism is a small, but rapidly growing sector that tends to attract international visitors who spend more per trip than other visitors. Within the Fraser Valley, significant opportunities exist to enhance the cultural product and experience offerings. However, Indigenous tourism development needs to originate from Indigenous communities.
- **SPORT TOURISM** Sport tourism has become highly competitive and is one of the fastest growing segments of the tourism industry. There are existing efforts to generate sport tourism visitation in the Fraser Valley. The Abbotsford Centre and Langley Event Centre offer excellent opportunities to draw national and international sporting events.

- **TOURING AND ROAD TRIPS** The Fraser Valley is also included within existing touring routes such as the Circle Farm Tour, Scenic 7, the Gold Rush Trail, and the Coast Mountain Circle Route. A significant portion of BC's tourism visitation is associated with touring. Self-guided touring provides an ideal way to move from place to place, and experience various parts of the Fraser Valley. With distinct, attractive communities and experiences existing along both sides of the river, the Fraser Valley is a perfect circle tour destination or overnight stop for travellers moving throughout BC. A focus on improving the touring experience will generate economic opportunities for all businesses and communities within the planning area.
- **FESTIVALS AND EVENTS** From the long-standing Abbotsford Airshow to highly popular Tulip Festivals, the Fraser Valley has demonstrated that the area can sustain short-term visitation, and offers potential for further growth. There is significant potential to enhance the year-round visitation driven by festivals and events.

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AT A GLANCE

VISION STATEMENT The Fraser Valley is a vibrant, accessible, world-class destination that is well managed and enhances the visitor economy and destination appeal. Against the backdrop of rich culture and history, the mighty Fraser River and wild mountain vistas, we offer world-class outdoor adventures, farm-fresh experiences, and opportunities to flourish and experience our way of life around every corner.

THEME 1	BETTER TOGETHER: BUILD TOURISM STRATEGICALLY BY INVESTING AND MANAGING GROWTH COLLABORATIVELY			
	<p>FINELY TUNED</p> <p>In developing a structured approach to growing tourism, create a joint planning structure with governance and oversight responsibilities. Ensure communities and tourism businesses are kept informed and engaged and tourism priorities are reflected in relevant plans.</p>	<p>INDIGENOUS PARTNERSHIPS</p> <p>In conjunction with Indigenous Tourism Association of British Columbia (ITBC), endeavour to attract funding for representation to support the Vancouver, Coast & Mountains tourism region. Within the context of developing Indigenous tourism, focus on building relations, strengthening partnerships, and unlocking resources.</p>	<p>RESPONSIVE PLANNING</p> <p>Work with strategic partners to prioritize the Fraser Valley as an immediate project for planning area-specific land use planning. Ensure land use management planning facilitates the development of sustainable tourism, including agritourism and sportfishing.</p>	<p>SUSTAINABLE USE</p> <p>Within the context of developing a Fraser Valley Outdoor Recreation Regional Management Strategy, address visitor capacity limits, dispersion strategies, and user conflicts. Encourage the government of BC to increase investment in conservation officer resources.</p>
	<p>FACILITATE AND SUPPORT</p> <p>Streamline and simplify the processes and requirements for securing land use permits. Ensure adventure tourism operators have business/tenure security. Ensure policies for supporting activities such as biking and/or hiking, etc., take the resources required for stewardship, maintenance, and administration into account. Encourage government policy alignment.</p>	<p>DATA DRIVEN</p> <p>Develop a research plan to facilitate a better understanding of current and potential visitors. Utilize these insights to inform decision making and support tourism investment. Apply insights from other planning areas to leverage initiatives of relevance for the Fraser Valley planning area.</p>	<p>ONE VOICE</p> <p>Share information, research, and the strategy with residents to keep the community informed, engaged, and involved. In the longer term, explore the feasibility of forming one Fraser Valley DMO. Combine resources to provide sustainable funding for tourism initiatives.</p>	
THEME 2	ACTIVATE THE FRASER: ACCELERATE THE VISITOR-BASED EVOLUTION OF “EXPERIENCE THE FRASER” (ETF)			
	<p>ACT NOW</p> <p>Develop an ETF Tourism Action Plan to engage the tourism industry in understanding the ETF and identifying opportunities. Identify strategies for visitor-based infrastructure and amenities to increase overnight stays, elevate Hope as the eastern gateway, and enhance the visitor appeal of the “node” communities which are the locations where people can “Experience the Fraser”.</p>	<p>SECURE THE FUNDAMENTALS</p> <p>Complete the remaining 315 kms of the 550 kms Canyon to Coast Trail, the Recreational Canyon to Coast Blueway, and identified complementary visitor amenities and trail enhancements. Secure funding to implement and foster operational development along the route.</p>	<p>GET READY</p> <p>In line with the ETF Tourism Action Plan, develop a suite of outstanding river-based tourism accommodations, attractions, and activities to draw overnight visitors. In creating iconic destination experiences, ensure that the history and cultural expression of Indigenous communities is embedded in the development, interpretation, and celebration of the Fraser River.</p>	

3

AT A GLANCE

THEME 3

BLUE GREEN CONNECTED: ACCELERATE RIVER-BASED AND MOUNTAIN-BASED PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

CREATE A SPLASH

Improve and develop new river-based and mountain-based outdoor recreation product experiences to include fishing, kayaking, tubing, rafting, water's edge cycling, hiking, walking, and wildlife watching. Develop principles for sustainable fishing, and ensure provincial resources are available to address matters such as enforcement of regulations and river safety.

WELL WORTH THE CLIMB

Improve and develop new mountain-based outdoor recreation product experiences to include trails, mountain biking, and rock climbing. Work with key stakeholders to provide better access to deactivated forest service roads that offer great recreational experiences and protect land-based assets having tourism development potential.

GREAT TRAILS

Develop a Fraser Valley Regional District master trails plan. In completing the Great Trail build-out, prioritize routes which are connected to the ETF. Secure a regionally funded trail coordinator to facilitate the collaborative planning, development, interpretation, and maintenance of key trails.

GREAT TASTES

Enable tourism operators to better understand and align with the Agricultural Land Commission Act and Agricultural Land Reserve regulations whilst being innovative in creating new agritourism experiences. Promote a stronger culinary tourism culture by developing culinary experiences, such as iconic food festivals and farmers' markets.

INDIGENOUS APPEAL

Support and engage Indigenous communities and entrepreneurs in creating more guided Indigenous cultural experiences. Meet consumer demand through enhanced product development, pairing authentic Indigenous experiences with river-based, mountain-based, and culinary experiences.

ON THE HIGHWAY

Improve wayfinding and signage, including digital maps and apps, to provide clear directions to river-based and mountain-based experiences. Improve amenities and services for RVs; increase Indigenous community led product development along the 5 Nation highway and enhance customer service at frontline tourism operations.

CURATE AND CELEBRATE

Identify and develop one Fraser Valley festival/event for each season. Better coordinate events to help disperse visitors throughout the year, and build on existing iconic festivals to realize regional benefit.

REMARKABLE EXPERIENCES

Implement the Remarkable Experiences program with a Scenic 7 theme. Implement similar programs geared towards the ETF initiative as well as a Mountain Life — Outdoor Guides theme.

THEME 4

EXCEED EXPECTATIONS: DELIVER AN EXCEPTIONAL VISITOR EXPERIENCE

ON THE MOVE

Work collaboratively with strategic partners to improve access to remote sites along resource roads and secure funding for road infrastructure upgrades to complement new recreational campgrounds and trails being developed. Improve highway efficiency to reduce congestion on main travel corridors and increase transportation choice to and throughout the Fraser Valley.

EVENT FACILITIES

Work with event facility owners to identify opportunities to improve their overall experience and ensure they continue to drive visitor growth.

VIBRANT PLACES

Improve the vibrancy of downtown centres, destination neighbourhoods, and key spaces by implementing existing beautification and revitalization plans and programs. Encourage communities without such programs to create their own and inspire local businesses to beautify and improve their immediate locations.

VITAL AMENITIES

Conduct a gap analysis to identify and improve visitor amenities along primary travel routes and highway hubs. Support the management and maintenance of tourism amenities and assets on Crown land. Work with key partners to provide free wi-fi and improve connectivity on primary travel corridors and along the ETF trails.

3 AT A GLANCE

THEME 4 CONTINUED	<p>WAYFINDING</p> <p>Work with key partners to undertake a visitor-centric audit of highway signage with a view to improving associated policy decisions. Develop an integrated signage and wayfinding plan, including digital assets and travel planning tools. Include consideration of a coordinated directional agritourism signage program.</p>	<p>UNIQUE ACCOMMODATIONS</p> <p>In expanding accommodation capacity and visitor choice, ensure that the needs of different market segments are provided for. Increase the number of campsites and RV sites within reach of key experiences and encourage the development of an Indigenous cultural accommodation experience.</p>	<p>EASILY REACHED</p> <p>Continue to develop Abbotsford International Airport as a viable alternative to YVR. Provide support for the implementation of its Master Plan for expansion and attract entrepreneurs to develop ground services needed to meet increases in passenger volume (e.g. car rentals, shuttles).</p>	<p>RESPECTFUL TRAVEL</p> <p>Develop an industry and visitor education program that focuses on protecting the ecosystems and environments that draw visitors to the valley</p>
THEME 5	PRO-BUSINESS: CREATE A BUSINESS FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT			
	<p>DEMONSTRATE VALUE</p> <p>Improve the understanding of the value of tourism through the communication of shareable data/infographics that demonstrate its economic significance. Use this information to build community support for tourism.</p>	<p>ENABLE & EQUIP</p> <p>Provide support and training to entrepreneurs to develop their skills. Create more awareness of existing labour market programming to enable businesses to expand, hire new workers, or enhance the training of existing workers. Raise awareness of available government resources and leverage support being offered. Develop an incentives program for developing new or expanding commercial tourism operations.</p>	<p>FUTURE-PROOF</p> <p>Work with federal and provincial government ministries to continue, and improve, Temporary Foreign Worker programs. Ensure programs are easy to access as a solution for labour shortages. Work with the government of BC to encourage high-school participation in tourism and hospitality programs.</p>	
THEME 6	LOOKING AHEAD: PREPARE THE DESTINATION AND TOURISM BUSINESSES FOR DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION			
	<p>SHARE KNOWLEDGE</p> <p>Access training on digital readiness to help tourism businesses understand and use the tools they will need to become more proficient in connecting with potential visitors.</p>	<p>ADOPT & ADAPT</p> <p>Work to jointly implement and leverage technology tools and platforms needed to provide an exceptional visitor experience, manage the online and/or digital destination presence, and manage destination growth.</p>		

4 GEARING UP

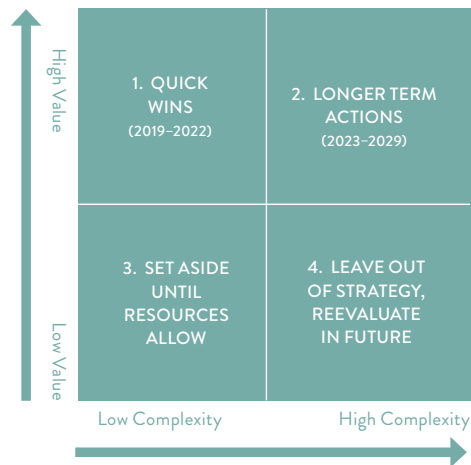
SUCCESS NETWORKS

This strategy is intended to inform actions for the future, which over time may be embedded in local, regional, and provincial plans. The result will be an integrated system of priorities to achieve better development decisions, drive greater tourism revenues, and realize benefits for businesses and communities in the Fraser Valley planning area. All of this will contribute to a thriving, vibrant, and growing economy.

Joint strategy ownership among all planning area tourism partners is a critical component of this program's success. The strategy identifies a suggested success network of tourism partners to champion and move actions within each objective forward.

FRAMEWORK

The strategy presents the destination development objectives using a consistent framework to determine the prioritization of each objective and the relative timing for implementation. Objectives with a provincial or regional scope are identified and will inform the regional and provincial destination development strategies.



EAGLE ACRES DAIRY, LANGLEY
Photo: ?

4 GEARING UP

CATALYST PROJECTS

The following seventeen actions were identified as catalyst projects for immediately moving the strategy into implementation.

Better Together: Build Tourism Strategically by Investing and Managing Growth Collaboratively

- Create a governance, oversight, and joint planning structure (as part of developing a structured approach to building tourism in the planning area).
- Work with ITBC to explore representation models and secure funding to support the Vancouver, Coast & Mountains tourism region.
- Work with FLNR to identify the Fraser Valley as an immediate project for planning area-specific land use planning.
- Complete a Fraser Valley Outdoor Recreation Regional Management Strategy.
- Encourage the government of BC to increase investment in conservation officer resources.
- Work with the government of BC to improve processes and requirements for land use permits and strengthen business/tenure security for adventure tourism operators and events.

- Work with the government of BC and local governments to review policies on supporting association of users (bikers and hikers, etc.) through contractual agreements to ensure adequate resources for stewardship, maintenance, and administration.
- Develop and implement a research plan to better understand current and potential visitors, inform decision making, and support entrepreneurial investments.
- Monitor progress in other planning areas, the Vancouver, Coast & Mountains Regional Destination Development Strategy, and the Provincial Destination Development Strategy to proactively identify initiatives across areas.

Activate the Fraser: Accelerate the Visitor-Based Evolution of “Experience the Fraser”

- Engage the tourism industry in understanding the status on ETF implementation, develop a gap analysis, and identify strategies to fill gaps on visitor-based infrastructure and amenities that encourage overnight stays.

- Develop a Fraser Valley Regional District master trails plan, including identifying varying degrees of trail ease of use, consistent signage, etc.
- Implement workshops for Fraser Valley tourism operators to gain a better understanding of the ALC Act and the ALR Use, Subdivision and Procedure Regulation, with the ability to innovate while remaining consistent with the regulations to create new agritourism experiences.
- Implement a Remarkable Experiences program with a Scenic 7 theme.

Exceed Expectations: Deliver an Exceptional Visitor Experience

- Encourage the government of BC to improve access to remote sites along resource roads and secure FLNR funding for road infrastructure upgrades.

- Increase funds and people to better manage and maintain tourism amenities and assets on Crown land (e.g., garbage, cleanup, outhouses).

Pro-Business: Create a business friendly environment

- Leverage existing BC value of tourism tools and communications to develop coordinated communications and shareable data/infographics to improve understanding of the value of tourism and enhance community support for tourism.

Looking Ahead: Prepare the Destination and Tourism Businesses for Digital Transformation

- Work with Destination BC to offer Industry learning and training on digital readiness to help tourism businesses understand and use the tools they need to be proficient in connecting with potential visitors.

LOOKING FOR MORE INFORMATION?

Read the Fraser Valley Destination Development Strategy
or reach us at:

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FRONT COVER PHOTO: HARRISON LAKE, Graham Osborne



HICKS LAKE
Photo: Graham Osborne