

SUNSHINE COAST

DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

HIGHLIGHTS



DESTINATION
BRITISH COLUMBIA

THANK YOU

The Sunshine Coast planning area stretches some 180 km northwest from Langdale in Howe Sound to Bliss Landing in Desolation Sound, and includes the islands of Gambier, Keats, Nelson, Hardy, Thormanby, Texada, Lasqueti, Harwood (Tla'amin Nation land) and Savary. With Toba Inlet to the north, the destination extends inland to include several inlets including Jervis, Princess Louisa, Narrows, Salmon, and Sechelt. The Sunshine Coast is home to 50,000 people, including the four First Nations communities of skwxwú7mesh Nation, shíshálh Nation, Tla'amin Nation, and

Klahoose Nation, three municipal communities of the Town of Gibsons, District of Sechelt, City of Powell River and two Regional Districts, the Sunshine Coast Regional District and Powell River Regional District. An economy once fueled by the logging and fishing industries, it is now being re-energized by tourism, recreation, and retirement alongside aquaculture, retail arts and crafts, and high tech. With no direct access by road from elsewhere in BC, the Sunshine Coast is dependent on ferry, airplane, and floatplane connections.

RUBY LAKE
Photo: Andrew Strain

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1 INTRODUCTION

WHY A STRATEGY?

The Sunshine Coast Destination Development Strategy was developed to enhance the competitiveness of the Sunshine Coast tourism destination 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 Sunshine Coast strategy.

WHO IS IT FOR?

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

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inland to include several inlets including Jervis, Princess Louisa, Narrows, Salmon, and Sechelt. The Sunshine Coast is home to 50,000 people, including the four First Nations communities of skwxwú7mesh Nation, shísháhlh Nation, three municipal communities of the Town of Gibsons, District of Sechelt, City of Powell River and two Regional Districts, the Sunshine Coast Regional District and Powell River Regional District. An economy once fueled by the logging and fishing industries, it is now being re-energized by tourism, recreation, and retirement alongside aquaculture, retail arts and crafts, and high tech. With no direct access by road from elsewhere in BC, the Sunshine Coast is dependent on ferry, airplane, and floatplane connections.

WHERE DOES IT FIT?

The Sunshine Coast 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 cross multiple jurisdictions, the importance of adopting an integrated approach with a shared vision and coordinated investment is critical. The Sunshine Coast Destination Development Strategy is one of six strategies being prepared for the Vancouver, Coast & Mountains tourism region. Others include Metro Vancouver, Fraser Valley, Sea-to-Sky Corridor, Gold Rush Trail and the 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 Sunshine Coast Destination Development Strategy form the foundation for additional, focused and aligned discussions regarding implementation. As tourism partners have already articulated their desire to work cooperatively on realizing destination development initiatives, it is important to ensure that the strategy becomes embedded in local, regional, provincial and federal decision making processes. It is only by working collaboratively that the full potential of the Sunshine Coast will be realized.

AT A GLANCE

In what follows, the distinctiveness of the Sunshine Coast destination is summarized and its vision for tourism 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 theme 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.

2 REALIZING THE POTENTIAL

A DISTINCTIVE DESTINATION

Only a 40 minute ferry ride from Vancouver, the Sunshine Coast offers the prospect of another world; a pocket wilderness of deep blue waters, steep forested mountains, scattered islands and a handful of rural oceanside communities each with its own distinctive character.

When it comes to outdoor adventure, visitors can hike, bike, sail, paddle, golf, dive, swim, climb, mountain bike, cross country ski, ride, or simply relax.

Opportunities abound for visitors to experience the rich tapestry of artisans, art galleries, cultural festivals, and events, and sustainable culinary experiences that bear testament to the creative energy, artisanal flair and spirit of enterprise characterized by Sunshine Coast communities. Encounters with the rich heritage of First Nations provide curious minds with deeper insights into the historic and contemporary significance of their compelling story — a story that is rooted in a place of immense beauty and natural splendour.

A SHARED VISION

The Sunshine Coast aspires to be a truly remarkable destination year-round, both indoors and outdoors. It is a place that is ready for visitors, easy to get to and to get around in, and attracts visitors who care about the place and its communities.

Adopting a sustainable approach to the development of the Sunshine Coast, partners will work together to realize the following vision:



“WE ARE A UNIFIED
SUNSHINE COAST,
WORKING TOGETHER

TO INCREASE THE SOCIAL, CULTURAL,
AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS FROM
OUR YEAR-ROUND VISITOR ECONOMY.
WE HAVE VIBRANT COASTAL
COMMUNITIES AMID EXCEPTIONAL
OUTDOOR ADVENTURES. WE ATTRACT
RESPECTFUL VISITORS WHO LIKE
TO DISCOVER AND UNDERSTAND
MORE ABOUT OUR LAID-BACK PACE
OF LIFE AND THE WILD, NATURAL
PLACES THAT NOURISH US.”

KEY OPPORTUNITIES

While the destination faces a number of challenges such as access, transportation, year-round availability of skilled labour and the perception of tourism locally, key opportunities include:

- Enhance the arrival experience — focus on transportation including BC Ferries service
- Attract skilled people — focus on recruiting, retaining and training staff
- Create a compelling offer — focus on developing / enhancing product experiences
- Keep it authentic — focus on Indigenous tourism
- Foster good relations — focus on strengthening support for tourism development
- Strive to excel — focus on enhancing quality of service and visitor amenities
- Work together — focus on cooperative tourism management

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REALIZING THE POTENTIAL

EXPERIENCE POTENTIAL

Specific motivating product experiences along with particular opportunities to create iconic experiences include:

- Indigenous Tourism — Tems Swiya Museum, Talaysay Tours, and Powell River Historical Museum & Archives
- Arts, Culture, Festivals & Events — Sunshine Coast Arts Crawl
- Trails — Hiking, Mountain Biking, Marine — Sunshine Coast Trail and Suncoaster Trail; Backcountry alpine hiking like the South Powell Divide; Mountain biking including the Coast Gravity Park and Duck Lake Trails
- Touring — Vehicle, Cycling, Motorcycles
- Boating/Marinas — Desolation Sound, Princess Louisa Inlet, Straight of Georgia, a multitude of islands
- Natural Asset Utilization — Rock climbing in the Eldred Valley; Wildlife viewing along inlets and waterways; Diving (there are over 100 dive sites)
- Health and Wellness — Painted Boat Resort Spa & Marina, Rockwater Secret Cove Resort, and Beyond Bliss Spa & Suites
- Sustainable Culinary Experiences — Foraging and Culinary tourism
- Sport Tourism

EARL'S COVE
Photo: Andrew Strain



3 AT A GLANCE

VISION STATEMENT We are a unified Sunshine Coast, working together to increase the social, cultural, and economic benefits from our year-round visitor economy. We have vibrant coastal communities amid exceptional outdoor adventures. We attract respectful visitors who like to discover and understand more about our laid-back pace of life and the wild, natural places that nourish us.

THEME 1	CRUCIAL CONNECTIONS – IMPROVE TRANSPORTATION TO, FROM AND WITHIN THE SUNSHINE COAST			
	<p>A SINGLE VOICE</p> <p>Build a coalition of support amongst partners to secure reliable, frequent and competitively priced ferry access that meets the needs of residents, provides a great first impression for visitors and responds to the ambition to grow the visitor economy.</p>	<p>FILL THE GAPS</p> <p>Engage the private sector and strategic partners in finding convenient and effective solutions to enhancing local access, circulation and multimodal movement to, and through, the destination.</p>	<p>BUILDING A PATH</p> <p>Work collaboratively with relevant agencies to ensure that the necessary route infrastructure is provided, maintained, and renewed in line with the needs of different user groups and an expanding visitor economy.</p>	
THEME 2	PEOPLE MATTER – ATTRACT, RETAIN AND TRAIN SKILLED WORKERS AND PROVIDE JOB GROWTH			
	<p>INVESTING IN PEOPLE</p> <p>Working in conjunction with relevant authorities, maintain a strong focus on meeting the needs of the sector in terms of identifying, anticipating and responding to staff shortages. Initiate a Sunshine Coast specific training and mentoring program for frontline staff.</p>	<p>FINDING A HOME</p> <p>Profile the specific accommodation needs of tourism workers within the context of providing creative solutions to the provision of affordable housing for residents and workers.</p>	<p>ASK A LOCAL</p> <p>Assess the perception of tourism amongst residents and nurture their support for the sector. Encourage their participation in ambassador and volunteer initiatives designed to equip visitors with local insights and knowledge.</p>	
THEME 3	STEPPING STONES – ENABLE TOURISM BUSINESS SUCCESS AND VIABILITY			
	<p>INSPIRE CONFIDENCE</p> <p>Supported by sound metrics and robust intelligence gathering, enable Sunshine Coast Tourism to fulfil its role in charting a sustainable course for tourism.</p>	<p>STREAMLINING DEVELOPMENT</p> <p>Profile the significance of tourism within the statutory plan making process, and work with relevant authorities and First Nations to streamline processes required for the development and activation of the destination.</p>	<p>SHARE KNOW-HOW AND SPARK IDEAS</p> <p>Enhance the capacity of new and established businesses to develop, position and package their products and equip them to network effectively with travel trade in bringing product to market.</p>	<p>THINK LOCAL</p> <p>Support local businesses by raising awareness amongst tourism providers of local suppliers, products, experiences and services.</p>

3

AT A GLANCE

THEME 4	COMMON PURPOSE – MANAGE THE DESTINATION COLLABORATIVELY				
	<p>COLLECTIVE AMBITION</p> <p>Engage those with the capacity to influence the development of tourism in a mutually beneficial, collaborative and coordinated approach to developing the visitor economy for the benefit of all.</p>		<p>LEAVE NO TRACE</p> <p>Ensure that the area’s natural and cultural heritage attributes are celebrated and safeguarded. Encourage all those involved in promoting the use, enjoyment, and appreciation of the natural environment to become custodians of its future.</p>		<p>NATURAL RESILIENCE</p> <p>Facilitate the growth of agritourism, maintain and enhance parks and natural assets, and build the capacity to respond to the challenges of climate change.</p>
THEME 5	CAREFULLY CRAFTED – IMPLEMENT PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT AND EXPERIENCE ENHANCEMENT THAT CULTIVATE A UNIQUE SENSE OF PLACE				
	<p>INDIGENOUS DEVELOPMENT</p> <p>Develop immersive experiences that will promote awareness of the cultural heritage of First Nations, support their active participation in the visitor economy and realize economic and social benefits for Indigenous businesses.</p>	<p>SHOWCASE & CELEBRATE</p> <p>Curate a series of arts and culture festivals and events to showcase the Sunshine Coast. Build culinary experiences into the offer in ways that will celebrate local food, support local suppliers and provide choices for visitors.</p>	<p>ON AND OFF ROAD</p> <p>Enhance the touring experience for drivers, cyclists and motorcyclists by providing access to key points of interest, opportunities to take in the view, and a coherent signage strategy. Continue to develop hiking trails as a core coastal experience, complete with reliable connections from points of arrival and easy access to a network of accommodations.</p>	<p>A BIKERS BUFFET</p> <p>Create a series of new, and maintain, existing mountain bike trails. Support or create reliable connections to, and between, trails, easy and convenient access to accommodations, and other supporting facilities and services. Profile mountain biking by showcasing national and international events.</p>	<p>WATER’S EDGE</p> <p>Promote seamless connections from the water’s edge to land-based experiences for incoming visitors; enhance the capacity for new boaters in terms of berths and buoys and encourage maritime best practices.</p>
THEME 6	ABOVE AND BEYOND – ENHANCE THE QUALITY OF SERVICES AND EXPERIENCES FOR OUR GUESTS				
	<p>ACCOMMODATIONS FOR ALL</p> <p>Encourage the development of new, unique, independent and boutique accommodations that will not only reflect the character of the Sunshine Coast but, along with the upgrade of existing properties, will meet the needs and expectations of visitors.</p>	<p>A COHESIVE WELCOME</p> <p>Within the context of a coherent destination visitor engagement plan, provide visitors with a seamless information and orientation service at visitor centres and other touch points across the destination.</p>	<p>GOOD PRACTICE</p> <p>Ensure that information about business operating hours is communicated. Ensure well-maintained and public washrooms are available for visitor use.</p>	<p>PLACE MATTERS</p> <p>Work with partners to improve the vibrancy of downtown and waterfront areas; enhance cultural venues where the culture and heritage of the Sunshine Coast can be showcased and new tourism enterprises supporting transportation solutions encouraged.</p>	

4 GEARING UP

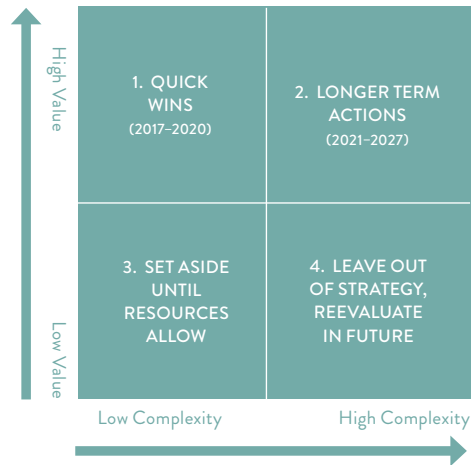
SUCCESS NETWORKS

This strategy is intended to inform actions for the future, which over time may be embedded in the local, regional, and provincial decision making. The result will be an integrated system of priorities that will achieve better development decisions, drive greater tourism revenues, and realize benefits for businesses and communities on the Sunshine Coast. All 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 as well and will inform the regional and provincial destination development strategies.



CATALYST PROJECTS

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

Crucial Connections: Improve Transportation To, From, and Within the Sunshine Coast

- Develop the business case for improved BC Ferries services, including information by market and type of traveller.
- Investigate with BC Ferries what conditions would be required to extend the sailing season and undertake activities to collect information demonstrating those conditions have been met.
- Develop the shuttle service business case, including; an assessment of what options exist now; case studies of tourism shuttle services that have been introduced within BC (examples include Tofino/Ucluelet, Kelowna, Kootenays); and, identification of future options.
- Document the private tour bus business opportunity and begin discussions with potential tour operators (e.g., West Coast Sightseeing, Landsea Tours).
- Document the car rental agency or car co-op at ferry terminals business opportunity and begin discussions with potential car rental agencies.

- Document the business opportunity and begin discussions with local governments to define local policies and activate ride-sharing (e.g., Uber business licenses or another similar model).

People Matter: Attract, Retain and Train Skilled Workers and Provide Job Growth

- Develop a labour market strategy for the Sunshine Coast based on customizing the British Columbia Tourism Labour Market Strategy to the unique needs of the coast.

Carefully Crafted: Implement Product Development and Experience Enhancement that Cultivate a Unique Sense of Place

- Implement the Destination BC Remarkable Experiences Program on the Sunshine Coast.

Above and Beyond: Enhance the Quality of Services and Experiences For Our Guests

- Develop a collaborative strategy for visitor services throughout the Sunshine Coast.

LOOKING FOR MORE INFORMATION?

You can likely find it in the more detailed Sunshine Coast Destination Development strategy or you can reach us at:

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FRONT COVER PHOTO: TIN HAT MOUNTAIN, Andrew Strain

DESOLATION SOUND
Photo: Andrew Strain