




**TOURISM
HAMILTON**

It's in our **character**



**Hamilton's 2024 – 2028
TOURISM STRATEGY**



Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Land Acknowledgment | 2 |
| Executive Summary | 3 |
| Developing the Tourism Strategy | 4 |
| 1.1 A 'Whole City' Approach | 4 |
| 1.1.1 Strategy Input & Alignment | 4 |
| 1.2 Current State of Tourism | 5 |
| 1.2.1 Tourism's Uneven Recovery & Projected Growth | 5 |
| 1.2.2 Trends in Tourism & Travel | 6 |
| 1.2.3 Relevant Federal and Provincial Initiatives | 9 |
| 1.3 Tourism Hamilton: Hamilton's Destination Management Organization (DMO) | 10 |
| 1.4 Where We've Been | 10 |
| 1.5 Hamilton's Current Destination Overview | 12 |
| 1.5.1 Burgeoning Tourism Districts | 12 |
| 1.5.2 Downtown Safety and Cleanliness | 13 |
| 1.5.3 Hamilton's Reputation as a Destination | 13 |
| 1.5.4 Sustainable Transportation & Connectivity | 13 |
| 1.5.5 Visitor Services | 13 |
| 1.5.6 Natural & Outdoor Tourism | 14 |
| 1.5.7 Culinary & Agritourism | 14 |
| 1.5.8 Music, Culture & Film | 14 |
| 1.5.9 Attractions | 14 |
| 1.5.10 Indigenous Tourism Experiences | 15 |
| 1.5.11 Product Development | 15 |
| 1.5.12 Major Tourism Events and Festivals | 16 |
| 1.5.13 Sport Tourism | 17 |
| 1.5.14 Accommodations & Overnight Demand | 17 |
| 1.5.15 Municipal Accommodation Tax | 17 |
| 1.6 Summary (SWOT Analysis) | 18 |
| Tourism Strategy | 21 |
| 2.1 Introduction | 21 |
| 2.2 Vision Statement | 21 |
| 2.3 Strategic Priorities | 21 |
| 2.3.1 Grow Hamilton's Reputation as a Leading Tourism Destination | 22 |
| 2.3.2 Cultivate Vibrant Tourism Districts | 24 |
| 2.3.3 Promote and Support the Sustainability of Natural Assets | 26 |
| 2.3.4 Strengthen Hamilton's Major Events and Festival Sector | 28 |
| 2.4 Reporting & Processes | 29 |



Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that what is now the City of Hamilton is situated upon the traditional territories of the Haudenosaunee, Huron-Wendat, Neutral, and Mississauga peoples. We further acknowledge that this land continues to be home to many diverse urban Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) whom we recognize as continued stewards of the land and vital contributors of the City's society.

We further acknowledge that this land is covered by the Dish with One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant between the Anishinaabe, Mississaugas, and Haudenosaunee that binds them to share the territory and protect the land. Subsequent Indigenous Nations and peoples and all newcomers have embraced the spirit of peace, friendship, and respect of this treaty territory, for which we are thankful.

The City of Hamilton acknowledges the historical and ongoing injustices that Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) endured in Canada, and we accept responsibility as a public institution to contribute towards revealing and correcting miseducation as well as renewing respectful relationships with Indigenous communities.

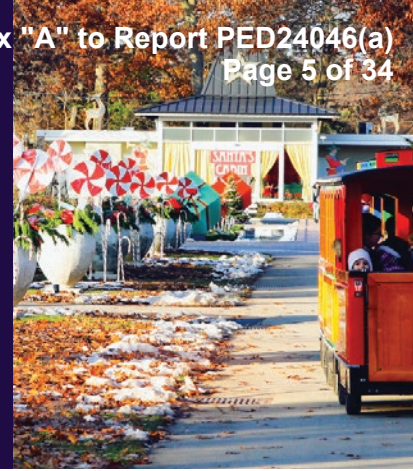
Beyond this acknowledgement, as allies, we hope that the goals outlined in this document work to further reconciliation with our Indigenous neighbours, to better steward the land, to nourish the people who live on the land, and to celebrate the many stories of the past and present peoples who call this land home.

We encourage everyone to learn more about the work that the City is doing on these topics by reading the [Urban Indigenous Strategy](#), by visiting the [Indigenous Relations Team](#) Webpage, and by learning from the many resources listed in the [Indigenous Hub](#).

Miigwetch (Anishnabek – pronounced MEE-gwetch), Niá:wen (Haudenosaunee – pronounced Nee-AH-wah), Tiawenhk (Huron-Wendat – pronounced Tee-AH-wenhk)

Executive Summary

Hamilton's Tourism Strategy is rooted in a vision to become a top Canadian destination celebrated for its vibrant tourism districts, captivating nature-based activities, and authentic and sustainable experiences. Embracing a regenerative 'whole city' approach, the strategy revolves around four strategic priorities.



01 Grow Hamilton's Reputation as Leading Tourism Destination

This priority focuses on supporting industry partners, welcoming visitors, and supporting the creation of unique experiences in Hamilton's neighbourhoods and natural spaces. These actions will be achieved through collaboration with strategic partners, sustainable tourism practices, and a commitment to supporting Indigenous tourism experiences. A 'whole city' approach using a lens of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA) ensures alignment with broader city initiatives, fostering collaboration across departments and partner groups to drive tourism growth.



02 Cultivate Vibrant Tourism Districts

Vibrant tourism districts reflect and nurture a community's authentic identity. They entice visitors and offer high-quality experiences that are unique to the destination. This priority aims to foster a true 'sense of place' in Hamilton's neighbourhoods, for both residents and visitors. Initiatives such as placemaking, programming, and business investment attraction enhance the overall vibrancy of key districts, in alignment with the City's efforts to revitalize neighborhoods and improve safety and cleanliness.

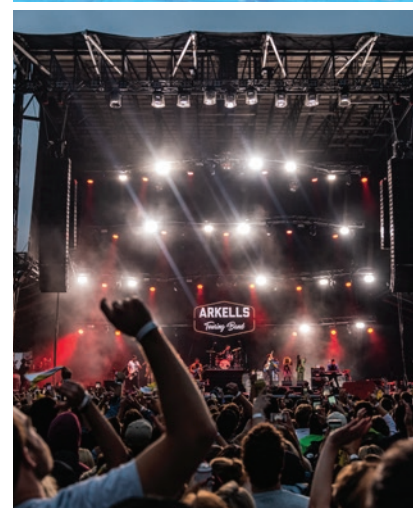


03 Promote and Support the Sustainability of Natural Assets

Recognizing Hamilton's abundant natural assets, this priority emphasizes the importance of thoughtful planning and infrastructure improvements to enhance visitor experiences while preserving the environment. Initiatives include developing a Waterfall Destination Master Plan, facilitating recreational waterfront activities, and leveraging federal funding for trail enhancements. The strategy aligns with broader city plans focused on greenspace protection and waterfront access, ensuring a cohesive approach to stewarding Hamilton's natural assets.

04 Strengthen Hamilton's Major Events and Festival Sector

Hosting major events and festivals is crucial for attracting visitors and enhancing Hamilton's reputation as a destination. This priority focuses on securing investments in event infrastructure, leveraging new funding sources for event attraction, and implementing strategies to manage the impact of major events on local communities. There is additional opportunity to actively seek out and support major festivals geared towards equity deserving groups that expand the diversity of audiences. The strategy aligns with Council priorities for enhancing the city's reputation as a center of culture, sport, and tourism, and integrates with economic development goals to attract investment and stimulate year-round vibrancy.



By implementing these strategic priorities and related actions, Tourism Hamilton aims to position the city as a dynamic and sustainable tourism destination that drives economic growth, fosters Hamilton's unique identity, and enriches the overall destination. The regenerative 'whole city' approach ensures alignment with broader city initiatives and leverages collaboration across departments and partners to achieve shared goals.



DEVELOPING THE Tourism Strategy

1.1 A 'Whole City' Approach

While tourism is the specific mandate of a few staff within the city, staff across the city play a role in Hamilton's success as a tourism destination; without clean streets, safe communities, good infrastructure, and a thriving City, tourism can not flourish. While tourism staff are not most responsible for operating the city's parks or greenspaces, tourism events activate public spaces and outdoor attractions promote the enjoyment of Hamilton's natural assets. Similarly, while tourism staff are not most responsible for the city's workforce, downtown office vacancy, or resident quality of life, the tourism industry is a major employer in the city and cultivating vibrant tourism districts improves resident quality of life and demand for commercial real estate.

In a 'whole city' approach to tourism, City Departments, Divisions and Sections work in partnership to not only create and support tourism experiences and businesses, but also to ensure the city's overall prosperity and attractiveness as a destination.

In fact, the **actions required to create a vibrant tourism destination harmonize with the City of Hamilton's Council priorities. Sustainable Economic & Ecological Development** is integral to Hamilton's tourism strategy as a resilient economy is the bedrock of a healthy host community. Similarly, promoting ecological sustainability aligns with the growing trend of attracting visitors who prioritize environmentally responsible destinations. Tourism contributes significantly to economic growth by generating revenue, creating jobs, raising the city's reputation externally, and stimulating investment in local businesses. Therefore, working to enhance the City's reputation as a centre of culture, sport, and tourism has a symbiotic relationship with the city's economic and ecological goals.

Similarly, **Safe and Thriving Neighbourhoods** are vital to Hamilton's appeal as a tourism

destination. Well-maintained public spaces, placemaking initiatives, efficient transportation, and affordable housing options all contribute to making Hamilton an attractive destination. This not only benefits visitors, but also contributes to making Hamilton an employer of choice for hospitality workers. Additionally, increased tourism activity can incentivize improvements to infrastructure and public spaces, benefiting residents and visitors alike by enhancing a community's 'sense of place' and the overall quality of life. For example, increasing access to the waterfront is a key action within this strategy that will animate the neighbourhood and create new recreational options for both residents and visitors.

Lastly, **Responsiveness and Transparency** are essential elements for stewarding a tourism destination. Involving various partners in an inclusive decision-making process leads to authentic tourism initiatives that benefit the entire community. Engaging with partners also ensures that tourism initiatives align with community values and priorities, fostering a sense of co-ownership and pride among residents. As with all industries, effective public engagement and transparent communication in tourism build trust and credibility among residents and visitors alike.

In summary, Hamilton has built a name for itself as a burgeoning tourism destination. The city has excellent natural and cultural attractions, unique communities, and several new developments underway. For example, the renovations to the entertainment district and the trails and public spaces being developed at the waterfront are revitalizing key tourism areas in the city. **However, in order for tourism to continue to positively impact the city, there is work to be done to better protect the city's natural assets, steward community relationships, and develop the hard and soft infrastructure to offer enriching experiences for residents and guests.**

1.1.1 STRATEGY INPUT & ALIGNMENT

This strategy supports and is supported by numerous City plans, policies, and strategies as well as those from the tourism industry, including but not limited to:

- Council Priorities, Outcomes and Measures of Success (2023)
- Economic Development Action Plan 2021-2025 (2021)
- Downtown Office Report (PED2301, 2023)
- Workforce Strategy (2023)
- Hamilton Civic Museum Strategy (2022-2030)
- Hamilton Urban Indigenous Strategy and Implementation Plan (2019)
- Hamilton Climate Action Strategy (2022)
- Hamilton Parks Master Plan (2022)
- Hamilton Recreation Master Plan (2022)
- West Harbour Recreation Master Plan (2010)

Understanding the vital role industry partners play in creating a thriving tourism destination, staff have also sought input from tourism partners through quarterly Team Hamilton Tourism meetings, one-on-one meetings, and roundtable style discussions.

As those most responsible for welcoming visitors to the city, tourism staff are in a unique position to create vibrancy and prosperity. Tourism Hamilton can tell the authentic story that connects Hamilton's people to their place, can encourage local cultures and neighbourhoods to thrive, can help visitors feel enriched by their experiences in the city, and can educate guests on how to steward Hamilton's natural landscape and water ways.

In summary, this strategy depends on a 'whole city' approach, with tourism staff

playing a key role in leading, supporting and advocating for tourism businesses, partners, and organizations throughout the City.

1.2 Current State of Tourism

The following section is a brief overview of the tourism landscape—both nationally and internationally—and the relevant trends affecting the tourism industry. These factors and trends have a local impact on Hamilton as a destination and its businesses.

1.2.1 TOURISM'S UNEVEN RECOVERY & PROJECTED GROWTH

Nationally, the tourism industry is an economic driver and job-creator as one of Canada's top service exports, as well as a tool for fostering social cohesion. As of Q3 2023, tourism contributed \$43.6 billion to Canada's GDP, generated \$105 billion in revenue, and supported **one in every ten jobs** in the country¹.

By these numbers, the tourism industry is almost recovered from the global pandemic, however the recovery remains uneven. A resilient travel sentiment and pent-up travel demand aided a quick rebound in domestic travel, but a full recovery has been dampened by surging inflationary pressures, travel disruptions, labour shortages, the uncertainty of a recession on the horizon, and global political unrest. Visitation and spending from US and international visitors continues to lag, but tourism in Canada is expected to recover fully by 2026.

Typically, destination demand in Canada is seasonal, with leisure demand—those travelling for pleasure or to visit friends and relatives—mirroring the most common

¹ Destination Canada Tourism Outlook Fall 2023, via Statistics Canada National Tourism Indicators 2023 Q2 and Labour Force Survey via Tourism HR Canada





times to travel and take vacation. Therefore, travel typically peaks in summer months and is lowest in winter months. Demand in the spring and fall shoulder seasons is typically driven by individual corporate business travel, major events, and meetings and conferences.

In addition to monthly seasonality, travel demand is also affected by day of week trends. For most destinations—including Hamilton—weekend stays are mainly from leisure guests and weekday stays are driven by individual corporate business travel and meeting and event business. **Therefore, a healthy balance between leisure, individual corporate business, major events, and meetings and conferences is vital to support year-round vibrancy in a destination.**

Traveler segments are also recovering unevenly, with leisure visitors leading the recovery and outperforming 2019 levels, both nationally and in Hamilton. As stated in the Downtown Hamilton Office Report (PED23081), work-from-home policies have impacted Hamilton's office market. As the slow return to office is hindering downtown recoveries across Canada, individual corporate business travel is lagging considerably behind pre-pandemic levels and weekday hotel occupancies have been slow to recover. Major events and meeting and conference travel are recovering faster than independent business travel; however, this segment is not expected to fully recover until 2026.

As the industry continues to recover from

the pandemic, global projections for tourism indicate strong, continued growth. The World Travel and Tourism Council predicts that tourism's contribution to Canada's GDP could double by 2033.

1.2.2 TRENDS IN TOURISM & TRAVEL

The tourism industry is constantly being shaped, not only by visitor trends but also by the economic forces impacting operators. This section gives an overview of current trends shaping the industry as new generations enter the travel sphere, visitor sentiments change, tourism business needs evolve, and host communities grow.

The following trends were compiled from industry research, consultation with industry and local operators, and excerpts from federal and provincial publications.

1.2.2.1 Visitor Trends

The following is a summary of how and why visitors travel to and within Canada and what they are looking for in a destination.

Authentic & Cultural Tourism

When travelling, visitors seek out authentic places and are eager to learn their stories. Increasingly, the industry is seeing uptake in educational entertainment, opportunities to support local and independent businesses, and demand for the "hidden gems" and "travel like a local" experiences. In turn, host destinations have sought to incorporate creative public art and placemaking initiatives to communicate a destination's 'sense of place.'

Visiting Friends & Relatives

This is the primary reason for most Canadian travel and a common purpose for many international visitors. In line with the above trend, residents are often the best tourism ambassadors as they not only bring visitors to the key tourism sites in their area but also show them their favorite local spots, unique experiences, and authentic cultural events within a destination.

Outdoor Adventure & Sustainability

This is another trend that has seen massive growth during the pandemic and continues to be a main motivator post-pandemic; visitors are seeking both passive and active outdoor adventures and becoming more aware of their eco-footprint. Examples include passive activities like hiking or cycling or active options like high-ropes attractions or ziplining. This trend also includes agritourism as a way for visitors to practice healthy consumption while immersing themselves in authentic outdoor experiences.

Health and Wellness

Building on outdoor tourism, visitors are also looking to be physically active, visit healing and natural places, and stay mentally healthy on vacation. This trend has seen exponential growth coming out of the pandemic. Examples include locally sourced dining options, water-based activities, or choosing active sightseeing transportation options such as kayaking or cycling over sedentary options like driving.

Indigenous Tourism

This is one of the fastest growing segments within Canada. As defined by the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC), "authentic Indigenous tourism is BY Indigenous Peoples, not ABOUT Indigenous Peoples." Indigenous tourism experiences not only offer visitors the opportunity to experience another culture, but ITAC also states that "Indigenous Tourism is the strongest tool in the toolkit to help Canadians to support reconciliation."

Safety, Security & Welcome

Beyond the physical health and safety concerns (made worse during the pandemic), visitors seek out a welcoming and accepting environment where they feel actively included. This is especially true for marginalized groups such as 2SLGBTQAI+ travellers, BIPOC

travellers, women, or visitors with mental or physical accessibility needs. According to a Destination Canada survey, the friendliness of locals is the highest ranked influencer of visitor experiences in a destination, followed closely by safety and cleanliness.

Inclusion, Diversity, Equality, Accessibility (IDEA)

Operators and destinations alike are working to meet physical and digital IDEA standards and create a welcoming environment at all stages of the travel journey, including planning, transportation, accommodations, attractions, and post-trip follow-up.

Blended & Extended Stays

Several travel motivations are combining to create this trend, including "bleisure travel" (combining business and leisure trips), travelling in off-season times to avoid high costs, or adding tourism activities to a trip while visiting friends and relatives. This has led to visitors travelling in off-peak months or times of day, winter activities gaining popularity, or leisure accommodations being used for a business trip to accommodate accompanying family members.

Digital Integration

Spanning from accessible website design and mobile-friendly applications to artificial intelligence and augmented/virtual reality experiences, consumers expect digital integration to be seamless. The digital elements are often not the main attraction, but rather are expected to flawlessly blend into the journey (including pre- and post-trip) to allow for enhanced experiences, aid with accessibility needs, and reduce friction at key points such as payment, processing, or documentation.

Social Engagement

While this trend has been emerging for several years, the pandemic was a catalyst for social engagement. Visitors are eager to travel socially, whether participating in group activities, using social recommendations to plan their trip, or engaging in online social media as part of the pre-, during-, and post-trip journey.

High Quality & Unique Products

With declining discretionary income and increasing destination competition, visitors

seek out experiences where they receive good value and high-quality experiences for their dollar. Visitors are looking for superior value for money, high standards and coordination across all aspects of their travel journey, and authentic experiences that cannot be duplicated in another destination.

Range of Offerings

As visitors curate detailed itineraries, having a range of product and experience offerings is vital. This includes passive options like trails, parks, and self-guided tours and ranges up to luxury, hyper-customized experiences like exclusive events, luxury hotels, or culinary encounters. It also includes options at varying financial price points, allowing visitors to choose where to spend their money and to customize their trip based on their values. Some visitors may value exclusive dining options in a destination and will choose inexpensive accommodations and activities in order to keep to their budget.

1.2.2.2 Business & Destination Trends

The following is a summary of the trends currently affecting destinations and tourism businesses.

Regenerative Tourism

Regenerative Tourism is a recent best practice in the tourism industry, which prioritizes the community and environment, reframing the tourism destination as a 'host community' rather than a resource to be exploited or consumed. This approach grew exponentially coming out of the pandemic as a response to "over tourism," capacity restraints, negative impacts on residents, and degenerative development. Capacity gaps were especially evident during the pandemic where Canadian destinations with natural assets suffered problems of ecological destruction and overcrowding due to lack of infrastructure such as public washrooms, wayfinding, clear signage, available parking, and capacity management.

Lack of Access & Reduced Transport Connectivity

This is especially true for rural communities and travel between cities. Within larger cities, transportation is based on commuter and resident needs, with little coordination between regional and local transportation modes and

a significant 'last mile²' gap. For example, Hamilton is connected to neighbouring communities by rail and has a growing airport, but a visitor to Hamilton would need to use several modes of transportation to travel from the regional transit stations or airport to reach their final destination. These last mile gaps and the associated transportation costs are barriers to visitors using sustainable multi-modal options.

Labor & Skills Shortage

A shortage of labour and skills is limiting the capacity of almost all tourism businesses. According to Destination Canada's Q1 2023 Tourism Snapshot, while the Canadian overall unemployment rate was 5.4% in March, the tourism unemployment rate was 6%. Furthermore, while the Canadian labor force expanded 5.8% above pre-pandemic levels by March 2023, the labor force active in the tourism sector remained 4.2% below its pre-pandemic levels.

Reduced Individual Corporate Business Travel

This is a key factor affecting the tourism industry's lagging recovery. As previously detailed, work-from-home policies and the slow return to office are affecting travel, especially during mid-week periods. For example, travelling for sales calls or customer support is especially slow to recover as businesses have tighter travel budgets, appreciate the ease and efficiency of virtual software, and are mindful of their carbon emission targets.

The Night-Time Economy

This is a relatively new concept in Canadian destinations, however European and Asian destinations are far ahead in this regard. Though most often thought of in terms of music, entertainment, or food and beverage establishments, the night-time economy involves all activities and work that take place between 6:00 PM and 6:00 AM, including transportation, health care, and public services. Canadian destinations are working to improve the services and offerings to support night-time economies. The night-time economy is an important economic driver as it builds capacity in destinations, expands business offerings, and brings vibrancy to cities' often dark and unanimated times of day.

Higher Costs

Higher costs are degrading operators' profit margins and further raising the barrier to entry for new businesses. Not only are high construction costs and rising land costs making capital investments more expensive, but inflationary pressures, rising property taxes and insurance prices, food and labour costs, and business operation costs are making operations more expensive. While some businesses are raising prices, expenses are rising at a far greater pace than consumer pricing, thereby lowering operators' profitability.

Reduced Access to Capital & Limited Liquidity

This is severely dampening investment into tourism assets, both new and capital upgrades. The tourism industry has always been a higher risk real estate investment, however there is less of a desire for these types of investments with the current market uncertainty and higher appetite for safe investments.

Product Degradation

Product degradation is a challenge across Canada as aging products require capital investment; this is made worse by visitor expectations of high-quality experiences and rising costs. This is especially true for attractions, such as waterparks, amusement parks, or entertainment assets. Coming out of the pandemic, many tourism businesses are laden with high levels of debt and have no extra funds to re-invest into their products—especially given higher construction costs.

Shift in Capacity & Role of DMOs

All of these trends are leading to a higher expectation of direct involvement and aid beyond marketing from Destination Management Organizations (DMOs).

1.2.3 RELEVANT FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL INITIATIVES

1.2.3.1 Canada's Federal Tourism Strategy

In response to the state of the tourism industry, in 2023 the Federal government released a tourism growth strategy, "*Canada 365: Welcoming the World. Every Day.*" The strategy is guided by four key principles:

- Equity, diversity, and inclusion
- Reconciliation in action
- Sustainable and regenerative approaches
- A focus on rural Canada

By 2030, hundreds of millions of dollars will be invested to support the strategy's five tourism priorities:

- **Invest in tourism assets**, including increased investment in tourism attractions and tourism support from the Business Development Bank of Canada,
- **Embrace recreation and the great outdoors**, including a Trails Tourism Strategy for Canada and leveraging recreational opportunities and Canada's great outdoors,
- **Partner to grow Indigenous tourism** through strengthening partnerships,
- **Attracting more international events**, as well as hosting more international events, and
- **Improve coordination through a Federal Ministerial Council**, including aligning government policies and programs to grow tourism.

To measure the performance of the Strategy, ambitious targets have been set through to 2030 to fulfill the two main objectives: to increase tourism's economic output and to improve Canada's competitive standing internationally.

These priorities align with Hamilton's current tourism needs and the city is poised to take advantage of several of these funding opportunities.

1.2.3.2 Ontario's Hamilton, Halton, Brant Regional Tourism Organization (RTO3)

The Ontario government segments the province into 15 different tourism regions. Hamilton is part of Region 3: Hamilton, Halton,

² The "last mile" is the gap between a person's trip from a transportation hub (rail, bus, airport, ferry) to their final destination. The greater the "last mile," the less likely a person is to use multi-modal transportation.



Brant, and the Regional Tourism Organization (RTO) is branded to visitors as “the Heart of Ontario.” In 2023, RTO3 released their 2024 to 2026 Strategic Plan, which focuses on four areas:

- **Relationship Development and Communications.** Actions include a regional marketing plan, building relationships with their destinations (including Hamilton), and measuring resident sentiment and understanding of tourism.
- **Leadership and Representation.** Actions include creating a better-connected region, especially around transportation, policy, and infrastructure.
- **Ecosystem Development and Value Co-Creation.** Actions include improving visitation research, data collection and sharing, supporting a regional Truth and Reconciliation Action Plan, sustainability and destination stewardship initiatives, and developing cross-regional tourism products and experiences.
- **Resource Management.** Actions include exploring investment and funding opportunities, as well as creating revenue-generating products and services.

As the largest destination in Region 3, Hamilton works closely with the regional tourism organization. Key areas of alignment for this strategy involve developing new tourism products and experiences as well as a regional approach to sustainability and destination stewardship.

RTO3 is working to become a certified **Sustainable Tourism Destination through GreenStep**. Founded in 2008, GreenStep is the only Canadian-based sustainable tourism certification provider covering all types of tourism businesses and destinations. GreenStep’s Sustainable Tourism Certification is an assessment-based program³ that provides guidance and support to tourism businesses as they strive to operate more sustainably. GreenStep’s Sustainable Tourism Destination Standard was created in alignment with the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and has been globally recognized by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council. **Tourism Hamilton staff are part of RTO3’s Destination Sustainability Stakeholder Committee.**

1.3 Tourism Hamilton: Hamilton’s Destination Management Organization (DMO)

Tourism Hamilton is the City’s official DMO. Organizationally, Tourism Hamilton is in the Tourism & Culture Division within the Planning & Economic Development Department. Working in harmony with Tourism & Culture sections, Tourism Hamilton is responsible for:

- **Sector Development**, which includes supporting the businesses and workforce, as well as investment attraction.
- **Event Attraction and Hosting**, including major events, meetings and conventions, sporting, festivals, etc.
- **Tourism Marketing**, both to individual leisure travelers (B2C) and business development and event attraction (B2B).
- **Visitor Services**, offered digitally through the TourismHamilton.com website and physically at the Visitor Experience Centre at 28 James St. N.
- **Product Development**, this is a new function by which staff curate unique experiences for visitors and co-create Tourism Products⁴ with local businesses and organizations.

Tourism Hamilton staff work closely with industry partners and have regular communication through quarterly Team Hamilton Tourism meetings, one-on-one meetings, and roundtable style discussions.

1.4 Where We’ve Been

Since the previous Tourism Strategy (2015-2020), the city has grown and made gains in developing the destination. The 2015 to 2020 strategy’s actions were focused on three strategic priorities. Many of these actions were achieved or exceeded, while others require additional or renewed attention.

Strategic Priority 1: Leadership

This was focused on developing a sustainable and collaborative leadership structure to facilitate the growth of tourism and secure additional funding for business development and marketing. Overall, this strategic priority’s actions were achieved:

³ The **GreenStep certification process** requires an in-depth assessment that takes into consideration sustainability management systems, compliance with applicable laws, employee and guest engagement in sustainability efforts, availability of sustainable and accessible buildings and infrastructure, energy and water conservation, waste and emissions, community engagement, cultural heritage preservation, IDEA, and more.

⁴UN Tourism defines a **Tourism Product** as “a combination of tangible and intangible elements, such as natural, cultural and man-made resources, attractions, facilities, services and activities around a specific center of interest which represents the core of the destination marketing mix and creates an overall visitor experience including emotional aspects for the potential customers. A tourism product is priced and sold through distribution channels, and it has a life cycle”. A simple example would be a brewery tour, where the “tourism product” is created by combining transportation, beer tastings at each brewery, and a guided experience.



- Tourism Hamilton is now the established DMO for Hamilton with dedicated marketing and sales teams.
- The DMO has had great success in winning and hosting several major events such as the NHL Heritage Classic, Canadian Country Music Awards, NDP Conference, Grey Cup 2021 and 2023, and more.
- Through the Destination Marketing Program (DMP), Tourism Hamilton worked collaboratively with hotel and industry partnerships on strategic event attraction. Though the DMP will now be replaced by the Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT), the industry trust and relationships built through the DMP will carry forward.

Strategic Priority 2: Marketing and Communications

These actions sought to establish a positive destination identity and grow Hamilton's share of the market with the highest potential for return. These actions were also largely achieved.

- The award-winning Tourism Hamilton brand was developed and has successfully built a significant following on various social and digital channels. Tourism Hamilton has over 80,000 followers on social media and roughly 12,000 subscribers to the monthly digital newsletter.
- Through the development of Tourism Hamilton's digital channels, Hamilton is able to target leisure visitors and promote the city as an attractive destination.
- A Customer Relation Management (CRM)

- system was implemented for advanced booking and offering integrated bidding for sports, meetings and conventions, event space, and hotel rooms.
- Strong relationships have been built with national and provincial associations in sports, meetings and conventions, and other tourism industry segments to keep Hamilton top of mind and in the rotation for repeat events.

Strategic Priority 3: Destination Development

These actions focused on creating a great destination and enhancing Hamilton's 'welcome.' Several actions were achieved in developing the destination, however there is still work to be done.

- The Visitor Experience Centre (28 James Street North) renovation was completed. The Centre now integrates physical and digital visitor amenities, boutique retail featuring local artists, an event space, and rotating exhibit activations. The Centre is fully accessible, Rainbow Registered⁵, and is working towards a GreenStep sustainability certification.
- Tourism staff aided in the development of identified tourism districts, such as the James St. North corridor and Waterfront; however, these areas are still underdeveloped and require further investments in visitor infrastructure, activation, and placemaking.
- Hamilton has worked to foster a flourishing festivals and events scene. Working closely with the City's Special Events Advisory Team

⁵The Rainbow Registered Accreditation Program is a national accreditation for 2SLGBTQI+ friendly businesses and organizations. When you see a Rainbow Registered symbol, you know the business or organization meets a stringent set of standards to ensure 2SLGBTQI+ customers feel safe, welcomed, and accepted. The accreditation was created by Canada's 2SLGBTQI+ Chamber of Commerce (CGLCC), with Tourism HR Canada.



(SEAT), tourism staff collaborate seamlessly across departments, making Hamilton a top host destination and a best practice community in this regard.

- While improvements are being made on transportation, both at a regional and city level, better collaboration is still needed to make travel to and within Hamilton a seamless experience.

In conclusion, while Hamilton has made great strides to becoming a vibrant tourism destination, several gaps and challenges remain. This strategy seeks to build on the destination's strengths and past successes and to address the gaps and challenges.

1.5 Hamilton's Current Destination Overview

Ultimately, a destination is made up of tourism products and experiences; the more variety and higher the quality of assets, the more demand a destination will drive. Tourism asset categories include accommodations, attractions, food and beverage, entertainment, recreation, event facilities, transportation, visitor services, heritage and cultural, and natural and outdoor assets.

Furthermore, assets within a destination have a symbiotic relationship: a community or key tourism area needs a variety of assets to thrive. For example, an ideal tourism area may have a hotel, a number of restaurants, a natural asset, and an attraction within a 20-minute walking radius.

At the same time, as stated, a healthy tourism

destination requires a whole-city approach. Without healthy and safe neighbourhoods, a sustainable economy, and protected ecology, Hamilton cannot be a healthy host community. While Hamilton has strong tourism assets in some of these categories, there are several gaps and challenges that need to be addressed. The following is an overview of the key factors at play within the destination.

1.5.1 BURGEONING TOURISM DISTRICTS

Hamilton has several **burgeoning tourism districts**. The entertainment district is about to undergo a major transformation with the renovations to the FirstOntario Centre arena and Hamilton Convention Centre and the launch of the National Centre for New Musicals at Theatre Aquarius. In addition, the city has a reputation for quality music and cultural venues. These assets work together with the surrounding restaurants, retail, and attractions located in the Downtown Hamilton BIA, International Village BIA, and James Street North corridor make for an excellent urban destination.

Hamilton is home to a total of 11 BIAs, each with a unique sense of place and authentic identity. Historic villages such as Ancaster, Dundas, Westdale, and Stoney Creek, draw visitors seeking quaint main streets, historic charm, and boutique retail and restaurants.

Furthermore, Hamilton's West Harbour development is growing the waterfront into a key tourism area. The improvements to trail connectivity and public spaces are prime examples of how infrastructure supports and creates a sense of place.

While Hamilton has excellent destination elements, there is limited infrastructure and no cohesive messaging around its tourism districts. These tourism districts need to be defined in ways that are clear to visitors. Related to this, Hamilton has limited, disjointed, and outdated physical and digital wayfinding.

1.5.2 DOWNTOWN SAFETY & CLEANLINESS

Increasingly, local partners and visiting guests have raised concerns about the cleanliness and safety of Hamilton's downtown. As stated, safety and cleanliness are highly ranked influencers of visitors' experiences in a destination. Without safe, healthy, and clean neighbourhoods, tourism cannot flourish.

Though this is a complex issue, one underlying factor is the lack of vibrancy in downtown, especially after 6pm. When streets are dark, businesses are closed, after-hour transportation is unavailable, and people choose to go elsewhere in the evening, the lack of animation encourages bad behaviour. **However, by encouraging night life, investing in infrastructure, and expanding transportation and support service hours, Hamilton's night-time economy can reinvigorate downtown and help to improve downtown safety and cleanliness.**

Fostering a healthy night-time economy also includes a closer look at the city's policies and planning. For example, encouraging alternative uses for after-hour activities will allow community members more access to spaces for hosting events or animating spaces. **International cities that have invested in these policy changes state that underrepresented communities, such as BIPOC, 2SLGTBQAI+, Indigenous, or cultural organizations, see the biggest benefit as they are typically underserved by traditional venues.**

1.5.3 HAMILTON'S REPUTATION AS A DESTINATION

Hamilton competes globally for international visitors and nationally for Canadian visitors. While the city's location between Toronto and Niagara—two of Canada's most visited destinations—helps with drive-through exposure, **Hamilton is overshadowed in the competitive market and has a low international profile.**

Locally, Hamiltonians are friendly and humble, but resident sentiment has been weakening due to social challenges. Residents are often not aware of all that Hamilton has to offer and there are limited visitor services to encourage residents to explore their own backyard. **Residents who are proud of their city and invite their friends and relatives to experience Hamilton's offerings are the best tourism ambassadors.**

1.5.4 SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORTATION & CONNECTIVITY

From a municipal viewpoint, Hamilton has excellent connectivity and transportation by road, rail, and air. Especially relevant to tourism, Hamilton's John C Munro Airport is working to become the gateway to Southern Ontario and undertaking a 10-year capital master plan. For visitors, transportation within Hamilton currently includes HSR (bus service) and active transportation options such as the bike share program and e-scooters. The reimagined HSR routes, LRT project, and expanded GO station will continue to improve transportation options.

However, these modes of transportation require different programs, apps, and payment platforms. International visitors have a lower barrier to using multi-modal transportation, but **Canadians are often averse to sustainable transportation options because of the lack of user-friendly education, the significant last mile gap, and associated costs.**

Lastly, while the **LRT will greatly improve connectivity to several tourism areas once complete, construction will cause a long period of disruption for businesses and visitors navigating the city.**

1.5.5 VISITOR SERVICES

Tourism Hamilton offers visitor services through the TourismHamilton.com website and at the newly renovated Visitor Experience Centre in downtown. While the Visitor Experience Centre has excellent offerings in a safe and inclusive space, **awareness of the Centre and its resources is lacking.** Furthermore, for visitors who do not travel to downtown Hamilton, there are no other physical visitor services offered. **As partners such as hotel and attraction staff or airport volunteers work to warmly welcome visitors,**

they require support to promote Hamilton's offerings and educate guests.

Digitally, Tourism Hamilton has a strong, award-winning brand and growing social and digital audiences. However, digital travel and tourism technology is rapidly evolving, and visitors have high expectations of their destinations to curate unique, personalized experiences and offer a range of customized itineraries. **Tourism Hamilton's current website infrastructure is ill-equipped to integrate new technology or cater to visitor's increasing digital expectations.**

1.5.6 NATURAL & OUTDOOR TOURISM

Hamilton has world-class natural assets and is becoming known regionally as a desirable hiking and cycling destination as the "Waterfall Capital of the World." Hamilton is home to numerous trail systems, the largest botanical gardens in Canada (RBG), and the Niagara Escarpment (a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve). However, infrastructure to support these activities is often lacking. **For residents and visitors to enjoy the natural assets while protecting the land, Hamilton must improve infrastructure and expand capacity.** Examples include onsite washrooms, improved signage and wayfinding, lighting on trailheads, adequate parking, and expanded capacity controls such as reservation systems.

Similarly, Council has identified increased access to the Waterfront and recreational services as a priority. While much work has been done to improve the waterfront infrastructure and trails, there is a gap in infrastructure and governance structure. For example, to facilitate on-water recreation and encourage water-based operators, additional docks and visitor services will be required.

Local and regional organizations, such as the Royal Botanical Gardens, the Waterfront Regeneration Trust (Waterfront Trail), the Bruce Trail Conservancy, and Hamilton's Conservation Authority are working to improve their offerings and capacity as well. Improvements are also taking place on a federal level as Canada invests in the TransCanada Trail—parts of which go through Hamilton.

1.5.7 CULINARY & AGRITOURISM

Hamilton is gaining a reputation as a "foodie" destination. Hamilton has excellent culinary options across the city, ranging from restaurants and bars to breweries and cideries to farm-

fresh agritourism experiences. **However, to truly become a culinary destination, additional product development and curated experiences are required.**

1.5.8 MUSIC, CULTURE & FILM

Hamilton has a rich culture scene and growing music and film industries. Hamilton's diverse population is enthusiastic about sharing their culture through creative expression. As the city's creative and cultural profile grows, Hamilton continues to attract new artists, makers, creative professionals, and supporting industries. Key creative industries like music, film, fashion, and art are vital to telling Hamilton's authentic story and raising the City's international profile. **There is an opportunity to collaborate with local partners to co-create tourism products to help visitors enjoy Hamilton's many cultures and creative experiences.**

Hamilton is home to several high-quality music venues, and the city has also had success attracting the supporting amenities and services required to host large-scale cultural events. As major concerts and entertainment shows come to Canada, there is demand for these high-quality events, but few destinations have the capacity to host thousands of spectators. **With the renovation of FirstOntario Centre arena, Hamilton will be in a unique position to capitalize on the major entertainment and concert market.** However, while Hamilton has strong small- and large-scale venues, there is a gap in the city's mid-scale venue offerings.

1.5.9 ATTRACTIONS

Hamilton has several strong attractions. The majority of Hamilton's attractions are based on the city's history and culture, with its many museums, the HMCS Haida, the Canadian Warplane Heritage Museum, the Football Hall of Fame, the Hamilton Art Gallery, Westfield Heritage Village, and several others. The city also has top nature-based and outdoor adventure attractions such as the Royal Botanical Gardens, TreeTop Trekking, and African Lion Safari.

Several key attractions in Hamilton are expanding into the group and international tour market. This market represents an opportunity for Hamilton as several attractions already have the capacity to host group and international tours, while others are investing in capacity building and infrastructure to grow into this market.



However, some of Hamilton’s attractions require capital investments and only a few new attractions have come into the city in recent years. For example, the city has identified Wild Waterworks and the surrounding Confederation Park as an area that requires investment.

While Hamilton has several strong attractions, there are **gaps in family-friendly attractions, attractions aimed at youth and young adults, and wellness-related attractions.**

As stated, destinations function best when tourism assets are co-located. Unfortunately, most of Hamilton’s attractions are spread across the city and do not have supporting assets such as restaurants or hotels nearby.

1.5.10 INDIGENOUS TOURISM EXPERIENCES

In June 2019, Hamilton City Council endorsed the City of Hamilton’s Urban Indigenous Strategy (UIS). The UIS identifies specific actions that the City needs to take to ensure Indigenous contributions and experiences are honoured and commemorated. As allies, Tourism Hamilton has a role to play in reconciliation and to support authentic Indigenous businesses in Hamilton.

Despite the success of Indigenous tourism experiences across Canada and the high demand in the market, the supply of market-ready experiences is severely lacking in southern Ontario and there are currently no year-round, market-ready Indigenous tourism products in Hamilton.

Therefore, Tourism Hamilton and the Indigenous Relations Team are working with

local Indigenous partners to co-create several authentic Indigenous tourism experiences. Ultimately, the process must begin with consulting the Indigenous community to ensure that all tourism products and experiences are developed and delivered in a way that support the Indigenous communities represented in Hamilton and the region.

This project is currently in the first step of consultation and the ultimate objective is to create authentic Indigenous tourism experiences in Hamilton. As Keith Henry, President & CEO of Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada, states, “Indigenous Tourism is the strongest tool in the toolkit to help Canadians to support reconciliation.” These experiences would seek to create Indigenous jobs, provide opportunities for investment in Indigenous tourism, and bring visitors to the Hamilton region for these experiences.

1.5.11 PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Tourism Product Development is a newer function of Hamilton’s DMO. A “tourism product” is created by tying together unique elements within a destination to create an authentic experience. A simple example would be a brewery tour, where the “tourism product” is created by combining transportation, beer tastings at each brewery, and a guided experience.

Product development is vital to destination development, as visitors expect curated experiences to guide them to genuine places and tell their stories. Following regenerative tourism practices, tourism product development



is about fostering healthy communities and inviting visitors to experience authentic local tastes, cultures, and stories. As a steward of the destination, a DMO works to co-create tourism products with local business operators and community organizations.

With Hamilton’s strong culinary, attractions, cultural, heritage, and natural assets, the city has all the building blocks to offer transformational tourism experiences, but product development is required to engage and entice visitors.

1.5.12 MAJOR TOURISM EVENTS & FESTIVALS

Hamilton has made a name for itself as a key festival and event destination. Local partners host over 20 annual events in Hamilton, several of which are award-winning. A few key festivals include Supercrawl, Rockton Fair, Winterfest, Telling Tales, Fringe Festival, and Hamilton Film Festival. These events speak to the healthy music and cultural industries in Hamilton.

In addition to the “home grown” festivals, Hamilton has shown itself to be an excellent destination to host sport, meetings and conferences, and other large-scale events. Building on Hamilton’s strong history as a sports town, the city draws visitors in for sporting events year-round, ranging from amateur sports to hosting major professional sporting events. A few examples of recent major tourism events include the NHL Heritage Classic, Canadian Country Music Awards, NDP Conference, Grey Cup, and the RBC Canadian Open.

While both local community-based events (e.g., Canada Day, Ribfest) and major events (e.g., Grey

Cup, NDP Conference) may draw many attendees and offer community benefits, not all events within the city are supported by tourism staff or considered a “tourism event.” To be considered a major tourism event, the event must not only draw in a significant number of out-of-town visitors, but must also boost tourism-related visitor spending in Hamilton.

Hosting major events not only ties directly into Council’s priority of enhancing the City’s reputation as a centre of culture, sport, and tourism, but also acts as an economic promoter.

For example, hosting a major conference on agri-food production, life sciences, technology, or goods movement signals to businesses in these industries that Hamilton is a key player and supports Foreign Direct Investment activities. Similarly, leveraging the reputation of Hamilton’s internationally known companies or McMaster Innovation Park can help attract conferences in key sectors to Hamilton. Lastly, hosting major events helps bring year-round vibrancy and overnight guests to the city.

Hamilton benefits from clustering event facilities with hotel rooms and complementing amenities (restaurants, retail) in downtown. This contributes greatly to a positive visitor experience and in securing large city-wide events. The city’s event hosting capacity will continue to grow with the major capital investment and renovation of the Hamilton Convention Centre.

While the city has a number of strong event spaces and a collaborative city-wide approach to major events, Hamilton is held back by lacking event and festival infrastructure.

Examples include public washrooms, access to sufficient power and servicing connections, equipment storage, or parking for trucks and event crews. **Similarly, during large city-wide events, there is an insufficient supply of overnight accommodations.**

1.5.13 SPORT TOURISM

Hamilton has a long history of being a “sports town” and is home to several major sporting teams that draw in visitors: the Hamilton Tiger-Cats, Forge FC Football, Toronto Rock Lacrosse, and the Hamilton Cardinals Baseball Club. The Tim Hortons Field is a strong sporting asset and the City has also recently made investments into additional sporting assets, such as cricket pitches. Furthermore, the City’s Parks Master Plan (2022) and Recreation Master Plan (2022) detail the importance of continuing to reinvest and improve the City’s recreational assets.

These strengths combine to give Hamilton a competitive edge in attracting not only spectator visitors, but also significant sporting events, ranging from amateur to professional.

1.5.14 ACCOMMODATIONS & OVERNIGHT DEMAND

A key metric of a destination’s health is overnight stays, particularly in hotels and short-term rentals, as these guests are most likely to be out of town visitors (tourists). The higher a city’s overall accommodation occupancy, the higher the demand for the tourism destination.

Hamilton has several excellent midscale and upper midscale hotels, **however there is an insufficient amount of high-quality economy hotels, no luxury hotels, and limited alternative accommodations (i.e., cottage, glamping).** Hamilton has a few campgrounds, however, they are located far from complementary attractions and closer to neighboring municipalities. Most accommodations are located in the downtown and surrounding areas, with gaps in several BIAs, the airport, the waterfront, and rural communities.

Overall, Hamilton’s overnight demand is growing.

However, the accommodation supply is insufficient during peak demand periods, such as major festivals, large conferences, or city-wide events. Not only does this hamper the city from attracting larger major events, but the demand and visitor spending spills over to neighboring communities.

Lastly, Hamilton’s neighbouring destinations face similar limitations to attracting major events. **Therefore, there is an opportunity for cities to collectively bid on major events in a regional play, pooling event hosting resources and overnight accommodations.**

1.5.15 MUNICIPAL ACCOMMODATION TAX

In January 2023, the City of Hamilton implemented a 4% Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT) on accommodation stays within its jurisdiction, including hotels, motels, and soon, short-term rentals (STRs). **This MAT aims to generate revenue dedicated to tourism development services and promotion, aligning with the city’s Tourism Strategy goals, and serving as a vital source of non-tax levy funding for Hamilton’s tourism industry initiatives.**

This Tourism Strategy serves as the guiding framework for directing MAT funds towards initiatives that contribute to the growth, development, and sustainability of Hamilton’s tourism industry. Ensuring alignment between MAT expenditures and the strategic priorities outlined in the Tourism Strategy, maximizes the impact of these funds and helps achieve long-term tourism development objectives.

Based on conversations with other municipalities who have implemented a MAT, best practices recommend creating a MAT Advisory Group made up of a variety of tourism industry partners. Furthermore, several municipalities and regions have created grant programs using MAT funds to aid in event attraction, product development, placemaking, and activation. Not only do these practices align with Council’s priorities of transparency and collaboration, but they also ensure that the MAT funds are used to directly benefit the tourism industry.

1.6 Summary (SWOT Analysis)

Based on all the preceding analysis, Hamilton's destination overview, and partner feedback, the following SWOT analysis summarizes Hamilton's strengths and weaknesses and identifies the opportunities and threats the city faces as a tourism destination.

- **Strengths** are internal value-creating factors that should be built upon.
- **Weaknesses** are internal value-destroying factors that should be mitigated and improved upon.
- **Opportunities** are external value-creating factors that a destination should take advantage of.
- **Threats** are external value-destroying factors that a destination should mitigate where possible and take into consideration when planning for the future.

- Burgeoning tourism districts (entertainment district, waterfront, BIAs, historic downtowns, etc.).
- Hamilton has a rich culture scene and growing music and film industries.
- Exposure to visitors from ideal location between Toronto and Niagara, two of Canada's most visited destinations.
- Improvements in sustainable and active transportation options (e-scooters, bikes, HSR re-envisioned, LRT, GO train expanding).
- Tourism Hamilton's Visitor Experience Centre is a safe and inclusive space that offers visitors excellent digital and physical resources.
- Tourism Hamilton has a strong brand and growing social following.
- Excellent natural and outdoor assets, e.g., waterfalls, trails, Niagara escarpment, waterfront.
- Top nature-based and outdoor adventure attractions such as the Royal Botanical Gardens, TreeTop Trekking, and African Lion Safari.
- Excellent culinary assets and reputation as "foodie" destination, including restaurants, bars, breweries and cideries, agritourism, etc.
- Strong historic and cultural attractions, e.g., HMCS Haida, Canadian Warplane Museum, Football Hall of Fame, Hamilton Art Gallery, Westfield Heritage Village, etc.
- Hamilton's history of being a "sports town," strong sporting assets e.g. Tim Horton's Field, and the city's several major sporting teams, e.g., the Hamilton Tiger-Cats, Forge FC Football, Toronto Rock Lacrosse, and the Hamilton Cardinals Baseball Club.
- City has several strong event spaces and major parks, and the convention centre will be renovated.
- Collaborative city-wide approach to hosting major events makes Hamilton a good event host and best practice city.
- Newly introduced MAT will generate revenue dedicated to tourism development services and promotion and serve as a vital source of non-tax levy funding for Hamilton's tourism industry initiatives.



Weaknesses

- Hamilton does not stand out in the competitive destination market and has a low international profile.
- Hamilton's resident sentiment has been weakening due to social challenges and residents are often not aware of all that Hamilton has to offer.
- Limited support infrastructure and cohesive messaging around tourism districts
- Limited, disjointed, and outdated wayfinding and lack of digital wayfinding assets.
- Increasing concerns about downtown safety and cleanliness.
- Lack of visitor services offered physically beyond Visitor Experience Centre downtown.
- Tourism Hamilton's current website infrastructure is ill-equipped to integrate new technology or to cater to visitor's digital expectations.
- Some of Hamilton's attractions require capital investments and only a few new attractions have come into the city.
- Gaps in family-friendly attractions, attractions aimed at youth and young adults, and wellness-related attractions.
- Currently lacking Indigenous tourism experiences, however a project is underway.
- Weak night-time economy due to limited supporting infrastructure, policies, and after-hour transportation.
- Outdoor and recreational infrastructure lacking for nature-based activities, e.g., safety and accessibility of trails and waterfalls, or docks to facilitate on-water rental operators at waterfront.
- Lacking event infrastructure and logistics for major events and festivals, i.e., public washrooms, access to sufficient power and servicing connections, equipment storage, parking for trucks and event crews.
- During large city-wide events, there is an insufficient supply of accommodations.
- Accommodation gaps in high-quality economy hotels, no luxury hotels, and limited alternative accommodations (i.e., cottage, glamping).
- Product development required to tie together Hamilton's assets and engage and entice visitors.

Opportunities

- Hamilton and neighbouring cities can collectively bid on major events in a regional play, pooling event hosting resources and overnight accommodations, aligned with federal tourism strategic priority of attracting more international events.
- Demand for high-quality entertainment and concerts growing. Hamilton can capitalize on this as few other Ontario cities have the capacity to host large entertainment.
- Nature-based activities on the rise as health and wellness become top-of-mind for visitors.
- Economic development synergies between foreign direct investment, key Hamilton industries, and hosting major events and conferences.
- Improving transit will make getting to and around Hamilton easier and increase sustainable options (Reimagining HSR, GO station expanding, LRT project).
- Hamilton Airport positioning itself as a gateway to all of southern Ontario will bring additional visitors and exposure to Hamilton.
- Secondary municipalities are becoming more attractive to investors as construction and land costs continue to rise in major urban centers (i.e., Toronto).
- Similarly, secondary municipalities have a lower barrier to entry for new businesses due to lower commercial rents than major urban centers (i.e., Toronto).
- Council has directed staff to investigate redeveloping Confederation Beach Park as a top destination.

Threats

- Increased competition as several other destinations in Ontario are implementing MAT and beginning destination development and marketing efforts.
- Disruption related to LRT construction and the closing of the Entertainment assets during renovation.
- Lack of affordable housing and wage pressures threatening hospitality workforce.
- The rising costs of travel and inflationary pressures are leading to diminishing discretionary income for consumers.
- Canadians are often averse to sustainable transportation options because of the lack of user-friendly education, the significant last mile gap, and associated costs.
- The less vibrancy in a downtown, the less safe visitors, businesses, and residents feel, which can contribute to a downward spiral of people and businesses leaving downtowns.





Tourism Strategy

2.1 Introduction

When done well, tourism can create vibrancy, social cohesion, and prosperity. Hamilton's Tourism Strategy is built on a regenerative and 'whole city' approach where Tourism Hamilton works collaboratively with City staff, tourism businesses, and industry partners to steward the destination. The following section details the vision and strategic priorities for Hamilton's tourism industry, as well as the actions to achieve the vision.

2.2 Vision Statement

Hamilton is a top Canadian destination, celebrated for our vibrant tourism districts, captivating nature-based activities, and authentic and sustainable experiences.

2.3 Strategic Priorities

To achieve this vision, this strategy is built on four strategic priorities:

1. **Grow Hamilton's Reputation as a Leading Tourism Destination**
2. **Cultivate Vibrant Tourism Districts**
3. **Promote and Support the Sustainability of Natural Assets**
4. **Strengthen Hamilton's Major Events and Festival Sector**

Within each strategic priority, the strategy details several actions Tourism Hamilton will take to steward the destination, along with key metrics and desired outcomes.

These actions are specific to tourism staff; however, as stated, staff across the city play a role in Hamilton's success as a tourism destination. Without clean streets, safe communities, good infrastructure, and a thriving City, tourism can not flourish. Therefore, in addition to tourism strategic actions, each strategic priority section lists 'whole city approach' actions being led by other city departments that support and are supported by this strategy.



2.3.1 Grow Hamilton's Reputation as a Leading Tourism Destination

As Hamilton's Destination Management Organization (DMO), it is Tourism Hamilton's role to steward the destination. Stewarding the destination requires supporting the industry partners who work in the industry, enticing and welcoming visitors to Hamilton, and co-creating unique experiences in the host communities and ecologies. A DMO's role in offering visitor services extends to enticing and welcoming visitor online—before they arrive in the destination—and assisting in their journey to and around the city.

In creating a healthy host destination, Hamilton's residents and businesses are the ultimate hosts and best ambassadors to promote all Hamilton has to offer to their visiting friends and relatives. Therefore, inspiring, encouraging, and clearly communicating with residents and tourism partners alike is vital.

2.3.1.1 Tourism Strategic Actions

1. Develop and implement a Tourism Product Development Program, cultivating authentic experiences to showcase the city's diverse cultural, heritage, culinary, and natural assets.
2. Complete and implement the Indigenous Tourism Experiences Study by 2024.
3. Following recommendations from the Indigenous Tourism Experiences Study, support new and existing Indigenous tourism operators in developing authentic Indigenous tourism experiences.
4. Work with Corporate Communications, HSR, Metrolinx, and other partners to identify and support the promotion of sustainable, destination-focused transportation options for tourists visiting and navigating the city.
5. Complete a digital review project across the Tourism & Culture Division to meet current and future needs.
6. Foster local pride in place encouraging residents to explore their own city and invite friends and relatives to visit.
7. Leverage Tourism Hamilton's brand, social channels, and in-kind partnerships to develop lure campaigns targeting leisure visitors and promote the city as an attractive destination.
8. To lead by example, Tourism Hamilton will obtain a GreenStep Sustainable Tourism Certification, which encompasses efforts in responsible tourism, environmental stewardship, accessibility, and diversity and equity.
9. Create a MAT Advisory Group of tourism industry partners by the end of 2024 to collaborate in a transparent manner on MAT spending.



2.3.1.2 Whole City Approach

Creating a healthy support system for a destination takes a whole-city approach. Hamilton's Workforce Strategy and related actions support this strategy. For example, they promote Hamilton as an appealing and inclusive place to work and build a workforce pipeline through work placements for secondary and post-secondary co-op students in the hospitality and tourism industry.

Furthermore, tourism staff are involved with larger City initiatives around Hamilton's cycling infrastructure and routes as well as projects addressing accessibility and accessible travel, in line with Council priorities for making safe and thriving neighbourhoods. Tourism staff are also following the City's efforts to increase public engagement to foster trust, inclusivity, and transparency with residents, visitors, and industry partners.

Lastly, tourism staff work closely with Economic Development to create vibrant downtowns and neighbourhoods, thriving live-work-play environments, profitable businesses, and a positive perception of Hamilton nationally and internationally.

2.3.1.3 Key Metrics & Desired Outcomes

- Number of new tourism products created,
- Visitor ridership on sustainable transportation options,
- Launch of new TourismHamilton.com website,
- Website performance and user statistics,
- Achieved GreenStep Sustainable Tourism Certification,
- Improved resident sentiment of tourism in Hamilton and Hamilton as a destination,
- Number of Indigenous tourism experiences created,
- Partner sentiment of tourism staff and support systems.



2.3.2 Cultivate Vibrant Tourism Districts

Vibrant tourism districts reflect and nurture a community’s authentic identity, which in turn entices visitors and offers high-quality experiences that are unique to the district. A vibrant tourism district prospers its tourism businesses and provides a welcoming and desirable environment for both residents and visitors. This vibrancy should extend beyond traditional working hours and foster the night-time economy. As a destination steward, Tourism Hamilton will also work to mitigate the negative impacts of upcoming LRT construction and entertainment district renovations.

Creating a sustainable tourism district requires physical and digital infrastructure to communicate a district’s identity to visitors and create a ‘sense of place.’ Animating dedicated visitor spaces and creating itineraries to help visitors experience a destination not only matches visitor travel trends, but further extends a host destination’s welcome. Lastly, to fill identified gaps in tourism districts, investment and business attraction are required.

2.3.2.1 Tourism Strategic Actions

1. Through the Downtown West Harbourfront Coordinating Committee, implement safety, cleanliness, and activation initiatives in the Downtown and West Harbourfront areas, focusing on programming, placemaking, and strategic investments to enhance vibrancy and co-create an authentic ‘sense of place.’
2. Enhance key tourism locations like the West Harbour and Downtown Entertainment Precinct through urban design and public art.
3. Create and implement a four-year exhibition and community program to use the Visitor Experience Centre as a year-round central hub that also connects to major hosted events.
4. Establish a Night-Time Economy Night-Time Economy initiative by the end of 2025 to review City policies and bylaws to remove barriers and encourage operators and community organizations to create a healthy and safe night-time economy.
5. Conduct a review of City of Hamilton tourism-related wayfinding signage and implement a program to update with current branding and digital technologies, to be completed by 2028.
6. Execute a tourism business attraction strategy to secure business investments that enhance Hamilton's destination offerings by filling identified gaps in accommodations, attractions, and cultural venues.
7. For identified tourism districts, work with local businesses, BIAs, organizations, and regional partners to co-create curated experiences and authentic itineraries that entice visitors and reflect the district’s unique identity.



2.3.2.2 Whole City Approach

Organizations and departments across the city work to create vibrant neighbourhoods in Hamilton. For example, tourism staff are part of the City's Downtown West Harbour Coordinating Committee. This committee is made up of key City teams all working to improve the city's safety, cleanliness, vibrancy, and LRT readiness. While tourism staff are not most responsible for downtown office vacancy, efforts to increase visitation downtown will have positive impacts and increase vibrancy. Furthermore, fostering a healthy night-time economy will not only bring that vibrancy past 6:00pm, but will also help improve the safety and cleanliness of downtown Hamilton.

The Tourism Strategy seeks to developing unique identities for all tourism districts across the city and to celebrate the arts, heritage, history, and cultural elements of Hamilton. As local businesses and resident organizations play a vital role in fostering the community and animating their neighborhoods, tourism staff rely on these local experts and ambassadors to host visitors alongside tourism staff.

The strategy also seeks to develop the downtown and waterfront as cultural hubs in line with Council priorities and the Economic Development Action Plan which seeks to transform the West Harbour area into a recreational, commercial, and residential waterfront destination.

2.3.2.3 Key Metrics & Desired Outcomes

- Night-time economy task force is established,
- City bylaw and policies are reviewed to encourage night-time economy,
- Downtown business sentiments improve,
- Overall level of downtown vibrancy improves,
- Number of micro-grants issued,
- Number of pop-ups and activations in Visitor Experience Centre,
- Number of physical signs installed/ replaced/updated and digital wayfinding elements,
- Number of business attraction campaign activities,
- Number of investment opportunities in key tourism districts,
- Number of visitor itineraries created.



2.3.3 Protect and Improve the Enjoyment of Natural Assets

Hamilton is home to world-class natural assets with over 150 waterfalls, hundreds of kilometers of trails, the Niagara Escarpment (a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve), a scenic waterfront, and several conservation areas. However, Hamilton must better steward the natural assets to help visitors and residents better connect with and enjoy its green spaces and waterways. Much of the work must begin with thoughtful planning and physical infrastructure improvements to protect not only the environment, but also improve the safety and enjoyment of those visiting the natural assets.

In addition to physical infrastructure, visitors should be engaged in stewarding the natural assets through education and clear communication. Furthermore, as stated, destinations are created by clustering various tourism assets together and creating a range of activities for visitors. Many of Hamilton's natural assets are located close to vibrant and emerging tourism districts that can be incorporated into a visitor's trip. However, visitors need help connecting these assets and Tourism Hamilton can assist by co-creating communication, itineraries, or tourism products with local partners.

2.3.3.1 Tourism Strategic Actions

1. Complete a Waterfall Destination Master Plan by 2028 to improve infrastructure and address safety, signage, and enforcement issues to enhance the visitor experience.
2. Work with Climate Office, Active Transportation, Corporate Communications, and industry partners to identify and support the promotion of eco-tourism, environmental rehabilitation efforts, and responsible enjoyment of Hamilton's natural assets.
3. With Planning and Economic Development partners, investigate tourism opportunities for the redevelopment of Wild Waterworks and surrounding Confederation Beach Park lands as a top destination, to have a plan to Council by 2028.
4. Leverage federal and provincial programs as they become available to accelerate capital investments to enhance Hamilton's trail systems and natural assets by 2028 (waterfalls, trails, escarpment, rural agritourism, waterfront.)
5. Work with the Land Development Office to establish the physical infrastructure (e.g., docks) and governance structure to facilitate additional recreational and leisure water-based activities and on-water operators at the waterfront by 2026.



2.3.3.2 Whole City Approach

These actions are aligned with Council priorities surrounding protecting the city's greenspace and waterways, as well as providing vibrant parks and recreation options, and increasing access to the waterfront. Similarly, the Economic Development Action Plan includes completing a feasibility study on how to leverage the economic potential of waterfalls and adjacent natural amenities with consideration to environmental and neighbourhood impacts.

In addition, this strategic priority also supports and is supported by numerous City and community plans, including the Hamilton Climate Action Strategy (2022), the Hamilton Parks Master Plan (2022), the Hamilton Recreation Master Plan (2022), and the West Harbour Recreation Master Plan (2010).

2.3.3.3 Key Metrics & Desired Outcomes

- Waterfall Destination Master Plan is completed,
- Amount of provincial and federal funding leveraged,
- Investment in Confederation Beach Park as a top destination,
- Improvements made to Hamilton's natural assets (i.e., number of lights, public washrooms, parking stalls added),
- Number of recreational operators on Hamilton's waterfront,
- Visitor education materials and communication plan is created and launched,
- Decreasing health and safety incidents involving Hamilton's natural assets.



2.3.4 Strengthen Hamilton's Major Events and Festival Sector

Hosting festivals and major events is one of the most visible ways that Hamilton welcomes visitors. These festivals and events bring vibrancy, cultural richness, and additional spending into the community and raise the city's profile. Hamilton has built a reputation as a strong host destination and tourism staff have had success securing additional events and festivals. With the upcoming investments in the arena and convention centre, Hamilton will be even better positioned to secure events.

However, the city is hampered by the limited supporting infrastructure and its capacity during peak periods. As a destination steward, Tourism Hamilton has an opportunity to work with regional destination partners to attract larger events by pooling resources and working in collaboration.

Furthermore, tourism staff can leverage the synergies between economic development and hosting major events and conferences to not only improve the city's overall reputation, but also to attract new employers and investment. This in turn will bring prosperity to the host destination and economic sustainability.



2.3.4.1 Tourism Strategic Actions

1. Implement sales campaigns to secure sporting and cultural tourism events that leverage investments in Hamilton's entertainment assets and other public spaces.
2. In line with the Federal Tourism Strategy, implement a sales campaign to secure international, national, and provincial meetings and conventions that provide year-round activity for industry partners.
3. Work with local Indigenous communities to host major sports events for Indigenous athletes. (Urban Indigenous Strategy Item #35).
4. Working with Indigenous Relations Team and Indigenous communities, support and promote National Indigenous Peoples Day (June 21st)
5. Enter a memorandum of understanding with the Hamilton Sports Group (Tiger-Cats) by the end of 2025 to formalize a partnership to increase the number of sports, culture, and community events and activations hosted at Tim Hortons Field.
6. Work with appropriate partners to leverage federal and provincial programs, as they become available, to accelerate capital investments in event and festival infrastructure in public spaces (enhance power, washrooms, lighting, connectivity to airport/transit, etc.)
7. Utilize a portion of the Municipal Accommodation Tax and other non-levy funding sources for bid fees for securing and executing major events, in collaboration with industry MAT Advisory Group.
8. Implement tailored neighborhood strategies for communities heavily impacted by major events (e.g., Stiplely during the Grey Cup) to mitigate effects on residents through effective communication and coordination of essential City services.

2.3.4.2 Whole City Approach

Hosting major events ties directly into Council's priority of enhancing the City's reputation as a centre of culture, sport, and tourism. This strategic priority is also in line with the Economic Development Action Plan's stretch target of attracting five major events that generate a total combined economic impact of at least \$50M.

In addition, hosting major events facilitates the growth of key sectors and aligns with several economic development and foreign direct investment goals as it signals Hamilton's economic diversity, raises the city's profile, and brings year-round activity to the city.

2.3.4.3 Key Metric Outcomes

- Number of major events hosted in Hamilton,
- Economic impact of major events,
- Improved event infrastructure (i.e., number of new power and servicing access or number of public washrooms in key event locations),
- Sentiment of industry partners and residents,
- Meeting and event planner sentiments,
- Leads generated and secured through campaigns,
- Number of event-related overnight accommodation stays.

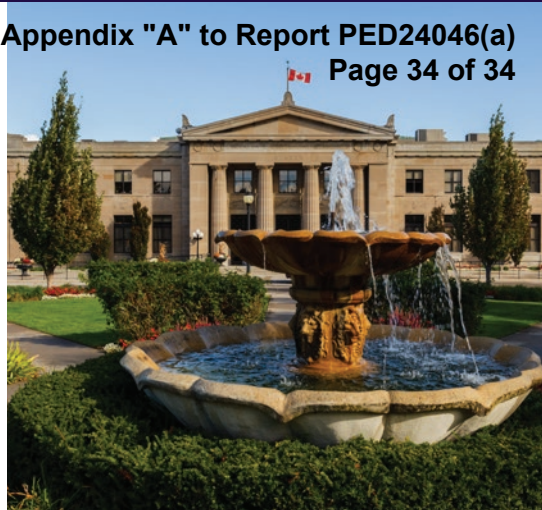
2.4 Reporting & Processes

In order to remain transparent and collaborative, tourism staff will provide an annual informational update to council. In addition, tourism staff will continue to host quarterly Team Hamilton meetings and provide updates to industry partners.

Wherever possible, tourism staff will look to leverage MAT funds or other non-levy sources to achieve new initiatives identified within this strategy. Any requests for funding will continue to go through the appropriate processes.







28 James St N, Hamilton, ON L8R 2K1
905 546 2666

TOURISMHAMILTON.COM



Scan for your
GUIDE
to the city.