

# TOURISM ECONOMIC RECOVERY MINISTERIAL TASK FORCE

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Location: Niagara Gorge  
Photo Credit: Destination Ontario

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MINISTRY OF HERITAGE, SPORT,  
TOURISM AND CULTURE INDUSTRIES

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# Introduction from Tim Hudak, Chair of the Tourism Economic Recovery Ministerial Task Force

It's been quite a journey. But it's hard to put into words how proud I am of the destination.

I want to begin by thanking Minister MacLeod for asking me to chair this Task Force. In a previous age I, too, had the privilege to serve as Ontario's Minister of Tourism, Culture and Recreation and I saw first-hand just how hard tourism operators and businesses had to work in the face of growing national and international competition. While the COVID-19 pandemic has created challenges an order of magnitude far more complex than we faced following 9/11, the simple fact remains, when measured end-to-end, the workers and businesses in Ontario can offer an experience that is a match for any other place in the world.

I also want to thank all of the members of the Task Force many of whom are facing serious demands in their own day jobs, yet still found the time every week to come together to enthusiastically share their expertise and develop the ideas into the roadmap you will find in the pages that follow. Their faith and commitment to the tourism industry is unwavering, even during one of the bleakest periods that this sector has ever encountered. I also want to thank every person, business and organization who took the time to offer submissions to the Task Force on what an Ontario tourism recovery could look like. In particular, I want to thank Vice Chair Beth Potter, as well as Rob Sampson, Andre Newell and David MacLachlan who chaired the subcommittees where so many of the ideas that follow emerged, as well as Assistant Deputy Minister Kevin Finnerty and the incredible team of professional public servants within the Ministry who patiently responded to our requests and were always ready to provide expert advice and other supports.

Throughout this process it became clear to us that the tourism industry is prepared to meet today's challenges; through a combination of ingenuity, creativity, innovation and a relentless customer focus. Even so, the reality remains that, after being forced to remain closed for the majority of the past 14 months, many tourism operators have long since exhausted the capital and liquidity needed to make necessary investments or even to operate at a near break-even level for an extended period of time, while waiting for consumer engagement to return.

There is reason for optimism, however. For one, significant segments of the public are ready to go out, explore, rediscover and re-engage with local businesses and attractions as soon as it becomes safe to do so. After doing their part, many Ontarians are eager to create new and lasting memories, reconnect with friends and family, and try new experiences, events, attractions and businesses in Ontario's tourism industry. There will be opportunities to make up for the moments lost to COVID-19 and celebrate all that we have overcome as a province. The Ontario government continues to encourage Ontarians to spend local, and we echo that call. We challenge all Ontarians to come out and enjoy all that Ontario has to offer. I am confident that Ontarians will choose to explore Ontario

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and as a result, they will be delighted by what is in store and enriched with precious memories that last a lifetime.

The common thread to this challenge and opportunity is that the Ontario tourism industry has the ability to rebuild itself while encouraging people to create new, fun, adventurous memories with local experiences safely and confidently. In so doing, this will kickstart Ontario's tourism economy. The tourism industry offers everything that Ontarians are looking for and have so dearly missed over the course of the pandemic.

This report doesn't contain all of the answers, but I am confident that it does contain real solutions, that will provide real help to workers and businesses who need it most. It also contains ideas that I believe will get more of us out of our homes and into our communities the moment it is safe to do so. Until that day comes, I hope that you share in my confidence that, as much as we have been forced to stay apart over the past 14 months, there is nowhere I would rather be than right here in Ontario.

Tim Hudak  
Chair  
Tourism Economic Recovery Ministerial Task Force

Location: Thunder Bay  
Photo Credit: Destination Ontario



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# Top 10 Recommendations of the Task Force

## 1. Emphasize safety in everything we say and do

Using the same energy and effort to tell Ontarians to “stay home” throughout the pandemic, the Ontario government and public health officials will need to communicate to Ontarians that it is “safe to travel”. When it is safe to travel, utilize government officials, Ontario’s Chief Medical Officer of Health and Ontario influencers to get the message out and promote all that Ontario has to offer. This will instill consumer confidence, encourage communities to welcome visitors and help to jumpstart and recover the tourism industry.

## 2. Give Ontarians an incentive to get out of the home and make new local memories

The travel incentive can support recovery by encouraging Ontarians to support local businesses and contribute to their community. The Ontario government will need to target consumers at the point of sale to remind them of potential savings issued through the incentive – encouraging visitors to extend their stays and visit more places. Simultaneously, a consumer confidence campaign should be launched to encourage Ontarians to travel during the “year of the staycation”. In addition to the travel incentive, it is recommended that Ontario develop a branded Ontario travel points card to enable medium and longer-term recovery.

## 3. Encourage and excite Ontarians to experience Ontario through New “Yours to Discover” days



Generate demand and excitement for Ontarians to explore their province in late 2021 and 2022 to make up for lost vacations due to the pandemic. With difficult but necessary public health restrictions in place, many holidays and plans to travel Ontario were put on hold – a coordinated effort from the whole of the industry incent travel on these select days will help to get Ontarians out to discover all their province has to offer!

Location: Algonquin Provincial Park

Photo Credit: Destination Ontario

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## 4. Provide increased stability and opportunities to tourism businesses and organizations

The Ontario government can enable attractions, sporting events, cultural events and festivals to align with a 3-5 year recovery timeline, by introducing multi-year operating funding programs or expanding current programs like Reconnect. This will act as a way to keep tourism organizations, businesses and operators afloat so that they can then be used as drivers of economic recovery in the medium and longer-term.

## 5. Bring back conventions and business events to Ontario

Establish a multi-year Conventions and Business Events Support Fund to remain competitive and support the long-term economic recovery of the gateway cities and beyond, to support the lucrative business and leisure travel market.

## 6. Make it easier for people to find the package, products and destinations that suit their budgets, schedules, and needs

The Task Force recommends direct industry support be provided to create products, attractions and experiences that appeal to everyone in all stages of life. From cultural attractions to nature and outdoor opportunities; family friendly deals to adult weekend getaways; and from affordable packages to luxury events – Ontario has everything to offer. These opportunities need to be market ready, easy to understand and accessible by all travelers.

## 7. Reduce the amount of time tourism businesses spend on red tape so they can spend more time delivering unforgettable experiences

Build on the government's early successes to support businesses (e.g., providing municipalities with the power to designate public spaces for responsible alcohol consumption, permanently allowing restaurants to do takeout/delivery of alcohol), by taking a cross-ministerial approach and collaborating with ministries to create the conditions for a thriving tourism industry, related to responsibly loosening alcohol laws, hospitality sector and gaming and reviewing the Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT) to optimize revenue generation for the tourism industry.

## 8. Make Nature and Outdoor experiences part of the province's solution to physical and mental health challenges

There are significant mental and physical health benefits to participating in nature and outdoor tourism, which are also generally considered to be safer activities in relation to COVID-19. Over the

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past year, people have enjoyed reconnecting with nature and outdoors by getting back on their bikes, exploring hiking trails and visiting local parks. There is an opportunity to capitalize on the interest in these activities to better promote the beautiful, unique, and wide-ranging nature and outdoor experiences Ontario has to offer across the province.

## 9. Create “Bite-Sized” Mobile and Scalable Experiences during the transition period to a full re-opening

To create momentum for when Ontario fully reopens, the Task Force recommends supporting, in the interim, scalable and mobile experiences, festivals and events (i.e., roadshow events) and business conferences. These “bite-sized” experiences will help to fill the gap and appetite for Ontarians and visitors until full-scale events and shows can resume safely. Ontario is host to a diverse, cultural landscape with rich tourism experiences that can be capitalized on to entice visitors to discover and participate.

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***Starting in the second half of 2021, Science North will launch The Great Northern Ontario Roadshow. This promotional tour will travel to more than 50 communities to highlight some of the tremendous tourist attractions and natural wonders located throughout the north. Through this roadshow the science centre hopes to generate revenue for tourism operations impacted by COVID-19. - Ontario News Release, December 16, 2020***

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## 10. Showcase the Best of Ontario through packaged Itineraries and Trails

Ontario has a unique and privileged opportunity to leverage and build on existing itineraries and trails. These diverse offerings can be used to showcase the “world in one province” and encourage travel across all regions and seasons in Ontario. Ontario has a number of existing branded trails already, from the Moments of Algoma Group of Seven project to the Route Champlain, from the outstanding culinary trails that feature butter tarts and cheeses to the breathtaking view across the Georgian Bay Coastal route, there is something for everyone. Having these well branded itineraries, based on research and analytics, will help to yield established travel preferences and interests, as well as new avid markets. These routes should be intuitive and make it easy to find Ontario products and experiences.

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# Task Force Overview

## Context and Mandate

The heritage, sport, tourism and culture sectors were hit first by the COVID-19 pandemic, they were hit the hardest, and will take the longest to recover. These sectors have been impacted by the triple threat that COVID-19 represents – health, economic and social – that has had a devastating impact on the sectors supported by the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries (MHSTCI).

From the earliest days of the pandemic the Ontario government has acted to provide relief and supports to these sectors, almost all of which depend on congregate settings or high touch environments to one degree or another. In the earliest days of the pandemic, the Honourable Lisa MacLeod, Minister of Heritage, Sport Tourism and Culture Industries, struck 14 Ministerial Advisory Councils comprised of representatives from each sector overseen by the Ministry.

The input from these councils helped inform Ontario’s 2020 and 2021 Budgets which included sector specific supports including a \$150 million Travel Incentive, a new \$100 million Ontario Tourism Recovery Program and \$100 million in one-time payments through the Ontario Tourism and Hospitality Small Business Support Grant. Additionally, the Ontario government released “Reconnecting Ontarians: Re-emerging as a Global Leader”, a White Paper for post-pandemic sectoral renewal.

Immediately following the 2021 Budget, Minister MacLeod established the Tourism Economic Recovery Ministerial Task Force to provide actionable guidance on the strategies, tactics and approaches that the Ontario government should consider when supporting the economic recovery of the tourism industry in Ontario. Chaired by Tim Hudak, a former Member of Provincial Parliament who served as Minister of Tourism, Culture and Recreation from 2001 to 2002, the Task Force committed to delivering recommendations on how to move the tourism industry forward by spring 2021.

Over the spring of 2021, the Task Force explored opportunities and barriers related to topics such as marketing and communications, travel incentives, burden reduction, products, experiences, and destination development. The Task Force considered existing ministry programs, policies and investments to determine ways these can be leveraged, amplified or strengthened. Three subcommittees were also created by the Task Force to undertake extensive input on the following topics: Marketing and Travel Incentives, Gateway Cities and Signature Destinations. Each subcommittee included expanded membership to reflect the diversity of Ontario’s tourism industry and strategic and operational knowledge.

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To enable collaboration and a cross-ministerial approach, the Task Force enlisted support and participation from other ministries with ties and linkages to tourism, including: Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, Ministry of the Attorney General, Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade, Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, Ministry of Transportation and Ministry of Francophone Affairs. The Task Force also received formal submissions from across the industry to incorporate into the final report.

This report is a culmination of these diverse sources as well as the efforts and ideas put forward by the Task Force members. The Task Force’s recommendations will be used and considered in the development of a ministry-wide, five-year plan.



Location: Ottawa  
Photo Credit: Destination Ontario



Location: Vaughan  
Photo Credit: Destination Ontario

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# Key Areas for Recovery

## How to Move Forward

Tourism is a key economic driver for the province of Ontario with a vast array of subsectors that directly and indirectly contribute to other areas of the economy. Several sectors depend on tourism for over 60% of their jobs (e.g., hotels, motels, RV parks and recreational campgrounds, air transportation, travel arrangement and reservation services, scenic and sightseeing transportation). COVID-19 has had the largest single-year impact on travel ever seen.

Due to the reality of physical distancing requirements, the inability to gather in large groups and the likelihood of fear and stigma of a social return to many pre-pandemic activities, the tourism sector is expected to be among the last to recover from the pandemic. Destination Canada has estimated that it will take until 2024 or longer for total tourism revenues in Canada to recover to 2019 levels, depending on factors such as the border re-opening and the availability of a vaccine.

While the economic impacts of COVID-19 on the sector have been devastating and far reaching, there is still an immense opportunity for the sector to come back stronger, more competitive and more resilient than ever. The economic power of tourism can be built on to leverage Ontario's assets and generate demand for Ontarians and future visitors to come. Prior to COVID-19, tourism generated \$36.7B in economic activity (i.e., tourism receipts) in 2018. This economic activity generated 392,777 jobs in Ontario, \$35.5B for Ontario's total GDP and \$13B in taxes for all levels of government. Tourism brought over \$10.3B in foreign exchange to Ontario.

The approach to tourism economic recovery will have to be multi-faceted and consider the regionality, seasonality and diversity of this industry. Tourism is seasonal. In Ontario, travel peaks in the summer, with 38% of visitor spending in Ontario generated between July and September. Additionally, most tourism-related businesses are small (99% employ less than 100 employees; 91% employ less than 20 employees). Tourism-related businesses account for 13% of all businesses in Ontario. The unique characteristics of this industry were important considerations for the development of this report. The Task Force has distilled their expertise from across the tourism industry to focus on the following eight key areas to enable economic recovery.

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In Destination Canada’s latest survey for Resident Sentiment Tracking, Ontarians’ feelings of safety towards all travel destinations have remained relatively stable compared to previous surveys. Ontarians’ feelings of safety towards all in-province destinations have been trending upwards over the past two weeks and suggest that from April 30 to May 2, 2021, 72% of Ontario residents feel safe travelling to other communities near them and 58% of Ontario residents feel safe travelling to other parts of the province. This may indicate an increase in desire to travel and eagerness to once again participate in Ontario tourism.



Location: Toronto  
Photo Credit: Destination Ontario

## 1. Safety and Consumer Confidence

A key barrier and challenge to tourism economic recovery will be to restore consumer confidence in visitors and instill a sense of safety for communities. COVID-19 has understandably caused hesitancy amongst Ontarians to both travel across the province and welcome visitors into their communities.

To move forward, the Ontario government needs to assure Ontarians and visitors that our province and tourism experiences are safe. To do this, the Task Force recommends collaboration between public health officials and sectors across the tourism industry to establish clear and consistent capacity parameters that will enable a gradual and safe reopening.

The Task Force recommends:

- As Ontario’s COVID-19 vaccination rollout occurs, the use of rapid testing through the tourism industry’s sectors should be examined as a way to increase capacities and return to a “new normal”, sooner. Rapid testing can be used as an enabler of mobility and can help to facilitate mass gatherings – which is an essential part of tourism experiences. Rapid testing can also be

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leveraged to alleviate travel hesitancy and should be aligned with assurance and the “safe to travel” message from Ontario government officials and public health officers.

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***Rapid testing could also play a role in supporting the re-opening of the meeting and event infrastructure, most notably the convention centres in Ottawa and Toronto. – Task Force Submission***

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- When Ontario is in a position to loosen restrictions as part of a re-opening framework, there must be clearly defined metrics and dates for longer term re-opening plans and parameters to provide clarity and time for mobilization. The province must also provide ample advance notice so that businesses are able to implement the necessary health and safety protections, including training of staff and investment in PPE well in before re-opening occurs.

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***Amidst the absolute loss of revenue for seasons 2020, and 2021, our sector will require support to lower or finance re-opening costs. We are seeking practical assistance that enables the survival of our businesses during COVID-19 and facilitates our ability to re-open doors when normal business levels return. – Task Force Submission***

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## 2. Marketing

Marketing is what drives visitation to Ontario and directs eager travelers where to go. Marketing has traditionally been targeted to specific demographics looking for memorable, enjoyable and accessible experiences, tailored to their taste, schedules and budgets.

For the foreseeable future, marketing will need to also need to emphasize an important new element: health and safety.

Once restrictions ease and Ontario is ready to welcome travel again, Ontarians will need to know and be reassured that their province is safe. This message will need to ring loud and clear across the province so that both travelers, and the communities and businesses they have been waiting to visit, are ready and prepared to bring back tourism.

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The Task Force Recommends:

- The Ontario government and public health officials emphasize a “safe to travel” message with the same urgency, energy and effort that was used to tell Ontarians to “stay home” throughout the pandemic. It will be important that all levels of government reflect this new messaging in their communications once, the province’s re-opening framework makes it clear it is safe to do so.
- Ontario has long been able to offer visitors the “world in one province” as one of the most diverse and multicultural jurisdictions across Canada, and globally. With festivals and events, attractions and experiences that celebrate a diversity of people, geographies, seasonal activities and cultural identities from across the world, visitors can taste and expose themselves to a wide array of culture and traditions. Emphasize Ontario’s distinctive value proposition that makes it a destination of choice compared other Canadian and global tourism destinations. Ontario has long been able to offer visitors the “world in one province”. Ontario should double down on this offer and demonstrate to people right here at home that they don't need to travel elsewhere to find pristine beaches, arts and culture, food and cuisine, superior outdoor adventures and world class attractions.

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***Carrousel of the Nations has long been a mainstay (44 years) of the Windsor-Essex summer festival season, celebrating the diversity and cultural identities of the ethnic groups in the region. Carrousel is a demonstration of the music, dance, food, and festivities of the people of the world. The event is a coordinated event between the Multicultural Council of Windsor and Essex County and individual ethnic communities.***

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Location: Toronto

Photo Credit: Destination Ontario

- For example, the long walkable beaches that Ontarians seek out in the Caribbean can be substituted by one of the many sandy beaches right here in Ontario, including Long Point, Sauble, Wasaga or Providence Bay. Exciting, diverse urban festivals draw people from all over the world and from all walks of life in our major centres, such as Pride Toronto, MonstrARTity and Toronto's Caribbean Carnival. European architecture and cafes can be found throughout Ontario's charming small towns.
- The Ontario government should build on its strong brand that appeals to Ontarians in the short term and can be translated to international markets in the longer-term, when competition will be fierce. As restrictions eventually ease and pent-up demand is ready to be exercised, Ontario needs to be known and recognized as a place to visit and experience. Local celebrities and Ontario talent could act as a reminder of all that Ontario has to offer and instill a sense of pride of place. Both the personal and business traveler should be considered when promoting Ontario's assets.
- Emphasize local pride of place in domestic marketing. Regional Tourism Organizations and Destination Marketing Organizations can be utilized to instill this sense of pride in Ontario products and experiences. There is an opportunity for them to create tourism ambassadors to market local experiences and drive and disperse demand across the province.
- The Ontario government should leverage its immense marketing reach through other Ontario government properties. To support marketing efforts that will lead to tourism economic recovery, the Ontario government should explore existing marketing infrastructure such as the Ontario Travel Information Centres (OTICs), LCBO, ONroutes, Foodland, and Ontario Lottery Gaming Corporation (OLG) in order to create demand for signature destinations, adventurous itineraries and better promote attractions across the province and throughout each season.



Location: Ontario Tourist Information Centre, Barrie  
Photo Credit: Destination Ontario

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### 3. Travel Incentive

In the 2020 Budget, the Ontario government announced \$150 million to explore ways to provide Ontario residents with support of up to 20 per cent for eligible Ontario tourism expenses to encourage them to discover the province in 2021. The Task Force recommends that the travel incentive should encourage travel spending in all areas of Ontario and in all seasons. Additionally, to build momentum and excitement, when the time is right, there should be a set time allotted to when the travel incentive can be redeemed.

The travel incentive needs to encourage more people to make local travel and hospitality decisions, including extending their trips and stays. This can help to create sustainable revenue and more jobs across the sector and create a meaningful multiplier effect for the public investment in the program.

The Task Force recommends:

- Marketing for the travel incentive should target two segments of Ontarians: those who are already planning to participate in tourism activities, and those who are cautious to re-enter the travel market. In both cases, business and leisure travel should be encouraged. There should be a marketing campaign aimed at raising consumer confidence to encourage the other segment of Ontarians to get out and visit businesses. Within this campaign, there needs to be a message of why it is important to stay local and support the economy.
- Marketing of the travel incentive should actively include creating physical and digital supports for tourism and hospitality businesses to use in their own marketing efforts. In particular ‘point of sale’ marketing in which the promise of savings realized via the tax incentive can be used to encourage existing customers to spend more than they otherwise would.
- As part of a wider incentive program, the Ontario government should also develop a branded Ontario travel points or discount card, that provides a tangible user-friendly incentive for Ontarians to spend more money in their communities. The points card should have a digital component and be connected to a mobile app for consumer ease. The card could build and expand upon existing programs such as the “Explore and Experience” program and can be tied to itinerary and trail use across Ontario.

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*Other jurisdictions have implemented discount cards to encourage visitor spending, including London, England’s Visitor Oyster Card (pre-COVID-19) and Prince Edward Island’s “Canada’s Food Island” gift cards. In Australia, New South Wales created an application-based voucher program to encourage the community to support dining, arts and recreation for businesses that register as COVID-19 safe. Each of these card programs have had large success and uptake in spurring travel and tourism within their respective regions.*

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Photo Credit: @theredheadroamer

- To further encourage and incent Ontarians to explore their own backyard, establish , “Yours to Discover Days” to make up for lost vacations and holidays due to the pandemic. These themed days will help to remind Ontarians of the “Year of the Staycation” in 2021 and remind them to discover and explore their own backyard. Emphasize that by participating in tourism you are supporting your neighbours, friends, etc. RTOs, DMOs and DO should all be synchronized in this communication.

## 4. Itineraries – Planning and Dispersion

Great tourism experiences are rarely the result of a customer engaging with a just a single provider. Instead, the best tourism operators have long understood that they all stand to benefit when there is an entire ecosystem of transportation providers, hotels, restaurants, festivals, attractions and cultural events that can thrive off of one another.

Entire communities and regions have long recognized that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and that business across an entire region can thrive when they promote and provide a great experience that feels seamless to the customer.

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Itineraries, packages and trails make it easier for multiple providers to combine their unique experiences into a single offering to the customer. Ontarians know that there are an abundance of existing exciting, diverse itineraries and trails to explore, such as the Culinary Tourism Alliance's Great Taste of Ontario, craft brewery trails, and waterfront trails. Cycling trails across Ontario often provide a way to grow tourism especially in rural and small towns. The spin off benefits include accommodation and hospitality (e.g., local cafes, inns, B&Bs, hotels, motels and restaurants). While this will be vital in the short term to entice visitors from across Ontario, and then from across Canada, it will also be acutely important in what is expected to become an extremely competitive international market. Ontario can also leverage its Gateway Cities to attract visitors and then facilitate movement into regions across the province – using connecting itineraries and trails to guide the visitor.



Location: Viewpoint Estate Winery, Harrow  
Photo Credit: Destination Ontario

The Task Force recommends:

- In addition to existing regional offerings, Ontario could expand targeted itineraries that cater to growing experiences that include LGBTQ+, culinary and craft, Francophone, Indigenous, history, theatre, nature and waterways, and sports all as part of a “world in one province” offering. Efforts by Regional Tourism Organizations, Destination Marketing Organizations, tourism sector associations and other partners to strengthen and develop well inventoried itineraries and road trips should continue to be supported and be driven by research and analysis, making it as easy as possible for travellers to book their vacations.

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***The Ontario Craft Brewers believe that [craft beer trails] would be a key part of promoting Ontario’s over 300 craft breweries as part of people’s staycation plans throughout the summer and fall – Task Force Submission***

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- Destination Ontario could fully build out and create a renewed Destination Ontario website with listings for experiences and itineraries, and links to partners, by region and by areas of interest with a robust marketing campaign that will enable Ontarians, Canadians and then US and international visitors to find everything they are looking for in a once in a lifetime Ontario

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vacation. Families, individuals and business travellers will be able to find something for everyone in their travel group using this resource.

- Establish a centralized, “one-stop-shop” point of mobile information where visitors can access real-time information on itineraries and trails. This kind of synergized platform would encourage travel to and beyond the Gateway Cities of Ottawa and Toronto, including the surrounding cities that make-up and contribute to the Greater Toronto Area, and would feature all of the diverse made-in-Ontario signature products, experiences and businesses within well built-out itineraries.
- In cooperation with other Ontario government ministries, agencies and private sector partners, use dynamic real time tools such as digital highway signs, social media, an App and/or electronic “one-stop-shop” to fill gaps in itineraries and to redirect consumers where there is overcrowding. Having clear, accessible and sought-after experiences is what will bring back visitors to Ontario and position the province as a competitive jurisdiction and destination of choice.

## 5. Investments and Program Modernization

Restrictions and closures continue to affect the operations and ability to generate revenue for many tourism and hospitality operators and businesses. Additionally, the continued closure of the Canadian border to travelers has left many tourism and hospitality businesses with a significant drop in visitors, including outfitters in Northern Ontario, border communities and Toronto and Ottawa which are normally primary destinations for international visitors. While the province has responded to COVID-19 with financial supports and pivoted existing resources and programs, Ontario’s tourism industry will need continued support into the medium and long-term timelines for economic recovery.

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***Bolstering Ontario's competitiveness domestically today will position the province well to compete internationally when international travel restrictions are lifted. This is especially important considering festival and live events sectors are beginning to reopen in the United States and elsewhere, giving them a competitive edge. – Task Force Submission***

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The Task Force recommends:

- Extend operational funding and ensure program flexibility to meet the needs of industry beyond the re-opening start up period. This will support the successful rebuilding of businesses to their former profitable levels.

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- The Ontario government can support the future of business and leisure travel by establishing a multi-year Conventions and Business Events Support Fund to remain competitive and support the long-term economic recovery of the gateway cities and beyond.
  - Continue to use the Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT) as a significant generator of funds for tourism but with some enhancements – mandatory inclusion of short-term accommodations, review of municipal authority for the distribution and collection of funds, and increased collaboration with tourism partners.
  - Utilize sector associations to understand and deliver training and workforce development programs that can help to support reopening operations.
    - As an example, the industry-led partnership initiative [Experience Fishing program](#) provides participating operators with the tools and resources needed to offer a standardized, safe and unique fishing experience to non-angler visitors who are new to the experience of fishing and experience growth through new revenue opportunities.
    - As a participating operator, the business receives: access to the Program Coordinator, basic fishing equipment kits for adults and children, marketing resources, training and educational resources for owners and staff, and increased marketing exposure through program promotion.
    - Another example of collaboration amongst sector associations to enable workforce development includes the 3 Fires Plan labour market concept, developed with Indigenous Tourism Ontario, Tourism Industry Association of Ontario and the Ontario Tourism Education Corporation.
  - Promote and invest in Indigenous tourism as an opportunity to diversify Ontario’s offerings and experiences to preserve and renew businesses for immediate and long-term positive economic benefits.
    - Ontario is home to the Canada’s largest Indigenous tourism industry; 1 in 3 Canadians and 1 in 3 International visitors are wanting to participate in an Indigenous tourism experience<sup>1</sup>.



Location: Thunder Bay  
Photo Credit: Destination Ontario

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Fiser, Adam, and Greg Hermus. Canada’s Indigenous Tourism Sector: Insights and Economic Impacts. Ottawa: The Conference Board of Canada, 2019.

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## 6. Transportation and Infrastructure

Often airports, visitor centres and rest stops are the first impression of Ontario when travelers come to visit. Ontario should take the opportunity to utilize these first impressions to welcome visitors to their destination and introduce them to local, regional and Provincial experiences and products. These vital pieces of infrastructure can be used to reinforce the Ontario/Canada brand and attract visitors to key tourism destinations and cultural interest areas. Ontario can learn from Nova Scotia in this respect as their airport features strong provincial branding and retail that reinforces their provincial offerings such as, takeaway seafood and local artisan crafts.

The Task Force Recommends:

- Explore opportunities for Indigenous, Francophone and multicultural displays, in provincial infrastructure or in partnership with the federal government in federal infrastructure such international and regional airports.
- Seek a common front with the federal government that champions the important role that airports and airlines play in delivering affordable, accessible, convenient and attractive (i.e. stop-over options) and consider providing additional marketing support.
- Strengthen the role played by regional airports as key cogs in Ontario’s tourism ecosystem. Partners like car and RV rental depots as anchors in those regions will help Ontarians discover previously unexplored areas.

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***Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the overwhelming popularity of Dundas Peak & Tew Falls and Webster Falls, the Hamilton Conservation Authority has instituted online reservable parking in 2-hour time slots. From May 1 to November 2021, all visitors, including HCA passholders, will be required to make a reservation prior to their visit. This change to a mandatory reservation will manage visitor numbers and assist with physical distancing and provide a safe and enjoyable visit. It will also allow visitors to travel with the peace of mind, knowing that their parking space is held for them. – Hamilton Conservation Authority website, March 30, 2021***

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- Use existing provincial highway signage and other dynamic tools to actively promote the proximity of destinations and to disperse travellers in real time to avoid overcrowding of popular areas. The Ontario government can leverage partnerships within its ministries, and

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with municipalities, ONroute and other rest stop operators, and operators of visitor centres to fund programs for improvements to tourism infrastructure projects including the development of rest stops, public restrooms, wayfinding and visitor information centres. This will help to facilitate a safe, smooth and easy way for visitors to enjoy our province.

- Encourage ONroute locations and provincial and local visitor information centres to showcase local community offerings (e.g. through vendors), encourage exploration of the area and advertise for tourism experiences.
- Focus on the development of cycling and paddling itineraries and destinations as well as the infrastructure needs of those activities be included in the development of any tourism and transportation program and funding improvements.



Location: Snug Harbour, Georgian Bay

Photo Credit: Destination Ontario

## 7. Burden Reduction

The Ontario government has taken positive steps to support businesses, but additional work is needed to transform the regulatory regime and advance the tourism industry so that it remains competitive. To enable tourism economic recovery, a stable and entrepreneurial business environment is vital for tourism businesses and operators to get back to 2019 levels of revenue generation.

The Task Force Recommends:

- Continue to take a customer-experience-first approach by removing “red tape” regulations that impede the ability of local tourism businesses and other providers to deliver great experiences. Ontario needs to be a tourist-friendly province that welcomes visitors and exceeds customer-experience expectations to compete with other jurisdictions. The Ontario government should continue to work with municipalities and tourism partners to implement available tools that permit responsible beverage alcohol consumption in public places and

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explore additional ways to responsibly ease alcohol laws further, e.g., extending licensed areas and allowing alcohol on beachfronts and pool decks, allowing people the ability to relax and fully experience the activity.

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***On March 29, 2019, a change to the Liquor Licence Act came into force which allows municipal governments to designate, by by-law, public areas within their jurisdiction for the public consumption of alcohol. Municipalities now have the flexibility to establish local rules that work for their municipality, such as the public places eligible for designation, and whether time limits for consumption of alcohol in public should be imposed. The City of Stratford is one of the first municipalities to explore this new authority through their Stratford Al Fresco project which allows alcohol to be consumed responsibly with food in approved areas during listed times.***

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- Pursue initiatives that allow for liquor to be included as part of all-inclusive packages to make Ontario a more competitive jurisdiction for travel. Additionally, the ability to consume liquor throughout street festivals would elevate the consumer experience and both appeal and attract visitors.
- Encourage consumer choice by creating an equal and fair regulatory environment for all accommodation providers while recognizing that having more accommodations options may allow for more social distancing while travelling in the short and medium-term of recovery. This includes optimizing revenue generation and collection for the MAT to be used for product and destination development, by including those short-term accommodators, which in some areas outnumber traditional accommodations such as hotels. Where they are not currently included in the local MAT program, they benefit from destination development programs without contributing to them and a significant revenue stream is lost.

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***The reduction of unnecessary red tape is a priority for the casino sector as it impacts our ability to be nimble and respond to opportunities to grow our business and create jobs. As a highly regulated industry, it is vital to reduce needless and duplicate reporting and other requirements in order to keep operating costs under control – Task Force Submission***

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- Actively explore opportunities for responsible gaming to play a bigger role in Ontario’s economic and tourism recovery. There are duplications in regulatory requirements that are hindering the sector from offering land-based gaming operations. Gaming regulations should reflect public interest and acknowledge the impact that the sector can have in recovering Ontario’s economy. Additionally, to amplify the gaming industry as part of tourism’s economic recovery, OLG’s marketing budget could be reviewed to better promote casinos as signature destinations.

## 8. Product and Destination Development

Ontario is home to rich, diverse, world class products and destinations throughout the Province. The issue is, not all of Ontarians and visitors recognize all that this province has to offer. Product and destinations are the reason behind a visitor’s decision about where to travel – we need to make sure that consumers understand Ontario’s assets, talent and experiences are one-of-a-kind and truly reflect the “world in one province”.

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***We need to educate Ontarians on what they don’t know. A rediscover campaign along the lines of “Ontario – what you don’t know” or “The Ontario you don’t know”. This could be expanded upon for ‘far local’ and out of Province markets as well – something like “Getting to know Ontario”***  
***- Task Force Member***

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The Task Force recommends:

- To drive visitation, the Ontario government should identify and promote Ontario’s “Top Ten” diverse feature events (i.e. winners) in each of the two Gateway Cities to anchor the idea of Ontario as the “world in one province”. This will help to focus on the existing renowned and well-known experiences that Ontario will come to be recognized for and to inspire the creation of new products.
- The Ontario government needs to support the creation of “bite-sized”, scalable and mobile experiences that keep Ontarians and visitors engaged. This will contribute to the expected phased recovery and also demonstrate safe ways to travel and experience Ontario until full scale events are once again the norm. For example, well known festivals and events could offer smaller gatherings across various locations – offering a taste and flavour of the larger crowds and gatherings to come.

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- Highlight Ontario's talent and creative industries by supporting the creation of music cities, film destinations to highlight filming locations (e.g. Hallmark Movies, Handmaids Tale, Gilmore Girls, Letterkenny); and the video gaming development industry.
  - Cross-promote Ontario's tourism offerings as contributors to physical and mental health. This can be achieved with partners like Ontario Parks and Parks Canada, but also with private operators.
    - Demonstrating how popular recreational boating has become during COVID-19, in 2020 Transport Canada issued 243,000 Pleasure Craft Operator Cards (PCOC). The previous 5-year average was 147,000 per year<sup>2</sup>.
    - Ontario By Bike saw increased traffic/users on their website in 2020, increased distribution of their 2021 Cycling in Ontario/Le velo en Ontario guide, and have sold out of their 2021 Ontario By Bike Rides<sup>3</sup>.



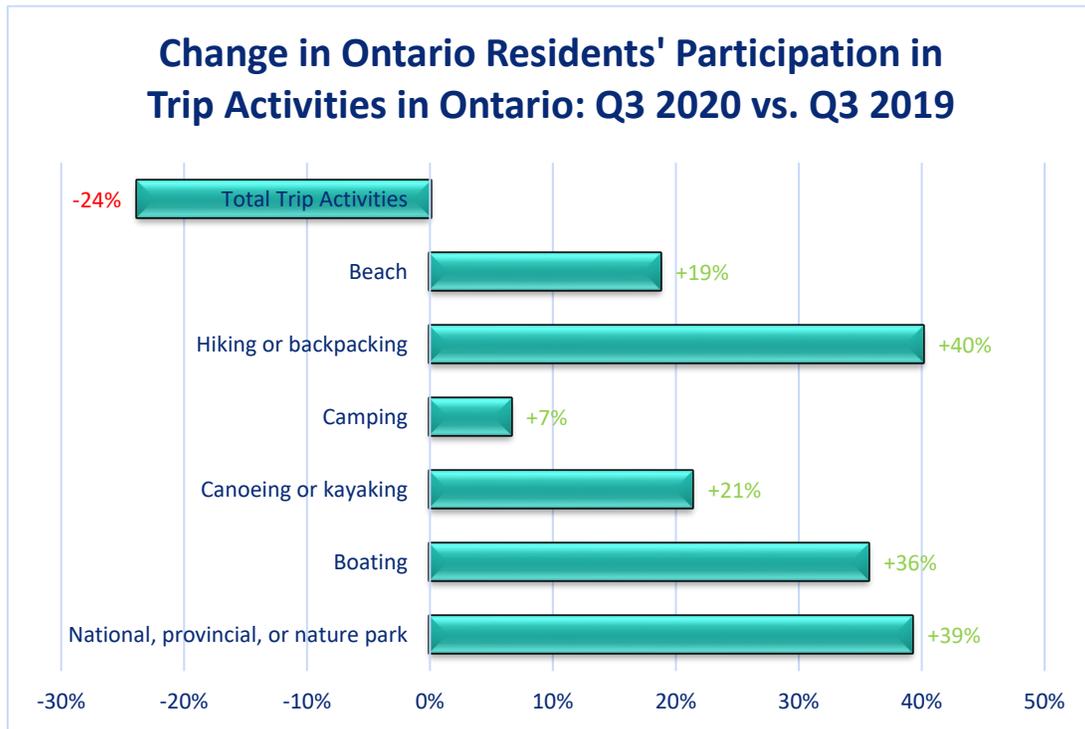
Location: Toronto, NXNE  
Photo Credit: Destination Ontario

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<sup>2</sup> Source: Boating Ontario presentation to the Signature Destination Subcommittee, April 1, 2021

<sup>3</sup> Source: Ontario By Bike presentation to the Signature Destination Subcommittee, April 1, 2021

- According to Statistics Canada, there was increased participation by Ontarians in the following trip activities in Ontario in Q3 2020 compared to Q3 2019: hiking or backpacking (+40%), visit a national or provincial nature park (+39%), boating (+36%), canoeing or kayaking (+21%), go to a beach (+19%), camping (+7%) and go for medical or other health treatment (+6%)<sup>4</sup>.



- “Moneris, the country’s largest payment processing company says retailers in the outdoor travel and sports and recreation sectors say a big boost in spending as people stayed close to home and tried to do more open-air activities.
  - Ontario boat dealers enjoyed a 26% jump in business in August 2020 over August 2019
  - Ontarians also bought 47% more camping gear in August 2020 than that same month in 2019<sup>5</sup>.
- Evidence from both within and outside Canada shows that trail usage is growing during COVID-19. Worldwide trends show that nature-based activities will play a role in reviving tourism. Organizations could take advantage of this and collaborate to get more Canadians and tourists using trails<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Source: Statistics Canada (Preliminary Data - National Travel Survey 2020)

<sup>5</sup> Source: Toronto Sun, September 29, 2020

<sup>6</sup> Source: Trekking Our Trails, The Conference Board of Canada, September 21, 2020

- The modernization of existing regional programs should be configured specifically to optimize product and destination development and to support the reinvigoration of existing and development of new tourism experiences that visitors want to see, hear, feel and taste. Funding programs should continue to be made available for the development and sustainment of trails.



Location: Arrowhead Provincial Park  
Photo Credit: Destination Ontario



Location: Seguin Maple Bush  
Photo Credit: Destination Ontario

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# The Future of Tourism is Bright

## Where We Will Go

As Ontario prepares to move on and move forward into a “new normal”, there are three phases of time that can be used to mark the outcomes and goals of the Task Force’s recommendations. These markers also align with the MHSTCI’s White Paper and strategic 5-year plan. This is where we hope to move tourism towards.

### **Short-Term (0 – 6 months)**

*In the immediate short-term window, Ontarians will be assured it is safe to travel and eager to exercise their pent-up demand and savings in Ontario.*

With a strong message to get out and travel from the Ontario government and public health officials, when it’s safe to do so, Ontarians will feel safe and compelled to rediscover their own backyard. As they venture out, they are reconnected with the experiences, attractions and events they know and love.

With a reopening framework and clear parameters in place, businesses across the tourism and hospitality sectors reopen safely and permanently, with a stabilized and well-trained workforce ready to welcome back customers. Focus on building out well inventoried itineraries and trails to move travelers to signature destinations across the Province, in all regions and in all seasons, while managing demand.

### **Medium-Term (6 months – 2 years)**

*Ontario showcases it is the “world in one province” by highlighting that you don't need to travel elsewhere to find pristine beaches, arts and culture, food and cuisine and world class attractions. Tourism provides opportunities to celebrate the experiences of its people, diverse communities and backgrounds to Ontarians and visitors.*

During this period, Ontario’s travel incentive and marketing of the province will promote unique, authentic, local experiences (e.g. hidden gems, farmer’s markets, culinary tours, Indigenous and Francophone experiences).

Ontario's Gateway Cities and Signature Destinations see increased visitation as evidenced by increased hotel bookings, admissions sales at attractions and local spending.

Visitors from other provinces begin to return thanks to restored domestic airline service. Consumer and corporate confidence in Ontario increases; long-term investments return. There are also “bite-

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sized” and scalable experiences supported to keep Ontarians and visitors engaged with the festivals, sporting events, cultural events, business events and attractions they know and love, until these activities can return to 2019 capacity levels.

### **Longer-Term (3-5 years)**

*Ontario maintains its competitive advantage as a global destination of choice while contributing to the economic and social recovery of our province.*

After gradually being scaled up in alignment with public health advice, large scale sporting events, festivals, cultural events and business events (meetings, trade shows and consumer shows) return to full capacity. International visitors return and are incentivized to travel to, and through, the Gateway Cities. Tourism in Ontario recovers to pre-pandemic (2019) levels; tourism reclaims its previous status as a key economic driver for the province.

The Task Force recognizes that the path to move forward and bring back tourism to Ontario will require the entire industry to work in tandem. The road ahead may be long, but we are hopeful that once restrictions ease, cases decline and vaccines rollout, the tourism industry will bounce back and recover stronger than ever. The recommendations outlined in this report provide guidance as to how the Ontario government can support this vital part of our economy. These will be imperative to move tourism forward in the short, medium- and longer-term timelines for recovery.



Location: Greater Toronto Area, World Pride Parade  
Photo Credit: Destination Ontario

Tourism is not just an economic driver, it also delivers a social bottom line as an enabler of culture, celebration and entertainment. Tourism can help to not just restore Ontario’s economy, but contribute our social fabric after having been socially distanced for so long. Tourism can help to support a renewed respect and appreciation for all our province has to offer. Ontarians can feel good about traveling in Ontario – knowing that they are supporting their friends and neighbours who have all been through so much over the course of COVID-19.

This report should both inspire and encourage the tourism industry, governments, sector partners and Ontarians to take part in moving forward towards economic recovery. Together, we can restore Ontario’s tourism industry and participate in a renewed pride of place.

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# Appendix

## Task Force Membership

### Main Task Force

1. Tim Hudak, Former Ontario Minister, President and CEO, Ontario Real Estate Association (Chair)
2. Beth Potter, President and CEO, Tourism Industry Association of Canada (Vice-Chair)
3. Rob Sampson, Former Ontario Minister
4. Michael Crockatt, President and CEO, Ottawa Tourism
5. Scott Beck, President and CEO, Destination Toronto
6. David MacLachlan, Executive Director, Destination Northern Ontario
7. Gordon Orr, CEO, Tourism Windsor Essex Pelee Island
8. Serge Felicetti, Director of Business Development, City of Niagara Falls
9. Nancy Tudorache, Regional Vice-President, Canada, Global Business Travel Association
10. Mardi Schueler, Vice-President, Ontario Motor Coach Association
11. Kevin Eshkawkogan, CEO, Indigenous Tourism Ontario
12. David Tarrant, Advisor to the Minister
13. Lauren McDonald, Board Member, Destination Ontario Board of Directors
14. Dennis Matthews, Board Member, Destination Ontario Board of Directors
15. Brett Walker, Chair, Canadian Association of Tour Operators, Collette
16. Leah Leslie, Director of Sales and Marketing, JW Marriott The Rosseau Muskoka Resort and Spa
17. Norm Miller, MPP, Parry Sound-Muskoka
18. Andre Newell, Director of Marketing and Communications, Toronto Caribbean Carnival
19. Katherine Hobbs, Manager of Tourism, Brockville Tourism
20. Vikas Kohli, Executive and Artistic Director, MonstrARTity
21. Davelle Morrison, President and Chair, Licensed Short-Term Accommodators of Prince Edward County.

### *Ex-Officio Members*

22. Lisa LaVecchia, President and CEO, Destination Ontario
23. Melanie Robert, Vice-President and Chief Marketing Officer, Destination Ontario

### Marketing and Travel Incentive Subcommittee

1. Rob Sampson, Councillor, Town of The Blue Mountains (Chair)
2. Lauren McDonald, Board Member, Destination Ontario Board of Directors
3. Gordon Orr, CEO, Tourism Windsor Essex Pelee Island
4. Mardi Schueler, Vice-President, Ontario Motor Coach Association
5. David Tarrant, Advisor to the Minister
6. Nancy Tudorache, Regional Vice-President, Canada, Global Business Travel Association
7. Serge Felicetti, Director of Business Development, City of Niagara Falls
8. Chris Bloore, President and CEO, Tourism Industry Association of Ontario
9. Laurie Marcil, Executive Director, Nature and Outdoor Tourism Ontario

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10. Aaron Dobbin, President and CEO, Wine Growers Ontario
  11. Tony Elenis, President and CEO, Ontario Restaurant, Hotel and Motel Association
  12. Kevin Nichol, President, Ontario Snow Resorts Association

### **Gateway Cities Subcommittee**

1. Andre Newell, Director of Marketing and Communications, Toronto Caribbean Carnival (Chair)
2. Michael Crockatt, President and CEO, Ottawa Tourism
3. Scott Beck, President and CEO, Destination Toronto
4. Lisa LaVecchia, President and CEO, Destination Ontario (Ex-Officio)
5. Kevin Eshkawkogan, CEO, Indigenous Tourism Ontario
6. Vikas Kohli, Executive and Artistic Director, MonstrARTity
7. Bianca Kennedy, President of the Board, Canadian Association of Exposition Management
8. Isabelle de Bruyn, Project Manager for the Tourism Sector, Societe Economique de L'Ontario
9. Terry Mundell, President and CEO, Greater Toronto Hotel Association
10. Anthony Annunziata, President and CEO, Tourism Niagara Canada
11. Nasma Ali, Founder, One Group Real Estate
12. Sherwin Modeste, Executive Director, Pride Toronto

### **Signature Destinations Subcommittee**

1. David MacLachlan, Executive Director, Destination Northern Ontario (Chair)
2. Davelle Morrison, President and Chair, Licensed Short-Term Accommodators of Prince Edward County.
3. Brett Walker, Chair, Canadian Association of Tour Operators, Collette
4. Leah Leslie, Director of Sales and Marketing, JW Marriott The Rosseau Muskoka Resort and Spa
5. Katherine Hobbs, Manager of Tourism, Brockville Tourism
6. Dennis Matthews, Board Member, Destination Ontario Board of Directors
7. Kurt Huck, President, Passenger and Commercial Vessel Association
8. Andrew Siegwart, President, Blue Mountain Village Association
9. Carolyn Hurst, Chair of the Board, Ontario Craft Wineries
10. Matt Rydberg, Owner, Crawford's Camp
11. Jamie Hopkins, General Manager, Santa's Village

The Task Force would also like to extend a sincere thank you to the individuals and sector associations who took the time to send forward ideas and recommendations for consideration and presented to subcommittees. Recovery of the tourism industry will not be possible without the full support of the industry and collaboration amongst all players.

Additionally, the Task Force would like to thank the Ministerial Advisory Councils for their leadership and foundational recommendations that were put forward at the onset of the pandemic. The Task Force has used these insights and built out this report based on the initial thinking and stakeholder engagement that has been completed.