

DRAFT: Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake Tourism Strategy and Action Plan (2024-2028)

Town of Niagara-on-the-Lake
1593 Four Mile Creek Road, PO Box 100
Virgil, Ontario, L0S 1T0

Vision Statement

Niagara-on-the-Lake is an extraordinary destination, known for its natural beauty, food and wine and unrivaled cultural experiences.

Exhibit 2: Recommended Roles and Responsibilities for NOTL's Tourism Ecosystem

Roles	Town of NOTL	DMO
Execution & Oversight of Tourism Strategy	X	
Community Relations	X	
Data Analysis, Tourism Research & Business Intelligence		X
Government Relations	X	
Destination Marketing of NOTL		X
Product & Experience Development		X
Tourism Branding		X
Tourism Business Support & Relations	X	
Tourism Investment Attraction	X	
Visitor Infrastructure (e.g., parking)	X	
Visitor Services (website, guidebooks, information booth, etc.)		X
Wayfinding Signage	X	

To ensure accountability and clarity in tourism governance, while balancing economic development with community wellbeing, the Town must establish and execute a formal legal agreement with the Council-appointed Destination Marketing Organization (DMO), as outlined in Exhibit 2.

Ongoing collaboration is fundamental to successful destination management in Niagara-on-the-Lake. The Town, the DMO, and a broad spectrum of tourism interested parties each play a vital role in shaping the visitor economy. This Strategy seeks to remove ambiguity by clearly identifying leadership responsibilities and aligning all partners toward shared objectives. The Town and the DMO are partners,

not silos, working in tandem to deliver a sustainable tourism model. Formalizing this partnership through a legal agreement will strengthen governance, clarify accountability, and ensure transparency in roles and responsibilities. Regular engagement opportunities, such as community town halls, will offer interested parties an active voice and ensure that tourism development reflects community values.

To further support sound governance and effective implementation of the Tourism Strategy, it is recommended that the Tourism Strategy Committee be sunset in recognition of the role and oversight provided by the appointed DMO Board. Members of the tourism sector are encouraged to represent and advocate for Niagara-on-the-Lake's visitor economy through continued participation in established engagement channels.

Destination management must remain grounded in the wellbeing of residents and the health of the local economy. Ensuring that residents, businesses, and visitors alike benefit from initiatives within the broader visitor economy is essential. Accordingly, the Town's portion of Municipal Accommodation Tax (MAT) revenue should be allocated to infrastructure and projects that deliver mutual value across these groups. Prioritizing the needs of residents and operators alike will further reinforce the economic and social dividends of a well-balanced tourism approach.

Measuring the impacts of this Strategy is critical to informing future investment and policy decisions. Data-driven performance indicators, such as visitor trends and satisfaction levels, will support more informed decision-making and allow the Town to communicate outcomes effectively. Regular reporting on these indicators will strengthen public trust in the Strategy and demonstrate the collective impact of both the Town and the DMO in managing a vibrant, sustainable visitor economy.

PRIORITY #1 – Governance and Destination Management

PRIORITY OBJECTIVE – Develop a sustainable tourism ecosystem with clear organizational roles, responsibilities and dedicated resources

Indicators of Success	Strategic Actions	Lead Partner	Time Frame	Priority	Estimated Budget
Leadership is maintained and capacity building enhanced within NOTL's tourism ecosystem	1) Maintain a tourism lead staff position at the Town of NOTL, reporting to the CAO; whose role includes effective implementation of the subject NOTL Tourism Strategy, to support tourism-related infrastructure projects, community and government relations, and liaise with the Council-appointed DMO	Town of NOTL	Immediate	Critical	TBD (incremental \$30,000 to \$40,000 to current budget allocation)
	2) Review and execute on recommended roles and responsibilities, and organize implementation of the subject NOTL Tourism Strategy	Town of NOTL	Immediate	Critical	N/A
A responsibility framework be formalized and internal processes established to maintain a sustainable tourism ecosystem in NOTL	3) Review Town of NOTL budget and determine appropriate allocation for tourism lead staff position to support Town tourism-related responsibilities (outlined in Exhibit 2)	Town of NOTL	Immediate	Critical	N/A
	4) Develop and execute a legal service agreement between the Town of NOTL and the Council-appointed DMO to allocate and clearly define tourism-related roles and responsibilities, expectations and obligations (as outlined in Exhibit 2)	Town of NOTL	Immediate	Critical	\$2,500 (legal fees)
	5) Provide updates to Council to reinforce the importance of tourism to NOTL's economy	Town of NOTL	Short-term and ongoing	High	N/A
	6) Host an annual "State of Tourism" Town Hall in collaboration with the DMO to provide tourism updates	Town of NOTL	Short-term	High	\$5,000 annually (hosting and materials)
	7) Implement system of regular liaison meetings between the Town and DMO on roles and responsibilities for accountability purposes to facilitate early identification of emerging issues and identify opportunities for collaboration	Town of NOTL	Short-term and ongoing	High	N/A

All tourism related municipal decisions will consider impact on tourism, including the Town's share of MAT revenue investment	8)	Ensure tourism related initiatives are communicated with the Town's Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and needs of the tourism industry are considered	Town of NOTL	Immediate and ongoing	High	N/A
	9)	Develop an overall goal for use of the Town's share of MAT revenue: to ensure NOTL is a profitable and sustainable destination for visitors, businesses and residents	Town of NOTL	Immediate	Critical	N/A
	10)	Ensure the Town's share of MAT funds are allocated to support not only infrastructure projects, but also resources for the tourism lead staff position to implement the Tourism Strategy	Town of NOTL	Immediate	Critical	\$2,500 (legal fees)
	11)	Prepare recommended MAT investment budget allocations for Council consideration and adjust on an annual basis	Town of NOTL	Immediate	High	N/A
	12)	Recommend for Council consideration projects and infrastructure initiatives that promote and support tourism and economic development efforts that benefit both visitors and residents, through use of an Evaluation Matrix for MAT Fund allocations	Town of NOTL	Short-term and ongoing	Critical	N/A
Resources and support are provided for tourism related businesses in NOTL, and in turn improve the guest experience	13)	Support an information and awareness program to educate and inform stakeholders and residents on the economic benefits and impact of the visitor economy	Town of NOTL	Short-term	High	\$5,000
	14)	Support the sustainability and expansion of tourism businesses, with a focus on their unique needs	Town of NOTL	Short-term	High	N/A
	15)	Develop a suite of information, data, and training resources to support tourism related businesses, including for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Visitor friendliness checklist b. Data analysis c. Links to training programs and resources d. Links to other supporting tourism organizations (RTO2, TIAO, Destination Ontario, Culinary Tourism Alliance, TIAC, Niagara Aspiring Global Geopark, etc.) e. Funding programs f. Calendar of major tourism events and festivals taking place in Niagara-on-the-Lake 	DMO	Short-term and ongoing	High	\$25,000 (database set-up, analysis and materials)

	16) Enhance the guest experience for visitors who are already coming to NOTL to ensure they stay longer and do more in the community: a. Encourage operators to direct guests to the DMO website for itineraries and accommodation ideas b. Ensure visitors are provided with many touch points to obtain directions to other activities, transit, parking, etc. c. Provide tools for businesses to cross-promote	DMO	Short-term	High	\$5,000
	17) Create a visitor-friendliness plan to help tourism businesses direct residents and visitors to notable assets and experiences within NOTL (e.g., drive visitors to different parts of the Experience Corridors)	DMO	Medium-term	High	\$15,000
	18) Facilitate a more “user-friendly” process to make it easier for event organizers to manage costs and receive permits for celebrations, festivals, and events within the Town (e.g., at community parks)	Town of NOTL	Short-term	Medium	N/A
The online visitor experience is streamlined	19) Develop the DMO website as the only visitor-facing website, clearly separated from other organizations (e.g., Chamber of Commerce) and eliminate all other former websites	DMO	Short-term	High	\$10,000
	20) Develop a webpage on the Town’s website for tourism-related businesses and potential investors to interact with the Town	Town of NOTL	Short-term	High	\$5,000
Platform established for interactive communication between the municipality, DMO, businesses, and residents	21) Implement an online platform to encourage and facilitate collaboration between tourism businesses	DMO	Short-term	High	(included in above)
	22) Organize regular meetings with tourism businesses to learn about new initiatives and opportunities for collaboration	Town of NOTL	Short-term and ongoing	Medium	\$2,500 (hosting and materials)
	23) Provide regular updates to the public on Tourism Strategy implementation, focusing on the importance of sustainability for strategic success	Town of NOTL	Short-term and ongoing	High	N/A
Regular collection and analysis of meaningful visitor data to support product development, investment attraction, visitor infrastructure	24) Develop a program to track visitation to NOTL through industry-generated data	DMO	Medium-term and ongoing	High	\$30,000 (data provider and database set-up)
	25) Work with partners to undertake annual visitor surveys to gain a qualitative understanding of visitors’ perception of NOTL’s tourism offerings	DMO	Medium-term	High	N/A
	26) Work with the Tourism Partnership of Niagara (TPN / RTO2) to undertake enhanced visitor research and analysis	DMO	Medium-term	Medium	N/A

development and marketing	27) Collect and track tourism economic development statistics including: a. New and enhanced investment in tourism assets and experiences b. The number of tourism-related businesses and the associated employment using the Tourism Asset Inventory, and c. The economic impact of NOTL’s visitor economy (e.g., visitor spending, the attributable GDP portion, and infrastructure associated with new/enhanced investments.)	Town of NOTL	Medium-term	High	\$20,000
---------------------------	---	--------------	-------------	------	----------

PRIORITY #2 – Product and Experience Development

PRIORITY OBJECTIVE – Adopt a strategy to enhance the Town’s best assets, define the Experience Corridors, and capitalize on new developments to broaden NOTL’s market base

Indicators of Success	Strategic Actions	Lead Partner	Time Frame	Priority	Estimated Budget
A Product and Experience Development plan is identified, and responsibilities assigned	1. Define the Product and Experience Development Plan for NOTL: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Enhance what exists today and categorize those offerings into Product Clusters b. Develop NOTL’s Experience Corridors (ECs) and integrate products clusters 	DMO	Immediate	Critical	N/A
	2. Attract new products and experiences for NOTL that fit within and/or enhance the Experience Corridors	Town of NOTL	Immediate	Critical	N/A
A responsibility framework is formalized, and internal processes are established to maintain a sustainable tourism ecosystem in NOTL	3. Maintain the asset inventory to establish NOTL’s Tourism Product Cluster Inventory	DMO	Immediate	Critical	N/A
	4. Develop NOTL’s Product Clusters and define the product offering and visitor appeal within each Cluster: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Arts, culture and theatre b. Agri-tourism c. Heritage & historic experiences d. Wineries & related experiences e. Nature & outdoor activities (including gardens) f. Culinary experiences & restaurants g. Major festivals & events h. Breweries, distilleries & cideries i. Retail & shopping j. Recreation & sport k. Conferences & business events l. Spas & wellness 	DMO	Short-term	Critical	\$25,000
	5. Create itineraries that build upon the draw of NOTL’s experiences to increase length of stay	DMO	Short-term and ongoing	High	\$5,000

	6. Create digital tours (e.g., downloadable walking tours, maps, etc.).	DMO	Short-term and ongoing	High	\$5,000 (app fee)
NOTL's Experience Corridors are defined and established, and products are identified within each grouping	7. Identify main travel routes through NOTL and define boundaries and theming for each of the six (6) NOTL ECs, including but not necessarily limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Niagara Stone Road (55) b. York Road (89) connecting Glendale to St. Davids and Queenston c. Niagara River Parkway d. Lakeshore Road (87) e. Queen Street / Historic Old Town f. Four Mile Creek Road (100) 	DMO	Immediate	High	N/A
	8. Develop a wayfinding strategy that incorporates both hard assets (signage) and digital navigation (based on digital maps and directions) for each of the ECs	DMO	Short-term	Critical	\$100,000
Gap assessment criteria are created for the Experience Corridors to encourage new investment and development	9. Identify gaps to help guide new investment within NOTL's ECs, including but not limited to following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Does it fill a gap within the existing product inventory (e.g., waterfront activities)? b. Does it help to extend the visitor season year-round? c. Is it a "high-quality" experience (e.g., boutique retail)? d. Does it help to promote green space and natural beauty? 	DMO	Medium-term	High	N/A
	10. Enhance efforts to include and invite First Nations communities to work on tourism initiatives within the Experience Corridors	Town of NOTL	Short-term	High	\$3,000 (meetings and materials)

PRIORITY #3 – Visitor Infrastructure and Investment Attraction

PRIORITY OBJECTIVE – Approach economic and community development through a tourism lens

Indicators of Success	Strategic Actions	Lead Partner	Time Frame	Priority	Estimated Budget
Municipal roles and responsibilities for tourism investment attraction and visitor infrastructure	1. Provide the resources for tourism lead staff position to execute on opportunities to attract new investment to NOTL (which may include financial support for travel to meet with targeted investors, partners and businesses)	Town of NOTL	Immediate	Critical	TBD (dependent on Priority #1 – Action 4)
	2. Evaluate current state of NOTL investment readiness, including current requirements for a Community Improvement Plan (CIP) to support new investment	Town of NOTL	Immediate	Critical	\$75,000
Transportation solutions are identified to support businesses and visitors, including parking, intercommunity transit, and bike lanes	3. Collaborate and explore opportunities with tourism stakeholders to connect visitors to transit and parking solutions (e.g., shuttle services, offsite parking, community trolley/hop-on-hop-off tours at key attractions) and consider a review of Town-owned land for potential sites for off-site parking and shuttles to Old Town	Town of NOTL	Short-term	Critical	\$2,500 (meetings and materials)
	4. Identify and prioritize infrastructure requirements for the Town focusing on: a. Parking Infrastructure b. Hop-on Hop-off Bus c. NOTL Park 'n' Pedal Plan	Town of NOTL	Short-term	Critical	\$25,000 to \$50,000
	5. Advocate for enhancements at Niagara District Airport and support a regional initiative for future infrastructure planning	Town of NOTL	Medium-term	High	N/A
	6. Identify lands and access available along the waterfront	Town of NOTL	Medium-term	Medium	N/A
	7. Ensure that visitors are an important consideration in planning initiatives to develop new infrastructure	Town of NOTL	Medium-term	Medium	N/A
	8. Engage regional and provincial policy makers on matters that support NOTL's tourism economy to ensure access and safety of visitors to the community	Town of NOTL	Medium-term	Medium	N/A

An Experience Corridor Wayfinding strategy is initiated, including signage and relevant infrastructure initiatives	9.	Implement the signage identified in the 'Wayfinding Strategy' for the community and visitors to better understand the assets in NOTL, linked to the brand and vision of the plan	Town of NOTL	Short-term	Critical	See Priority #2 – Action 9
	10.	Clearly define the approach of the ECs within NOTL and how the corridors can expand the visitor experience and assist with identifying programming that visitors can enjoy (see Priority 2: Product and Experience Development)	DMO	Immediate	Critical	See Priority #2 – Action 2
	11.	Link businesses to the ECs that highlight the unique products of each set of opportunities. The ECs should be targeted at specific audiences and should be considered in Tourism NOTL's Marketing Plan	DMO	Short-term	Critical	N/A

PRIORITY #4 – Destination Marketing

PRIORITY OBJECTIVE – Adopt the Tourism Vision for NOTL as an outward-facing brand, leading with NOTL's best experiences

Indicators of Success	Strategic Actions	Lead Partner	Time Frame	Priority	Estimated Budget
Roles and responsibilities for marketing and promotion of the destination are allocated	1. Ensure all marketing and promotion, including building the visitor-facing website, are allocated to the Town's appointed DMO	DMO	Immediate	Critical	N/A
	2. Develop a Marketing Strategy to support NOTL's Tourism Vision and initiate branding efforts	DMO	Immediate	Critical	N/A
	3. Collaborate with regional tourism partners to leverage the regional Niagara experience and position NOTL as a hub for premium experiences in Niagara	DMO	Immediate	High	N/A
A visitor-facing brand is developed for NOTL as a destination, distinct from the civic brand identity	4. Undertake a visitor branding exercise for NOTL that aligns with the Tourism Vision and NOTL's civic brand identity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Build a dynamic and memorable personality for NOTL's visitor brand– considering NOTL as both a day-trip and overnight destination that is high-quality and appealing b. Create a unique and engaging logo and tagline for the NOTL's visitor brand 	DMO	Immediate	Critical	\$50,000 (brand strategy)
	5. Develop collateral materials using the new visitor brand	DMO	Immediate	Critical	\$10,000 to \$15,000
	6. Develop a brand manual to educate all stakeholders and strategic partners how to use the new Tourism Brand	DMO	Short-term	Critical	\$5,000 to \$8,000
	7. Work with appropriate strategic partners to grow awareness of the new visitor brand identity and build excitement	DMO	Short-term	High	N/A
	8. Create an awareness marketing plan to specifically showcase the best experiences in alignment with NOTL's tourism Vision statement	DMO	Short-term	High	\$10,000
	9. Build marketing assets for the campaign	DMO	Short-term	High	\$50,000-\$100,000 for web development,
Marketing campaigns showcase the best experiences in NOTL					

					print materials, etc. (NOTE each video costs \$10,000 excl. media buy)
	10. Market the Experience Corridors and key existing tourism Product Cluster for wider recognition, promoting on the “best of NOTL”	DMO	Short-term	Critical	TBD
NOTL’s Product Clusters and Experience Corridors continue to align with visitor needs and wants year-round	11. Align NOTL’s Product Clusters and Experience Corridors to the needs and wants of its visitor markets:	DMO	Medium-term	High	N/A (Included in Priority #2)
	a. Establish specific value propositions for NOTL’s target audiences and ensure marketing campaigns are specific in content, language, and benefits for each audience				
	b. Review NOTL’s product clusters in relation to historic visitation, as detailed in Phase 1: Background Review & Initial Findings Report				
	12. Market the Experience Corridors and key existing tourism Product Cluster for wider recognition, focusing on year-round experiences, including (but not necessarily limited to):	DMO	Medium-term	High	TBD
	a. Seasonal Experience Corridor itineraries				
	b. Wine and winery-related experiences				
	c. Culinary establishments, products, and experiences				
	d. Event and festival venues and experiences				
	e. Business event and conference venues and related tourism experiences				
	f. Cultural and heritage experiences (including Indigenous Tourism and Black history & heritage experiences)				

