


YELLOWKNIFE

2025 - 2028

Tourism Strategy



The background of the entire page is a composite image. The top portion shows a dark sky with vibrant green and blue aurora borealis. Below this, a wide, calm lake is visible, dotted with numerous ice floes. The water reflects the colors of the sky and the surrounding landscape. In the distance, a range of mountains is visible under a soft, hazy light. A large, semi-transparent dark circle is centered over the lake, containing white text.

The City of Yellowknife acknowledges that we are located in Chief Drygeese territory. From time immemorial, it has been the traditional land of the Yellowknives Dene First Nation. We respect the histories, languages, and cultures of all other Indigenous Peoples including the North Slave Métis, and all First Nations, Métis, and Inuit whose presence continues to enrich our vibrant community.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following 3-year Tourism Strategy outlines the planning considerations, goals, strategies, and initiatives that flowed from industry trends and best practices research. It also incorporates insights from one-on-one discussions, focus groups, and workshops that were part of the tourism strategy planning process for the City of Yellowknife.

Planning and managing tourism is a long-term investment because it's about creating and sustaining experiences that will be enjoyed by a visitor at some future date. These are just some of the points to keep in mind:

1. Destinations are usually purchased "sight unseen". Certainly, people will have seen pictures, they may have watched videos, and they probably have read books and magazines, but the reality is that until they step foot in the destination, they don't really know what they have purchased. Travel for tourism is a high-risk experience. It's also usually very expensive. And if the reality doesn't live up to the expectation, then many visitors don't get the opportunity to do it over again.
2. Intermediaries or 3rd parties are just about always involved in the purchase decision. They can be informal like friends and relatives (and TripAdvisor reviewers) who have their opinion about the destination. They can also be formal like travel agents and tour operators who may be involved in the booking decision. Regardless they all have a point of view that can influence what consumers do in a destination or if they even decide to visit at all.
3. Tourism travel has a high level of emotional engagement. For most people, just finding the time to travel is a challenge. They might have only one or two trips a year for leisure and tourism. For some visitors, Yellowknife might represent a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Destination travel is a huge emotional investment, and it must be right the first time because there are no second chances.

4. Destination travel is not about staying in a hotel room. Nor is it about flying in an airplane or visiting the local attractions. It's about all those things and more. Visitors consume "experiences" and those experiences are about travel, hospitality, attractions, food service, visitor servicing, retail, working seamlessly together. Ironically, most businesses really have no idea what else their visitor is doing in the destination. Nor do they realize that those other elements of the trip experience might enhance or detract from the very experience that the business is also a part of.
5. People love to share and tell stories. And those once in a lifetime trips are a rich source of stories that will be told and retold for years to come. Wonderful experiences are shared time and again. And terrible experiences are shared just as often. We live in an age of social media; an age of consumer advocacy – and there is no hiding from poor service, shoddy workmanship, and attractions that didn't live up to expectations.

Destination marketing and management is a long-term multi-year investment – it needs time, resources, and continuity to be successful. An investment in dedicated staff and budget is essential for strategic market development and destination management.

Yellowknife has several strengths that it can capitalize on. It has a strong base of passionate entrepreneurs who have been working in the tourism industry for some time. Yellowknife also has a Visitor Center which operates on a year-round basis and is influential in assisting visitors with itineraries and cross-selling businesses and services in

the city. The city is the primary service hub for the territory, and visitors to other communities will often transit through Yellowknife. It is featured prominently in marketing materials and activities of NWT Tourism who have a mandate to develop domestic and international markets for the NWT. And, from a brand perspective, NWT Tourism and Yellowknife are closely aligned in terms of focus and positioning on aurora, outdoors, and nature.

Disadvantages include lack of analytics or research into activities, profile and spending habits of visitors to Yellowknife, lack of a tourism or hotel association who can advocate on behalf of the local tourism economy, no sustained investment in tourism marketing by the city, and no Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) that might be responsible for the marketing and management of the tourism sector.

Destination Vision

The process of engagement with the community identified several themes which spoke to values of importance to residents of Yellowknife. The values form the foundation for a destination vision which was crafted using an iterative process with workshop participants. It conveys a sense of what the destination offers to potential visitors but in the context of what is also important to the quality of life in the community. It is intended to be both aspirational and inspirational. The destination vision for Yellowknife is the following:

“Yellowknife is a place where hosts eagerly share the essence of home and land, inviting visitors to immerse themselves in cultural richness, natural wonders, and sustainable adventures that honour the community and territory.”

Several goals, strategies, and initiatives are outlined in the 3-year Tourism Strategy, but, in terms of immediacy, the following goals and

strategies are the most crucial and should be acted upon as soon as possible:

Goal: Developing Support for the Industry Strategies:

- Develop and implement a Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) for Yellowknife with a focus on managing and enhancing the visitor experience.
- Invest in ongoing research to better understand the visitor dynamic in Yellowknife and opportunities for improvement and increasing length of stay.

Goal: Building Destination Awareness Strategies:

- Follow NWT Tourism’s lead with respect to all marketing outreach and product development for all visitor segments. This includes leisure travel, sports, and conference business.
- Enhance Yellowknife’s value proposition for all visitation to the city – either as part of a destination experience or as part of a transit experience to the NWT.

Each Strategy is addressed in greater detail:

Develop and Implement a Destination Marketing Organization (DMO)

Yellowknife City Council will be reviewing legislation to collect an accommodation tariff that can be dedicated to the development and operation of a Destination Marketing Organization. It should be established as a not-for-profit organization and stakeholder association with a Board composed of representatives from the city, the hotel industry, the airport, and the tourism community at large. The focus of the mandate in the first few formative years should be on the development, management, and measurement of tourism within the city to provide a solid foundation for strengthening Yellowknife’s value proposition for all visitation.

The DMO can be a conduit for identifying and focusing on need periods, supporting consistently high standards of operation by industry partners, identifying and lobbying on issues that discourage investment, finding resources and profile for existing and new members, and strengthening tourism's economic profile and visibility in the community.

Invest in Ongoing Research

Understanding the visitor experience in Yellowknife is key to understanding opportunities for improvement and extending length of stay. It's also the means to gauge potential partnerships with other stakeholders who have a vested interest in enhancing the overall visitor experience – whether visiting only Yellowknife or transiting through on route to other locations within the territory. Opportunities to collect information are many and varied – from intercepts at key attractions, visitor center, and accommodation establishments, to formal exit surveys undertaken at the airport with the support of the airport authority.

Better intelligence of the visitor dynamic is only one dimension of the investment in research; the other is to understand and communicate the performance of the tourism sector, both on an ongoing basis and at year end.

Follow Northwest Territories Tourism (NWT)'s Lead

NWT Tourism has sustained marketing investments and trade relationships in all markets of interest. As the primary service center and the largest city in the NWT, Yellowknife has a vested interest in being featured prominently in the majority of outreach provided by NWT Tourism. And NWT Tourism has a vested interest in Yellowknife being a strong, strategic partner because they are an essential element in the delivery of the brand promise. A brand promise is the

expectation that is created in the marketplace for what the destination will deliver to the consumer on behalf of all its tourism stakeholders. And Yellowknife touches the majority of all visitation to the NWT in one capacity or another.

Sport tourism and MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Convention, Exhibitions) deserve special consideration as niche markets to consider during the summer and shoulder seasons. With limited capacity and infrastructure, Yellowknife can play a critical role in servicing future demand but that may often be on a regional basis (i.e. in conjunction with other communities). NWT Tourism has the mandate and capacity to lead on identifying and confirming prospects, and Yellowknife's role should be to guarantee ongoing financial support. Once a piece of future business has been confirmed by NWT Tourism, then the role of the Yellowknife DMO will be to manage logistics, accommodation, and potential trip itineraries so that future conference delegates and/or athletes can plan on extended stays either before or after the event.

Enhance Yellowknife's Value Proposition for All Visitation to the City

Assessing and understanding what works in terms of existing visitor experiences (and what doesn't) is key to understanding how to improve and enhance those same experiences. That can result in higher spend and extended length of stay. More importantly, it strengthens the relationship with a potential third party who has interest in that same customer having an extraordinary experience. An example of a third party might be a high-end tour company, or an operator that the customer is booked with in another part of the territory. Yellowknife has an opportunity to add value to all visitor experiences and, in so doing, build equity with other external stakeholders who will receive more satisfied customers.

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INTRODUCTION

As the capital of the Northwest Territories, Yellowknife serves as both a destination and a gateway to Canada's North for visitors seeking a place to meet, to enjoy arts and culture, or to take in the breathtaking aurora borealis. However, with a changing economic landscape, the City of Yellowknife is at a point in time to take proactive efforts to evaluate the future underpinnings of its economy.

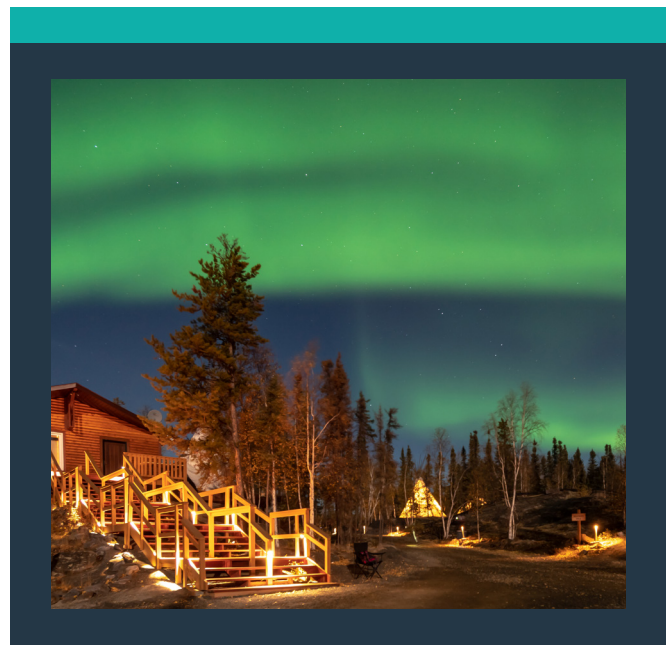
The tourism sector in Yellowknife is a critical component of the overall economy. With the pandemic in the rearview mirror the opportunity has presented itself to reinvigorate the tourism sector to support its continued growth and impact to the local and regional economy. Yellowknife's visitor economy generates significant regional impacts such as year-round employment, business income, and government revenue.

The impact of the visitor economy and the strength of this sector will be challenged to help fill the impending economic void which will be created with a series of mine closures over the next decade. The recent economic impact report "Eyes Wide Open Understanding the Effects of a Diminished Resource Economy" has estimated that combined, the diamond mines create 1,045 direct and indirect jobs filled by Yellowknife residents. Subsequently, economic diversification is imperative to strengthen the tax base, provide employment opportunities (particularly for young people), and continue to stimulate investment and economic growth.

The City's previous Tourism Strategy was completed in 2019 and this renewed strategy will help recalibrate Yellowknife's focus on fostering tourism opportunities and offering support to local tourism operators. The strategy's foundation is built upon extensive community and stakeholder consultation and market data.

The strategy provides strategic recommendations for the City of Yellowknife on how to catalyze tourism investment in the region as a key economic driver.

In commissioning this 3-year Tourism Strategy, the City of Yellowknife recognizes that it must have a strong and pragmatic approach to addressing the opportunities and barriers that face the tourism industry. The City is well positioned with strategic partners in the community and region. The Yellowknives Dene First Nation, Tłı̄chǫ Government, North Slave Métis Alliance, NWT Tourism, the Government of the Northwest Territories, existing businesses (tourism and non-tourism), educational institutions, and cultural communities all have a role in supporting the growth of a strong and healthy visitor economy in the city. Building collective ownership and capitalizing on shared resources and benefits is foundational to this strategy.



Project Plan

The Yellowknife Tourism Strategy is a roadmap that includes a vision, goals, and strategic initiatives. It is an ongoing platform that will be used to cooperatively fulfill the vision for tourism in Yellowknife. It will be the foundation for future engagement, sustainable business success, and a long-term competitive advantage for the city.

This plan is based on extensive research, analysis, and community engagement. Input from tourism industry leaders, elected officials, and residents was instrumental in creating the strategy's recommendations. The City of Yellowknife is poised to have a role in coordinating the next phase of the Yellowknife Tourism Strategy. Because this is a plan with ideas that transcend the tourism industry, initiative planning and implementation will be shared responsibilities among the industry, economic development organizations, and various community organizations within Yellowknife. The effective engagement and alignment of all stakeholders is the key element in the journey of a successful destination strategy. It is a journey the region will take together, and one that will benefit residents, businesses, and visitors for years to come.

March 2023

Strategic Assessment & Data Analysis

Tourism Trend Analysis
Review of Current Plans within City

May 2023

Community Engagement

1:1 Interviews
Focus Groups
Visioning Workshop

December 2023

Yellowknife Tourism Strategy Development

Tourism Strategy Draft
TIERS Analysis

December 2024

Plan Presentation to City Council

TIMELINE

TOURISM INDUSTRY AND YELLOWKNIFE TODAY

Industry Trends

The plan was informed by a scan of international research and tourism trends relevant for Yellowknife. The act of travel both inspires and defines people. Travellers are looking for deep, meaningful connections to the places they visit. Travel brands and destinations are tapping into values-based tourism products and services that resonate with consumers seeking transformational travel experiences.

At the same time, there are increasing calls for tourism to be more responsible and accountable to the destinations they serve. Tourism needs to add to the quality of life of those who choose to make the destination their home. There is a growing collective desire to minimize impact on the environment and on the communities affected. Many destinations are now including goals related to the UN Sustainable Development Guidelines in their forward planning. This has several implications in terms of how people are choosing to travel and how destinations and brands are responding.

SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL

Residents and visitors are far more attentive to the impact travel has on the environment and culture of the host destination. Sustainable travel practices encourage operators and visitors to be stewards for the places they experience. According to the Euromonitor, sustainable travel packages (adventure, culture and heritage, eco-tourism, and wellness) are forecast to amount to \$134 billion USD in 2023 and will be the larger share of overall packages compared to typical mass-market tourism products like sun/sea-themed vacations.

More significantly, customers are willing to pay more for sustainable products and services, such as using renewable resources, carbon offsetting, paying specific price levels to ensure a fair or living wage, or sourcing local food and drink. In a recent survey, 74 percent of Virtuoso travellers said they were willing to pay more to travel sustainably if they know where their money is going.

American Express echoed this sentiment with their observation that travellers want to discover lesser-known locations, while helping to support local communities. The 2023 Global Travel Trends Report found that 69% of all respondents agreed that they would be willing to spend more on a vacation if they knew it supported the local community.

Why is this important to Yellowknife? The Yellowknife brand identity is based upon experiences being offered in a spectacular natural environment. Both the community and visitors need to be stewards for that environment. Guests become powerful advocates for destinations that proactively manage their experience.

OUTDOOR ADVENTURE

Outdoor adventure is a significant tourism trend. The demand for outdoor and adventure travel has been growing, with travelers seeking experiences that connect them with nature, offer physical activities, and provide opportunities for personal growth and transformation. This trend is driven by a desire for sustainable travel options, wellness, and the appeal of less crowded destinations. The global adventure travel market is expected to see substantial growth in the coming years.

“Outdoors” is the overriding consideration. And that can mean different things for

different people. For some travellers, Yellowknife would be an exotic outdoor setting. Others might desire a more remote experience in the interior and Yellowknife would be a staging point. "Adventure" is also a continuum from soft adventure (hiking, outdoor photography, aurora viewing, canoeing, etc.) to hard adventure (backpacking, trekking, wilderness/winter camping, etc.).

WELLNESS

Yellowknife is in a pristine natural environment that is far removed from the clutter, stress, and congestion of other destinations. Health and wellbeing are themes that can be capitalized on in all messaging. They have become important motivations for travel. The 2023 Global Travel Trends Report shared that a large majority of respondents (75%) are planning to decrease screen time while travelling to better their mental health and/or seeking to surround themselves with nature to focus on mental clarity (68%). The Euromonitor expects that value-based offers such as sports, wellness and eco-tourism are all expected to outperform standard packages over 2023- 2027, with average value growth of over 12% per year.

AUTHENTICITY

Travelers are increasingly seeking genuine experiences that offer a deeper connection with local cultures, traditions, and environments. This trend reflects a desire for meaningful travel that goes beyond the surface-level attractions to engage with the true essence of a destination. Authenticity provides unique, memorable experiences that resonate with travelers on a personal level. Closely related to this trend is the increasing interest in Indigenous experiences and interpretation. From a competitive perspective, this can be a point of differentiation that truly sets Yellowknife apart from other destinations.

BLENDED TRAVEL

Closely related to the wellness trend is the growing importance of balancing work and play. Blended business and leisure travel is a growing trend, where consumers are redefining their work-life balance and experiencing the joy of travel, whether through "workcations" or work from anywhere policies. Forbes reported in 2022 that 89% of people plan to add personal vacation time to their business travel - many of whom will bring family and friends along.

Anecdotally, much of the current demand for fixed-roof accommodation (including hotels, VRBO, and Airbnb) is driven by business travel, medical travel, and friends and family visiting Yellowknife. Provided that potential visitors are made aware of opportunities well enough in advance, there may be occasion to extend existing trips or to bring friends/family to enjoy part of that time together.

SOCIAL MEDIA

The immersive audio-visual experience of social media can present an invaluable source of information. A recent survey from Skyscanner revealed that around half of its respondents made travel plans that were inspired by the content they had seen on social media. Instagram was the most popular source of travel ideas, followed by Facebook and TikTok.

The default device for planning and booking has become mobile, and consumers increasingly look to social media for travel ideas and inspiration. American Express reported that 75% of respondents agree that they have been inspired to travel to a specific destination by social media, and 57% of respondents agree that they like to capture content for their social media accounts during their travels.

The implication for Yellowknife is that it also needs to manage its online brand and

message. And reviews from customers through social media need to be addressed quickly and constructively.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The 2023 Futures Study identifies the third most important trend in tourism across the globe to be community engagement. The report states “Communities expect to be more engaged in destination, product and experience development for locals and visitors”. Community values, such as sustainability and equity, diversity, and inclusion, and reconciliation, need to be considered by government and industry tourism planning. When a destination incorporates its local values into the visitor experience, this creative, cultural and community energy improves the quality of experience and competitive advantage for the destination.

Many destinations do regular check-ins with residents through Visitor Sentiment Surveys to gauge the impact and support for visitors to the community. It may be an initiative that Yellowknife considers in its tourism planning.

LEGACY IMPACTS

In the business events sector, more attention is being given to the long-term legacy impacts from hosting meetings. In addition to the immediate outcomes derived by its economic benefits, business events perform another useful role for the host destination. For example, it provides the opportunity to broaden academic, professional, and scientific networks, form trade and investment relationships, partner in innovation, secure venture capital, and attract new talent. The trend is for government and industry to view business events as a strategic tool to strengthen their communities by maximizing the long-term impacts which a meeting has on wider society.

This may be something for Yellowknife to consider in its plans going forward, particularly as it looks to work with NWT Tourism to source conference business.



Economic Development and Tourism

In many communities, the tourism sector is viewed as somewhat separate and distinct from other industry sectors in terms of how it impacts the local and regional economy, particularly when viewed through an economic development lens. However, tourism and economic development are codependent as the sector impacts job creation, the economic multiplier effect, infrastructure development and improvement of business conditions.

The City of Yellowknife recognizes the tourism industry is and will continue to be an important driver of the local economy. Yellowknife's 2020-2024: Mayor's Task Force on Economic Development and the Yellowknives Dene First Nation and City of Yellowknife Joint Economic Development Strategy – 2020 correctly capture the importance of tourism as part of an economic development strategy to grow the economy. The tourism sector alone will not replace the economic loss of the mine closures. However, both documents acknowledge that tourism and local business development through enhanced collaboration can play an important role in improving the local economy.

Tourism has a positive influence on the socioeconomic conditions of Yellowknife, including:

- **Business Development:** Retaining, growing existing and attracting new business is fundamental to economic growth. The tourism sector contributes to business development primarily in growing the service sector and has proven to also stimulate small business entrepreneurship.
- **Workforce Development:** Availability of a skilled and well-trained workforce is crucial for economic development. The tourism sector contributes significantly to employment opportunities in the hospitality, entertainment, and retail sectors and by extension can reduce unemployment rates.
- **Economic Diversification:** The economic resiliency of communities is tied to the diversity of its industry sectors. For Yellowknife its tourism sector is critical to supporting economic diversity and can create an environment for innovation and entrepreneurship in the sector.
- **Quality of Life:** Improving community amenities such as parks, recreation, as well as efficient public transportation and safety can positively influence business and worker retention. The tourism sector plays an important role in identifying community investments that can support increased visitation and create community assets that also benefit residents.

Ensuring that the tourism sector is incorporated within Yellowknife's on-going economic development deliberations will ensure investments and policies directed to tourism will be weighted in a similar fashion to other industry sectors in the community.

- **Infrastructure Development:** Supporting the expansion and maintenance of hard infrastructure such as roads, water, and sewers are critical to economic growth. Tourism infrastructure reflects additional areas for investment that support both visitors and residents including construction of hotels and recreational facilities.

Indigenous Experiences

Partnering with Indigenous owned businesses that are incorporating authentic northern Indigenous themes into programming is an opportunity for all communities to increase market interest in authentic, curated experiences. When combined with interest in aurora viewing for example, this provides programming opportunities that may be unique from those offered in other destinations. But aurora viewing is only one example. Curating Indigenous inspired experiences involving outdoors, adventure, cuisine, etc. can create opportunities for all seasons.

A Destination Canada study on Indigenous tourism in the United States in 2017 offered insights that are particularly relevant for Yellowknife:

- Authenticity is a primary factor when considering Indigenous tourism experiences
- Commercialized, highly staged, and passive experiences and positioning are to be avoided
- This type of travel is highly experiential and emotional
- It is a personal experience rather than a mass-produced experience

Indigenous programming also opens opportunities for support and resources from organizations such as the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC). Resources and training materials are available to members, and Indigenous businesses can be profiled on their consumer-facing website.

The Indigenous Tourism Development Fund (ITDF) continues to evolve but it may represent a future partnership opportunity for Yellowknife. The ITDF prioritizes infrastructure, human resources, development

and marketing to support Indigenous tourism growth, aligning with ITAC's strategy for Canada to become a global leader in Indigenous tourism by 2030.

Collective efforts have been undertaken to ensure that there is functional alignment between the economic development aspirations of Yellowknife and the neighbouring Indigenous communities. The City of Yellowknife in partnership with Yellowknives Dene First Nation prepared the "Yellowknives Dene First Nation and City of Yellowknife Joint Economic Development Strategy" which was then followed up by the Economic Development Strategy, 2020-2024: Mayor's Task Force on Economic Development. Both documents recognized the importance of formulating functional partnerships between the city and First Nations around economic development, and particularly the role of tourism.

Both strategies identified areas where joint efforts, to advance tourism, could be implemented. These ranged from short, medium to longer term efforts built upon a collective desire to leverage the value of the tourism market as the regional economy begins to change with the closing of regional mining operations.

Joint tourism initiatives that were identified included the following:

Jointly host a First Nation-City festival to celebrate progress made of the Joint Economic Development Strategy and other initiatives

This joint economic development strategy marks the culmination of years of reconciliation progress between Yellowknives Dene First Nation and the City of Yellowknife.

The aim of this festival would be to:

- Educate locals on the work that has been made and the long road ahead.
- Renew local optimism regarding the partnership and reconfirm that the partnership is founded on a pillar of social/cultural appreciation.
- Attract positive media attention to the region.

Work with tourism partners to develop an Indigenous Culture Training and Certification

During stakeholder consultation, a common discussion was that front-line workers (e.g. taxi drivers, restaurant staff, tourism operators etc.) are the first point of contact with visitors and shape their impression.

Many are not aware of Yellowknives Dene First Nation history, language and culture and unintentionally spread misinformation on the history of the region. Developing a cohesive tourism brand and experience between the First Nation and the City will require outreach to those workers to ensure that visitors are receiving consistent messaging.

Current State of Tourism In Yellowknife

The research phase of the project included a comprehensive review of information available at the municipal and territorial level. This included hotel and Airbnb/VRBO data, visitation, purpose of trip and spending, and population data - both historical and projected. Unless indicated otherwise (e.g. Yellowknife Hotel, Yellowknife Airport, etc.) all data is territory wide.

Visitor data, purpose of trip, and hotel data were all based on 2019/2020, which is the most current information available. It was also the last “normalized” year pre-COVID. There is no historical data available on the visitor experience in the City of Yellowknife in terms of length of stay, reason for visit, expenditures, economic impact, or popular itineraries. These are opportunities for future inquiry.

TripAdvisor, which is used in destinations around the world as a data source, was referenced for historical data on popularity and rating of key attractions in the City of Yellowknife. Data was pulled from all TripAdvisor reviews (generally from 2014 to 2023). Other sources of information included:

- Tourism 2015: New Directions for a Spectacular Future – published February 2011
- City of Yellowknife 2015-2019 Tourism Strategy – published June 2014
- Tourism 2020: Opening Our Spectacular Home to the World – published September 2016
- Towards a \$235 Million NWT Tourism Industry – published December 2016

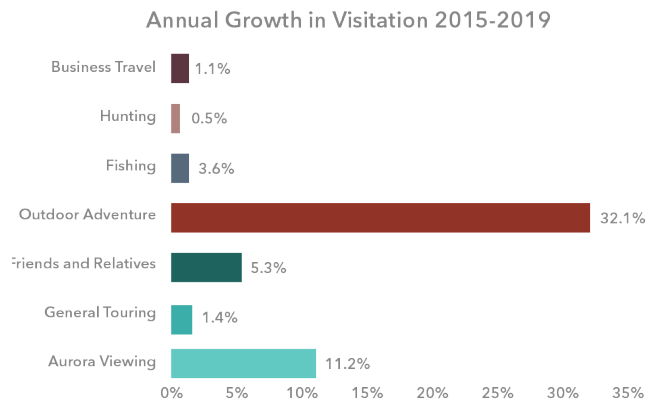
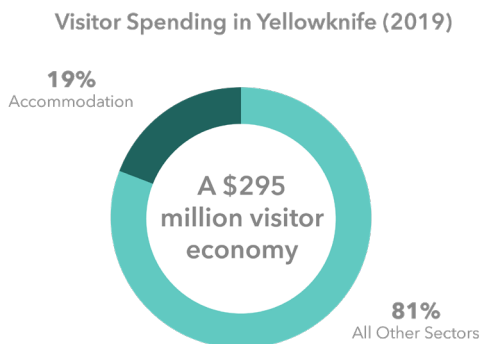
- Organizing for Tourism Yellowknife – published July 2018
- City of Yellowknife Economic Development Strategy, 2020-2024 – published April 2020
- Tourism 2025: Roadmap to Recovery – published March 2021
- Welcoming Visitors – 2022/23 Marketing Plan by NWT Tourism – published March 2022
- Resident Readiness Strategy – published March 2022

Detailed research findings and charts are available in appendix “Research”. Top level observations include the following:

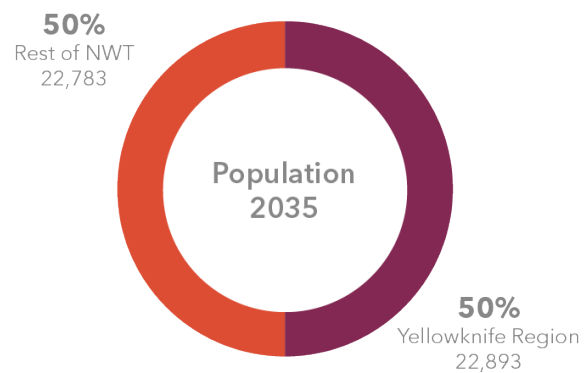
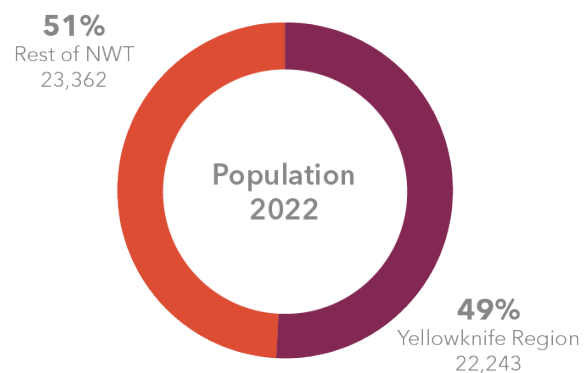
- Short-term accommodation (Airbnb/VRBOs) serves a higher end market in Yellowknife, with average daily rate and revenue per available room (REVPAR) generally outpacing hotel accommodation on a month-to-month basis. They also augment the traditional supply of hotel rooms by providing much needed inventory during the fall and late winter/early spring periods.
- Over the past several years (2015-2020), in terms of visitor volume, aurora viewing has surpassed business travel as the primary reason for visit. The yield for business travel however is much higher than for aurora viewing. The two dimensions might be combined to offer value-added opportunities for business travellers or to extend the length of stay.
- Several Asian markets are showing resilience and rebound. This includes Korea, Taiwan, and Japan which are important source markets for Yellowknife.

- China has become an important source market for the NWT, growing at an annual rate of 51% per year (2015-2020). With Canada’s loss of approved nation status by China and the decrease in Chinese outbound travel generally, it will be important to augment that base with domestic and other international travel. Note, organized group travel from China is the segment affected, not independent travel.

- TripAdvisor research suggests there are several local attractions and amenities in Yellowknife with very positive reviews but are not particularly popular. This is an opportunity for cross-promotion and future itinerary development within the city.
- A tourism economic impact analysis was not completed for Yellowknife but the size of the sector can be estimated using information available on accommodation spending in the city. Visitor spending impacts many sectors of a destination’s economy from accommodation to foodservice, retail, entertainment, and local transportation. Spending on accommodation is typically from as low as 8% in a large urban environment, to as high as 20% in rural environments. On that basis, knowing accommodation spending in 2019 was approximately \$56 million, and using 19% as a conservative estimate, the total value of Yellowknife’s visitor economy can be estimated to be \$295 million.



- By 2031 The size of population living in Yellowknife will be roughly equivalent to the size of population living in the rest of the NWT. The implication is Yellowknife will become an even more important epicenter for business and leisure for the entire region. It will be important to understand how the city adds value to all travel transiting through the city. This is an opportunity to build collaboration and programs with regional stakeholders.



Additional insights and research information are available for review in the appendix.

VISION FOR YELLOWKNIFE

A destination vision should ultimately describe the state of the destination if it is to be successful in all its strategic activities. In other words, a destination vision is a desired future state. It needs to be both aspirational and inspirational. The language should be simple to make the statement as memorable as possible. Ultimately, a strong destination vision is one which residents can rally around, and visitors will ultimately want to experience.

The consulting team reviewed the destination visions from fifteen similar projects they have previously conducted, as well as analyzed the strategic visions for well-known consumer brands. Utilizing these as reference points, an iterative process was used by the consulting team to refine and enhance draft destination vision themes for Yellowknife. Also considered in this process was feedback from the focus groups, one-on-ones and secondary research.



The following five destination vision themes were then discussed and prioritized at the Visioning Workshop on November 15, 2023. These themes form the basis of the destination vision.



Local Culture

Yellowknife's character is reflected by its diversity and depth of cultural expressions.



Hospitality

Hosts excited to share their love for home and land with respectful guests.



Outdoor Adventure

Visitors seeking adventures in stunning natural beauty with enough space for everyone.



Sustainability

Visitors and residents have a responsibility to protect and conserve the land for future generations.



Community

Belonging and sense of place is important to Yellowknife. We celebrate our connectedness and look out for one another.

Therefore, the recommended destination vision for Yellowknife is...

A place where hosts eagerly share the essence of home and land, inviting visitors to immerse themselves in cultural richness, natural wonders, and sustainable adventures that honour the community and territory.



GOALS & INITIATIVES

To accomplish the destination vision for Yellowknife, four overarching strategic goals have been developed. Within each goal, a series of actionable initiatives were developed to position, support and sustain Yellowknife as a thriving, unique, and compelling leisure and business event destination. Also, it should be noted that although this is a three-year tourism strategy, not all the initiatives can be assessed and initiated within this 3-year period.

In support of each goal statement, a set of specific strategies were developed to set the tone of what each goal is set to achieve.

1. Enhancing the Visitor Experience

- Strengthen the quality of the visitor experience to increase word of mouth and potential spend in Yellowknife.
- Broaden engagement and participation in tourism from the business and cultural communities.

2. Building Strategic Partnerships

- Strengthen the resources and expertise available for the tourism industry through collaboration and shared goals.
- Broaden understanding, ownership, and investment in support of tourism in Yellowknife through long-term partnerships.

3. Developing Support for the Industry

- Develop and implement a Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) for Yellowknife with a focus on managing and enhancing the visitor experience.
- Invest in ongoing research to better understand the visitor dynamic in Yellowknife and opportunities for improvement and increasing length of stay.

4. Building Destination Awareness

- Follow NWT Tourism's lead with respect to all marketing outreach and development. This includes leisure travel, sports, and conference business.
- Enhance Yellowknife's value proposition for all visitation to the city – either as part of a destination experience or as part of a transit experience to the NWT.

Goal 1: Enhancing the Visitor Experience

Enhancing the visitor experience has many benefits – from the potential to extend the length of stay of existing visitors to Yellowknife, to the potential to attract new markets. Enhanced experiences also strengthen a destination’s value proposition.

Supporting strategies include:

- Strengthen the quality of the visitor experience to increase word of mouth and potential spend in Yellowknife.
- Broaden engagement and participation in tourism from the business and cultural communities.

| Initiative | Priority | Timeline | | |
|--|----------|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| | | Short (1-2 Years) | Medium (3-5 Years) | Long (5+ Years) |
| a) Promote events as a way to connect with locals (e.g., culinary, music). | Higher | | | |
| b) Develop programming and on-the-ground interpretation and signage to support the aurora experience. | Higher | | | |
| c) Coordinate efforts to enhance the downtown cleanliness/safety/beautification including public art. | Higher | | | |
| d) Work with business operators to address accessibility standards. | Higher | | | |
| e) Improve access to water for tourism activities (e.g., SUP, canoeing, kayaking, motorboat). | Higher | | | |
| f) Create a unique neighborhood environment in Old Town/waterfront (e.g., culinary, events, retail, arts/culture). | Medium | | | |
| g) Develop more programming for visitors to engage within the city. | Medium | | | |
| h) Work closely with the airport to ensure a seamless/accessible-friendly experience when arriving into Yellowknife. | Medium | | | |
| i) Enhance the wayfinding options for visitors as they arrive into Yellowknife. | Medium | | | |
| j) Further develop the Visitor Information Centre as a focal point for visitors, residents, and operators including expanding availability of print materials and improved signage to international standards. | Medium | | | |
| k) Explore developing new experiences for emerging visitor markets (e.g., health/wellness, luxury camping). | Medium | | | |

Goal 2: Building Strategic Partnerships

Building strategic relationships with key partners provides access to new resources, expertise, and communication channels. It also builds ownership and long-term equity in the value of the destination and the importance of the visitor economy.

Supporting strategies include:

- Strengthen the resources and expertise available for the tourism industry through collaboration and shared goals.
- Broaden understanding, ownership, and investment in support of tourism in Yellowknife through long-term partnerships.

| Initiative | Priority | Timeline | | |
|--|----------|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| | | Short (1-2 Years) | Medium (3-5 Years) | Long (5+ Years) |
| a) Continue to work with NWT Tourism and ITI to align programming with the City of Yellowknife tourism programming and investment efforts. | Higher | | | |
| b) Develop relationships with the cultural communities to create new experiences. | Medium | | | |
| c) Develop a partnership with Yukon and Nunavut to develop a Northern Canada experience across all territories. | Medium | | | |
| d) Continue to enhance the relationship with Indigenous First Nations/Métis governments and organizations and other local governments to align efforts to support tour operators, service providers, and improve the tourist experience. | Medium | | | |
| e) Work with GNWT to develop a workforce recruitment package/enhancements for the industry. | Medium | | | |
| f) Work with partners to better leverage existing infrastructure for multi-season use (e.g., parks, trails). | Medium | | | |
| g) Establish partnerships with transportation providers to offer convenient and affordable transportation options for tourists. | Medium | | | |
| h) Create a working relationship with the Yellowknife Airport to increase the number of flights into the city and explore opportunities to enhance airport infrastructure to support the NWT tourist experience (e.g., amenities, strategic plan). | Medium | | | |
| i) Work with local/regional tour operators to formulate a clear understanding of the city's role in licensing and enforcement. | Lower | | | |

| Initiative | Priority | Timeline | | |
|--|----------|------------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| | | Short (1-2 Years) | Medium (3-5 Years) | Long (5+ Years) |
| j) Partner with government and academic institutions to develop an outreach strategy to attract meetings and conventions. | Lower | [Progress bar: 100% in Short term] | | |
| k) Develop partnerships to support service operators' service skills and knowledge (e.g., Northern Most Host). | Lower | [Progress bar: 25% in Short term] | | |
| l) Work with private sector businesses and community stakeholders to evaluate existing capacity of Yellowknife's tourism infrastructure and collaborate on approaches to fund renewal of existing and new product. | Lower | [Progress bar: 25% in Short term] | | |



Goal 3: Developing Support for the Industry

Tourism depends upon a sustained investment in resources and support over the long term to be successful. Building destination brand awareness, stimulating interest, converting to visitation and expenditure, and exceeding expectations involves the collaborative efforts of many stakeholders.

Supporting strategies include:

- Develop and implement a Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) for Yellowknife with a focus on managing and enhancing the visitor experience.
- Invest in ongoing research to better understand the visitor dynamic in Yellowknife and opportunities for improvement and increasing length of stay.

| Initiative | Priority | Timeline | | |
|---|----------|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| | | Short (1-2 Years) | Medium (3-5 Years) | Long (5+ Years) |
| a) Implement a visitor-based assessment (i.e., hotel tax/levy) to generate the funds for Yellowknife to better compete for tourism. | Higher | | | |
| b) Develop a coordinated destination marketing/management effort for Yellowknife leisure travel and business events, working closely with the local industry and NWT Tourism. | Medium | | | |
| c) Establish more rigorous and consistent standards regarding business licensing and commercial vehicle licensing. | Lower | | | |
| d) Enhance support for events through policies, funding, and/or permitting processes. | Lower | | | |
| e) Develop a level of expectation in health, safety, and service standards for short-term vacation rentals. | Lower | | | |
| f) Working with all levels of government, develop short-term housing solutions for the seasonal tourism workforce. | Lower | | | |
| g) Explore the idea through partnership in developing a year-round indoor market (e.g., Granville Island). | Lower | | | |
| h) Enhance tourism research and business intelligence to measure success, understand visitor dynamics, and to set targets for performance goals. | Lower | | | |
| i) Conduct a feasibility study for tourism infrastructure such as on-ground investments to augment experiences, fixed roof accommodation, and meeting venue space. | Lower | | | |

Goal 4: Building Destination Awareness

Building destination awareness is about connecting through channels and intermediaries with audiences who are interested and motivated to visit because of the brand appeal of the destination. The entire path to purchase process from awareness to visitation may take several years and a sustained commitment in marketing from the destination.

Supporting strategies include:

- Follow NWT Tourism’s lead with respect to all marketing outreach and development. This includes leisure travel, sports, and conference business.
- Enhance Yellowknife’s value proposition for all visitation to the city – either as part of a destination experience or as part of a transit experience to the NWT.

| Initiative | Priority | Timeline | | |
|---|----------|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| | | Short (1-2 Years) | Medium (3-5 Years) | Long (5+ Years) |
| a) Embrace "Dark Skies" - showcase the "best viewing location in the world" promise by policy, programming, and interpretation in the city. | Higher | | | |
| b) Add value to every excursion outside the city - "Your journey to NWT starts with a trip to Yellowknife". | Higher | | | |
| c) Focus and showcase Indigenous led and interpreted experiences. | Higher | | | |
| d) Refresh, organize, and manage website and social media accounts for tourism. | Higher | | | |
| e) Build/promote recreational opportunities with Yellowknife as a portal to Great Slave Lake – one of the world's greatest freshwater lakes. | Higher | | | |
| f) Confirm an ongoing working relationship with NWT Tourism to source and confirm conference and sports business both locally and regionally. | Higher | | | |
| g) Capitalize on the charm and amenities of Old Town as a focus for local programming. | Medium | | | |
| h) Highlight local craft-artist content and opportunities virtually and through programming. | Medium | | | |
| i) Develop a historical awareness and heritage program/story-telling. | Higher | | | |

A DESTINATION MARKETING ORGANIZATION FOR YELLOWKNIFE

Implementing a Destination Marketing Organization for Yellowknife is a key recommendation to focus and grow the tourism strategy.

Developing a tourism industry involves a sustained commitment to management and marketing over a period of several years. And that obligation needs to be a full-time endeavour. The Yellowknife hotel community, through the previous hotel association, recognized the importance of a DMO and agreed to the collection of a voluntary levy on fixed roof accommodation in the city that would be collected and remitted for the purposes of operation, marketing, and management.

A DMO is typically operated on a not-for-profit basis with the executive director or CEO reporting to a Board of Directors. The Board usually includes hoteliers, key industry partners (such as the airport), local government, and the tourism industry at large. It may also be membership based.

Originally created solely for marketing and promotion, the role of a DMO has evolved considerably over the past few decades. Obligations of DMOs may include:

- **Marketing and Promotion:** DMOs are responsible for promoting the destination to potential visitors. This may include consumer and trade marketing campaigns, developing branding strategies, familiarization tours, and paid/unpaid media to attract interest and visitation.
- **Strategic Planning:** DMOs work on long-term planning and development strategies to ensure that the destination grows sustainably. This involves collaborating with local government, tourism stakeholders, and the broader community to grow volume and/or yield on a year-round basis.
- **Support for Tourism Businesses:** DMOs provide support to local tourism-related businesses, such as hotels, restaurants, and tour operators. They offer resources, training, and networking opportunities to help businesses adapt to new opportunities and to provide a consistently high standard of service.
- **Visitor Services:** DMOs manage visitor information centres and provide tourists with information about attractions, events, local retail, accommodations, dining, and transportation. This enhances the visitor experience and encourages longer stays.
- **Event Coordination:** DMOs often play a role supporting/coordinating events and festivals that draw visitors to the area. These events can significantly boost the local economy and enhance the destination's appeal.
- **Research and Analysis:** DMOs undertake primary and secondary research to understand tourism trends, visitor demographics, and market demand. They also act as a referral for market intelligence and insights that can be shared or workshopped with the broader tourism community.

- **Sustainable Tourism:** DMOs advocate for sustainable tourism practices to protect the environment and culture of the destination. This includes promoting eco-friendly initiatives and responsible tourism behavior.
- **Stakeholder Collaboration:** DMOs act as an advocate between various stakeholders, including local government, businesses, and the community. This collaboration broadens understanding, investment, and support for tourism initiatives.

Yellowknife enjoys a unique dynamic because the territorial tourism organization, NWT Tourism, has a brand which is closely aligned with the city, and it has relationships with trade and media partners in all major markets. Its mandate is to grow tourism for the territory, so Yellowknife is positioned both as a destination as well as a staging area for travel to other parts of the region. This is a strong base to grow on.

It also suggests that the Yellowknife DMO in the short term can be concerned less with marketing outreach, and more with managing the breadth and quality of product ready to take to market. That means investing in local research, working with and profiling local operators, supporting the development of service standards and accreditation where appropriate, and building strong, strategic relationships with key stakeholders and the broader tourism community.

The Yellowknife DMO should also be the coordinating organization for media and trade familiarization tours organized independently or through NWT Tourism. It should be responsible for updating content on the website and in relevant social media channels. Visitor Center operation and management could also be under the purview of the DMO as well as the collection of visitor statistics.

One market segment that is an immediate opportunity for investment is the conference and sport market. It is a portfolio managed by NWT Tourism but would benefit from an ongoing financial commitment from the Yellowknife DMO. That would allow NWT Tourism to prospect for conference and sport opportunities that would have a regional appeal particularly during the summer and shoulder seasons. The DMO's role once a piece of business has been confirmed would be to confirm accommodation required, support logistics, and work with the event organizer to reach out to delegates in advance to introduce themed itineraries and extended stays.

Consumer travel shows in cities with direct connections to Yellowknife are opportunities for profiling products and experiences particularly for the summer season. The shows could be attended independently or in partnership with NWT Tourism. One example is the YEG Travel Show (Edmonton).

Consideration might also be given to the DMO playing a role in recognizing or accrediting tour operators who make a commitment to high quality service, Indigenous Culture Training, and a better understanding the breadth of things to see and do in Yellowknife. Businesses that have made that investment in training could be featured on the DMO website, have access to decals or logos that position them as experts and/or ambassadors, they might have access to ongoing information about new itineraries and products, preference for upcoming familiarization tours, etc. There are lots of ways to dial up value for preferred customers. And that recognition provides assurance for potential customers.

CONCLUSION

The Yellowknife Tourism Strategy is a path forward for the city to develop and capitalize on the unique assets and opportunities to grow its tourism economy. Focus is imparted by the vision which incorporates key tenets – diversity, connectedness, respect, extraordinary nature, and hospitality - that make Yellowknife a special place to live, work, and play. Strategies and initiatives capitalize on specific opportunities, where possible, but more importantly provides context for longer term aspirations that may be realized as resources become available. Collaboration is an essential theme because successfully developing and managing the tourism economy requires multiple stakeholders working toward a common purpose.

Tourism is not just about leisure. It is about understanding that everyone who visits the city – people on business, government, recreational travellers, people visiting to see friends and family – all are part of the tourism economy. And each of them has the potential to visit again, to stay for a little longer, and to be a catalyst for why others should visit Yellowknife as well.

At its core, tourism is about transformative experiences undertaken by visitors to a destination. Done well, tourism enriches lives, broadens perspectives, and creates lasting memories. It also provides opportunities to connect with residents and celebrate the events and culture that make life meaningful. Respect for the community and its values are core for visitors understanding their role as stewards for the places they come to experience. And that engagement establishes a foundation for a destination to endure for future generations.

None of this occurs by happenstance. Successful destinations engage business, residents, and local politicians to a common vision of what success looks like and a path forward that is achievable. Successful destinations are stewards for the assets and experiences that others come to share. Destination management is just as important as destination marketing.

Creation of a Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) for Yellowknife is an important first step in that journey. It is a path forward for capitalizing on the many opportunities to build a competitive advantage that is distinct and compelling.

Does a local DMO complement the work done by NWT Tourism? Absolutely. Yellowknife is both a destination and a key staging point for experiences in other parts of the NWT. Strengthening the city's role in the customer experience provides value to every other stakeholder touched by that same customer. A strong, healthy tourism economy in the NWT needs a strong, healthy tourism economy in Yellowknife.

Yellowknife is coming into its own as a 21st century city with a unique identity and sense of place. A healthy visitor economy will grow awareness, invite investment, encourage repeat visitation, and attract new residents. Tourism has the potential to be an important part of Yellowknife's economic future.

APPENDIX

Research

Introduction

As referenced in the strategy, there is a lack of accurate data on the characteristics, profile, and activities (including \$ spend) of visitors who stayed in Yellowknife.

Non-resident visitation data to Yellowknife Airport was reviewed for the period from 2014 to 2019 and this included the purpose of visit. This data was not specific to visitors who stayed in Yellowknife, but that segment would certainly have been part of the overall visitor population who were sampled.

The best source of data for what travellers did while visiting Yellowknife was Tripadvisor. A review of the most popular attractions, visitor ratings, and comments was informative.

The power of social media reviews (and TripAdvisor specifically) should not be underestimated. Potential customers are often building itineraries and booking travel without having ever been to the destination. Third party reviews by people who have experienced a destination are usually perceived as very credible. By extension, customers whose expectations were exceeded leave the destination as an advocate and ambassador for the destination brand. And that outreach, virtually and otherwise, can influence thousands of potential future visitors.

Hotel and AirBnB/VRBO statistics were obtained from GNWT. Data for Yellowknife for 2019 was used. There was data available for 2020 and 2021 but the performance and visitation to the NWT were so atypical that 2019 served as a better proxy for what might be considered the norm.

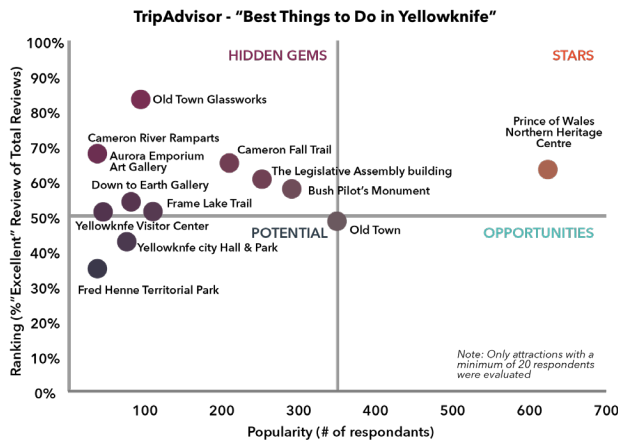
In addition to the research already cited, the following information was reviewed:

- [2019-2020 Year in Review Tourism Indicators](#) – basic data from April 1, 2019 to March 31, 2020
- [Tourism Visitation and Expenditures \(2019-2020\)](#) - release date: November 1, 2020
- [UPDATED: Yellowknife AirBnB Information](#) - data from 2019 to April 2021
- [UPDATED: NWT Excluding Yellowknife AirBnB Information](#) - data from 2019 to April 2021
- [UPDATED: Yellowknife Hotel Information](#) - data from 2019 to April 2021
- [UPDATED: Northwest Territories Food and Drinking Places Receipts](#) - data from 2016 to March 2021
- [Yellowknife Airport Origin by Country \(2018-2019\)](#) - data from 2014 to 2019
- [Fishing License Data](#) - data from 2014 to 2019
- [Hunting Visitor Origin](#) - data from 2011 to 2019
- [Tourism Operator Licenses Issued \(2019\)](#) – updated Nov 24, 2020
- [Licenced Tourism Operators by Region \(2016-2020\)](#) - data from 2016 to 2019
- Destination Canada. Aboriginal Tourism US Qualitative Research: Summary of Findings and Considerations.

Attractions in Yellowknife

The following table shows the most popular attractions in Yellowknife according to data available on Tripadvisor.

Data is plotted along two dimensions – “popularity” as measured by the frequency of respondents who provided a review of the attraction over the years, and “brand ambassadors” which is a subset of total reviews that provided the highest possible ranking for the attraction.



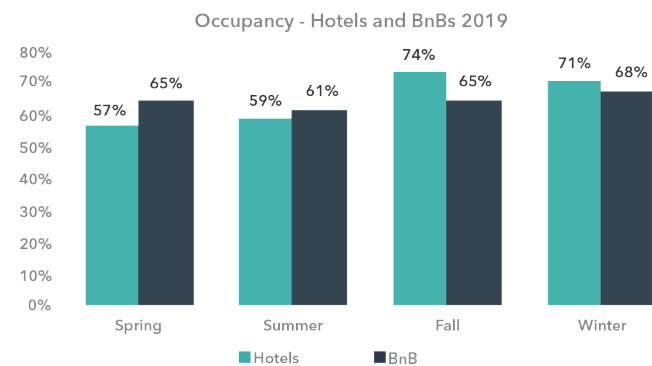
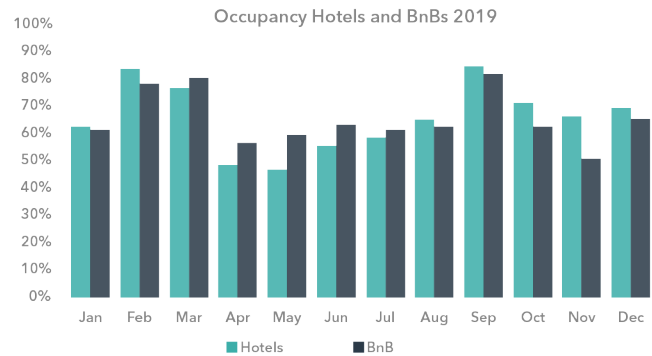
The chart is segmented into four quadrants – Stars, Opportunities, Potential, and Hidden Gems. “Stars” are the most straightforward – popular attractions with very positive reviews. They can be capitalized on immediately as important additions to just about any traveller’s itinerary.

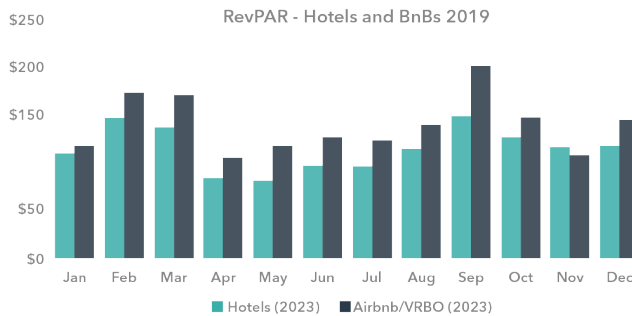
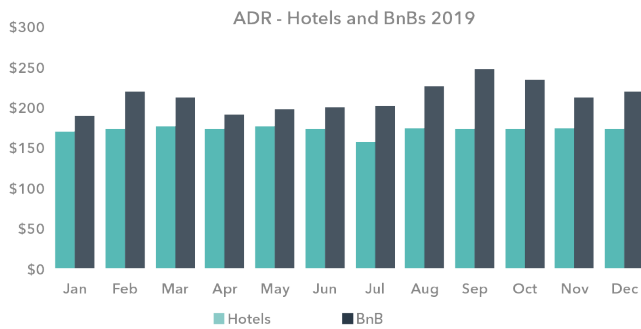
The “Hidden Gems” are the most intriguing. There may be seasonal or infrastructural considerations that limit availability and access. But that aside, these are attractions that have a passionate fan base and can enhance Yellowknife’s attractiveness as a destination simply by building stronger awareness among existing and potential visitors.

Hotel and Airbnb/VRBO Performance

Hotel performance as recorded by Smith Travel Research (STR) is based on a sample of 5 hotels representing 640 available rooms in the city of Yellowknife. Data is for 2019 which is the most recent information available. The STR sample is 58% of the total number of available hotel rooms in Yellowknife (as of 2019).

Overall annual occupancy was 65%, average daily room rate was \$172, and revenue per available room (REVPAR) was \$113. By comparison, in 2019 there were also an average 213 Airbnb/VRBOs in operation in the city with an annual occupancy of 65%, average daily rate of \$220, and REVPAR of \$140. Comparisons are illustrated below.





Occupancies for hotels and Airbnb/VRBOs both monthly and seasonally are comparable. But the latter outperform hotels consistently in terms of average daily rate and REVPAR. The implication is Airbnb/VRBOs serve a higher yield customer and, presumably, service standards are also higher.

Airbnb/VRBOs are also a significant economic contributor to the city with annual gross revenue estimated at \$10.9 million. The STR hotel sample, by comparison, contributes annual gross revenue of \$26.4 million. When this is weighted by the total number of hotel rooms in the city then estimated gross revenue for hotel spending is \$45.5 million (assuming non-STR hotels had the same level of occupancy and REVPAR). Collectively, accommodation revenue in 2019 for the city of Yellowknife (hotels and Airbnb/VRBO) is estimated at \$56.4 million.

Estimating the economic value of the visitor economy is more challenging because there has never been an economic impact analysis undertaken in the city. But reviewing comparable analyses undertaken for

Canada for several regional jurisdictions, accommodation spending as a proportion of the total visitor economy varies from a low of 8% to a high of 20% of total spending. On that basis, it's reasonable to estimate that the total value of the visitor economy that flowed through the city in 2019 is conservatively estimated at \$295 million dollars.

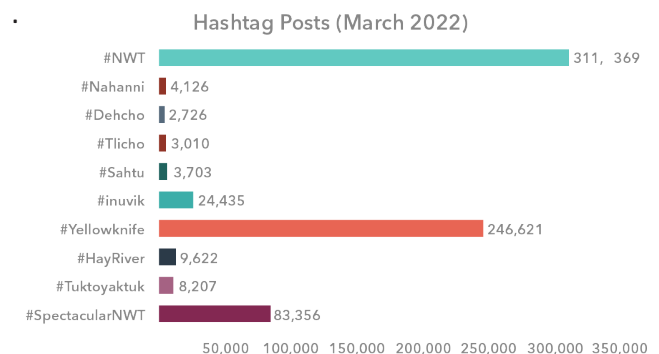
Visitor Spending in Yellowknife (2019)

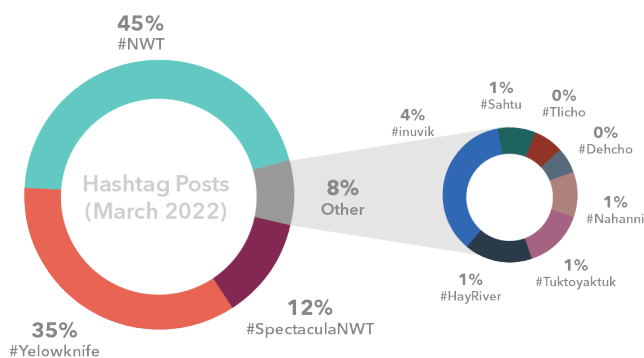


Hashtags

A hashtag is a word or phrase preceded by a hash symbol (#). It's used within a post on social media to help those who may be interested in a topic to be able to find it. Hashtags can be a great way to drive influence and followers, generating views, likes, and shares at little to no cost. They were first widely used on Twitter (aka "X"), but they have become commonplace on other platforms including Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest, and TikTok.

The Resident Readiness Strategy (March 2022) identified the primary hashtags followed by the GNWT and NWT Tourism as well as their frequency. They are illustrated in the charts below.



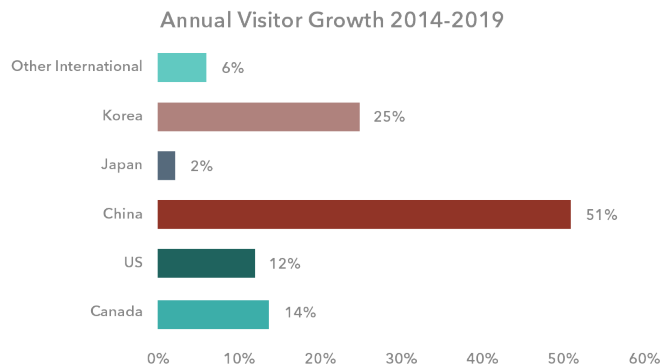
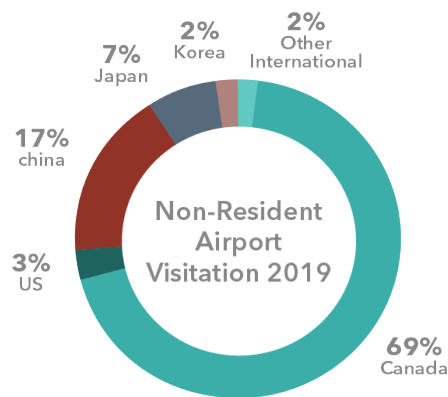


The report illustrated that the most common hashtag is #NWT. But #Yellowknife followed closely behind at 35% of the total and almost three times the third most common hashtag - #SpectacularNWT.

Driving resident campaign success was linked to growing increased use of the SpectacularNWT hashtag. It would be interesting to understand if growth in other categories increased as well since they may be perceived as complementary sites and already dominate hashtag use. More important, it speaks to the need for brand alignment as the potential for confusing or conflicting messaging is significant.

Visitor Origin

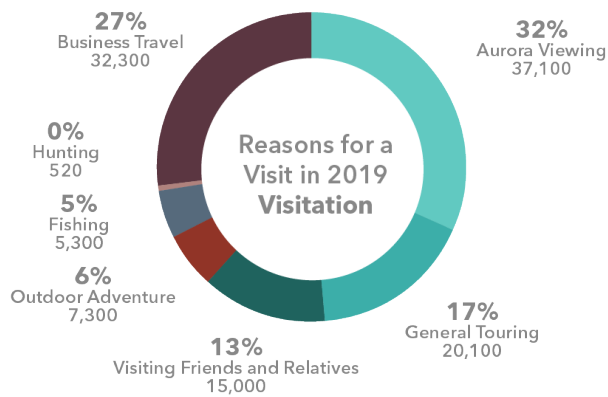
Non-resident visitation data to Yellowknife Airport was reviewed for the period from 2014 to 2019 and is illustrated below. Canada was clearly the priority market, accounting for 69% of total visitation in 2019 and growing at a rate of 14% per year from 2014/15 to 2018/19. China was the second largest in terms of volume, at 17% of total volume in 2018/19 and growing at a rate of 51% per year. Japan was third with total volume of 7% but clearly maturing as growth was only 2% per year. The USA was the fourth largest market by volume, accounting for 3% in 2018/19 and growing at a rate of 3% per year.



Going forward, the focus should continue to be on domestic travel as the overriding priority. Chinese recovery will continue to be problematic with Canada losing approved destination status as a group tour destination in 2023. This will not impact independent travel from China but will negatively impact organized group travel. Consideration might be given to Chinese cohorts based in North America that use many of the same inbound North American operators as their mainland Chinese counterparts. This would be a niche best led by NWT Tourism.

Purpose of Visit

The purpose of visit for visitors to the NWT was provided by GNWT. Non-resident visitation data to Yellowknife Airport was reviewed for the period from 2014 to 2019 and is illustrated below.

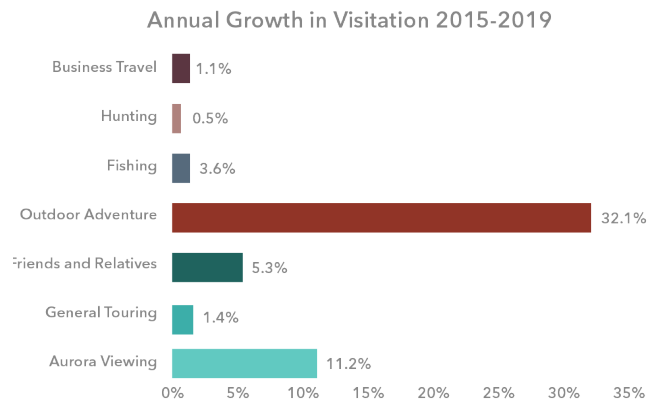


Aurora viewing and business travel are by far the most lucrative sectors in terms of volume of visitation and gross expenditures. Aurora viewing has grown at a rate of 11% per year over the five-year period from 2015 to 2019, while business travel, at a rate of 1% has shown only nominal growth.

Outdoor adventure, at 32% per year, has shown the strongest growth and this bodes well particularly for summer travel and strengthening Yellowknife's value proposition for pre/post activity as part of an outdoor adventure experience.

Hunting and fishing offer the highest returns on a per visitor basis, but growth in both sectors has been flat (0.5% for hunting) to nominal (3.6% for fishing).

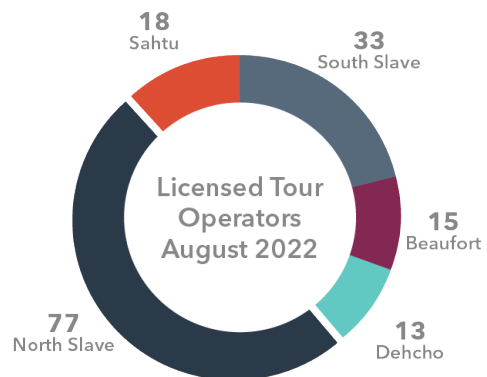
Rates of growth for each sector over this period are illustrated.



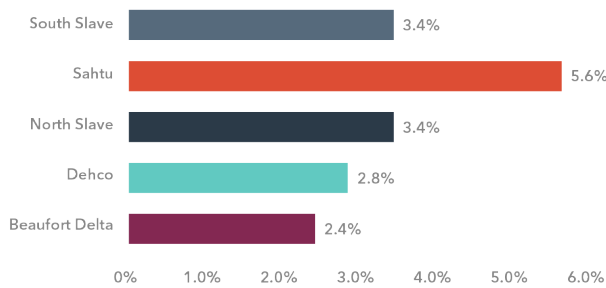
The implication for Yellowknife is aurora viewing and business travel should be priorities for a new destination marketing organization. There is also an important role for the City of Yellowknife to play in adding value to travel that is transiting through the community. It's important for any future visitor to the NWT that their "once in a lifetime" opportunity begins (or ends) with a visit to the City of Yellowknife.

Tour Operator Licencing

As of August 2022, there were 156 licenced tour operators conducting business in the NWT. This is a decrease of the maximum number of 159 in 2019. Almost half were operating in the North Slave region (which includes the city of Yellowknife). The annual growth in licencing in the North Slave is approximately 3% per year (between 2016 and 2022). Data is illustrated in the charts below. In 2018 it was estimated that 45% of operators were involved in aurora programming.



Annual Rate of Growth of Licences 2016 - 2022



55%
Other



45%
Aurora Tour
Operators in 2018

The Tourism Act and Regulations govern the tourism industry in the Northwest Territories and are administered by the Department of Industry, Tourism, and Investment. Businesses that satisfy three criteria require a tour operator licence: 1) provision of a guided service; 2) operation as a commercial activity which involves some level of compensation; and 3) provision of a tourism activity which is designed specifically for visitors to an area.

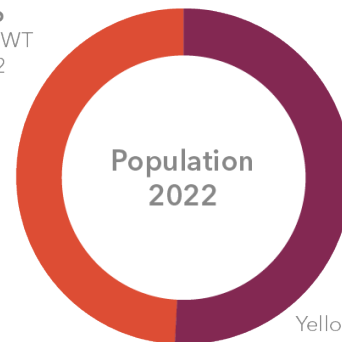
A license will be issued if the proposed activities are “reasonably safe” and will not have a negative impact on the environment. Furthermore, the Licence Administrator needs to be satisfied that the proposed activity will not unreasonably conflict with the activities of existing tourism operators in the area or interfere with the traditional or current use of the proposed area of operation, including traditional Indigenous use. It is also assumed that the applicant will have all other required licences for doing business in Yellowknife (e.g., a municipal business licence).

It’s unclear how conflict with other tourism operators is assessed, but this may have to be more closely scrutinized given the implications of softer demand post COVID. At a minimum, the city may need to consider how tourism operators within its boundaries are sourcing local goods and services and operating to a consistently high standard of service. Some communities (e.g. Edmonton) have gone to the length of accrediting operators prior to allowing them to do business in the community.

Population

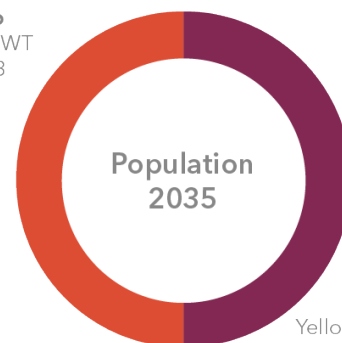
The population of the NWT in 2022 was 45,605 with almost half of that (49%) contained within the city of Yellowknife. By 2035 Yellowknife is projected to account for 50% of the NWT population as annual growth for the city is nominal (0.4% per year), while the balance of the territory will see a decline in growth. The charts below illustrate the 2022 estimates and the 2035 scenario.

51%
Rest of NWT
23,362



49%
Yellowknife Region
22,243

50%
Rest of NWT
22,783



50%
Yellowknife Region
22,893

The dependency ratio for the city and the territory is also expected to increase over time. The dependency ratio is the proportion of the young and elderly compared to the working population. From 2013 to 2022, the proportion of the population that was young in Yellowknife stayed relatively constant at around 19%. But the proportion of the elderly increased from 8% to 14%. That suggests shrinkage of the working population and an overall ageing which may have implications for labour force participation. The trend is stronger for the rest of the NWT which show a decline in the young population and a marked increase in the elderly. Illustrations are provided below.

Review of the 2022 demographic data suggests there are other distinctions between the population of the City of Yellowknife and the rest of the NWT that are worth noting:

- High portion of non-Indigenous (76%) compared to the rest of NWT (26%)
- Higher employment rate
- Higher workforce participation
- Lower proportion of one-parent families (19% vs 28% for the rest of the NWT)
- Higher education rate
- Higher employment and personal incomes
- Higher family incomes

In this context it's easier to understand the distinction between the City of Yellowknife and the rest of the NWT, and perhaps the reason for an often cited "us versus them" mentality. From a tourism perspective, the city can close the perceived gap by focusing on adding value to a transient visitor experience that includes a stay in Yellowknife.

Programming for meetings and events that link communities and regional opportunities is another way to strengthen relationships while adding value. Building opportunities for development and inclusion of Indigenous experiences is a focus the City will have to pay

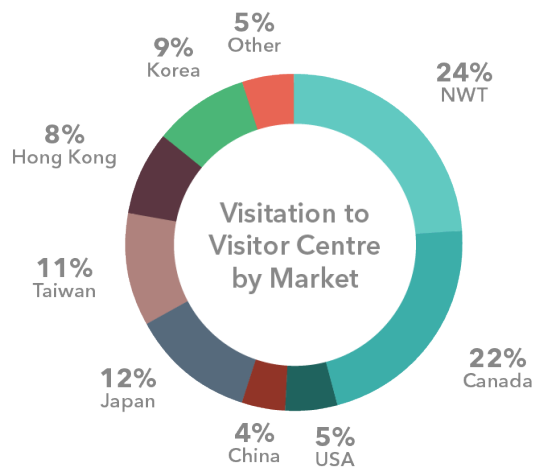
closer attention to ensure initiatives are not overlooked and are pursued in a culturally appropriate manner.

The Visitor Information Centre

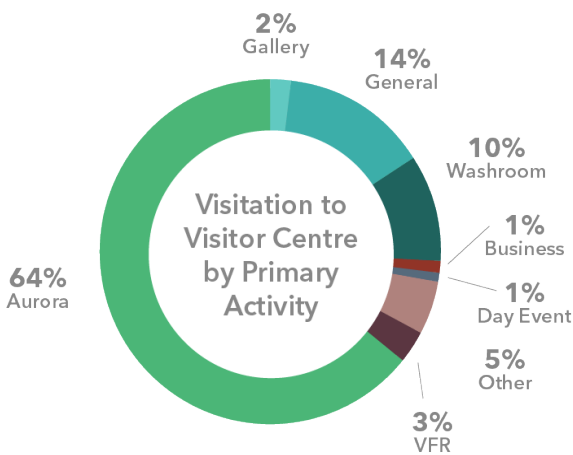
The Visitor Information Centre is located in the downtown mall and operates on an annual basis. Input from the Yellowknives Dene First Nation guided the design, materials used in the construction, and heritage information provided. It also includes a viewing gallery which features local NWT artists, and an exhibit devoted to aurora. Not surprisingly it is a popular resource for tour groups to the city, and visitors receive a certificate and pin to commemorate their visit to the city.

Data collected at the Visitor Center in Yellowknife provides insight into geographic origin and primary reason for visiting the center. Exhibits are attached for 2023 and 2024. Inferences about the visitor population at large to Yellowknife should be viewed with caution. The reason for that is the bias because of tour operators using the Visitor center as a staging point, and the challenges with collecting data on a systematic basis. The Center is also intercepting visitors at the beginning of their journey rather than at the end so it won't be an accurate reflection of time spent in the city.

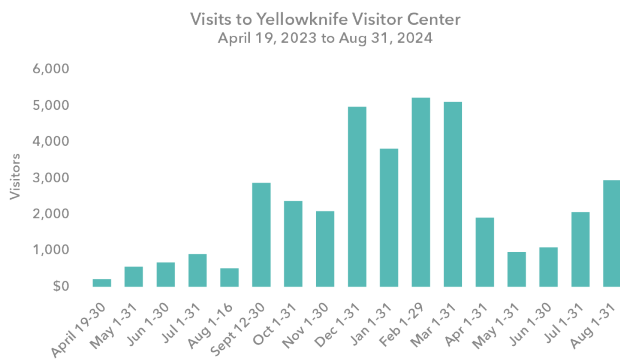
The total visitation data at the Visitor Center does illustrate the seasonality of visitation to Yellowknife with less than 1,500 visitors per month during the summer period, to more than 5,000 per month during the peak aurora viewing months of the winter.



Note: April 19, 2023 to August 31, 2024



Note: April 19, 2023 to August 31, 2024



During the engagement process, there was considerable discussion about the benefits of the Visitor Center offering reference material for travellers solely on a digital basis versus managing and distributing print materials such as travel guides and brochures.

The reality is that both print and digital mediums serve distinct needs in terms of building awareness and conversion for today's travellers.

The Visitor Information Centre is a staging area where individual travelers or organized groups are looking for insight or affirmation about various aspects of their travel journey. They come with a mindset and bias based upon their own individual research and understanding of the destination that they are visiting. But they never have perfect knowledge and will often be receptive to relevant opportunities or experiences that will enhance their current experience. Print materials and imagery channel that appetite by stimulating serendipity and trial. Ad hoc changes to an existing itinerary or planting seeds for a future visit can be stimulated by print offers that are evocative, time sensitive, and relevant.

SWOT Analysis

Based on the feedback from the stakeholder engagement and the review of research and other materials, a SWOT analysis was conducted to better understand the internal and external factors to be considered in development of the tourism strategy.

STRENGTHS

- VRBOs and Airbnb's serve a higher end, higher yield, market than the existing hotels.
- Fall and winter are the two peak seasons for visitation.
- Geographic location and climate combine to make Yellowknife one of the best aurora viewing locations in the world.
- Competitive positioning on NWT Tourism is aligned with Yellowknife's brand.
- The primary airport servicing the NWT is in Yellowknife
- Strong entrepreneurial and volunteer spirit in the community
- "Old Town" has a destination vibe and a unique feel with the adjacent houseboats.
- Great Slave Lake is a world-renowned fishing and watersport destination.
- Yellowknife is a transportation hub for service into other parts of the territory.
- Residents are generally knowledgeable and supportive of tourism.
- Several signature events with strong local champions (Snowking's Winter Festival, Ramble and Ride, Folk on the Rocks, etc.)
- Visitor center well designed and multi-functional with options for display, profiling local art, and small events.
- City has a point person at NWT Tourism that can collaborate on meetings and conference opportunities.
- Influx of military, government, and business all represent opportunities for outreach and repeat visitation.
- Yellowknife has "Capital" advantages that can be used to encourage government and academic meetings both regionally

and nationally.

- The city is positioned on the edge of a wilderness that is both compelling and exotic.
- A broad base of high-end adventure activities is available in the NWT (e.g. hunting, fishing, hiking, wilderness camping, lodge retreats, etc.)
- The Tłıchq nation have a tourism strategy and position Yellowknife as a strategic hub and gateway to the north.
- The Ingraham Trail Route (Hwy 4) begins in Yellowknife and extends 70 km/43.5 miles to Tibbitt Lake
- Approval of a accommodation-based tax that could fund the DMO.
- GNWT (Industry, Trade and Tourism) – has been supportive of Yellowknife's tourism development.

WEAKNESSES

- Yellowknife perceived as receiving an inordinate share of GNWT's resources and attention.
- Yellowknife not perceived as a value-add for excursions into other parts of the territory.
- Short term rentals are licensed by the City of Yellowknife but not regulated.
- Aurora competitive positioning not supported by substantive programming or capital investment.
- Programming emphasis on virtual rather than paper collateral at visitor center incongruent with customers' needs or operators' capabilities.
- High vacancies in the downtown and in the mall specifically.
- Lack of international symbol signing for visitor center.
- Overlapping jurisdictions with respect to trails, signage, and interpretation.
- Bureaucracy at the city is stretched – and the focus is often tactical rather than strategic.
- There is no tourism industry and/or hotel association, or advocacy group within the city.

- No systematic program of hospitality and service training in the city.
- No Visitor Information Centre or interpretation at the airport.
- Lack of accommodation capacity particularly during peak times of the year.
- Limited capacity for meetings and conferences, particularly during the busy travel period in the fall.
- Influx of non-resident boutique and specialty operators during tourism season competes with resident operators for access to amenities and viewing locations.
- Very little data on tourism spending, travel patterns, profile, and length of stay within the Yellowknife region.
- No economic assessment of the impact of the tourism industry in Yellowknife
- No vocational schools easily accessible for support and training in hospitality, foodservice, and tourism.
- Access to short-term housing for potential seasonal employees
- Tourism performance data on an ongoing real time basis is very limited.
- The Yellowknives Dene First Nation priorities for the tourism sector are currently reflected in the Joint Economic Development Strategy (JEDS).
- Water based recreation opportunities on the Great Slave Lake out of Yellowknife is not strongly promoted.
- The airport strategic plan may be an opportunity for collaboration with respect to visitor orientation and interpretation of the city and the territory.
- Aligning tourism opportunities to future air route development and expansion.
- Tangible programming and products related to aurora interpretation will build equity in Yellowknife's brand.
- In January 2020, the Łutsël K'é Dene Nation announced their ownership of the Frontier Lodge. It will continue to offer world-class fishing and will add new adventures and cultural programs interpreted from the Łutsël K'é Dene perspective.
- Growing demand for health and wellness-based experiences: e.g., spa, rejuvenation, health, well-being, and retreats.
- Stronger digital exposure for themes, experiences, and attractions within the city.
- A stronger role for tourism stakeholders as advocates and leaders for destination management and marketing.
- "Glamping" – growing interest in luxury camping in small groups; intimate; with high quality of service.
- Potential to convert the old aquatic center into a meeting/conference facility.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Mine closures may provide windfall opportunities for investment in capital and infrastructure projects that may benefit tourism (e.g. land reclamation and improvement, programming and interpretation of the history of mining, etc.).
- Indigenous experiences, interpretation, and authenticity are powerful themes that can be capitalized upon.
- Yellowknife can support a broader regional approach to soliciting meetings, sports, and conference business.

THREATS

- Access to labour markets to support a service intensive tourism industry.
- Building competitive advantage as a destination is a long-term proposition that requires political and industry support.
- An aging population may put increasing demands on the labour force and city's infrastructure.
- Climate change may have longer term repercussions with respect to seasonality, ice road operation, and aurora viewing.

Planning Considerations

During the engagement phase of developing this plan, several themes emerged as key takeaways to help guide the development of the vision, goals, and initiatives. Planning considerations below are grouped by their related goal (see Goals & Initiatives section).

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS IN RELATION TO ENHANCING THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

1. Provision of visitor information is oriented to digital fulfillment.
 - Allowing brochure drop off and distribution provides tangible benefits to visitors looking for daily experiences and builds stronger rapport with tourism operators. Virtual programming could complement but shouldn't replace traditional programming.
2. The Visitor Information Centre is an essential stop in a group itinerary.
 - The Visitor Information Centre is a strategic focal point for visitors, residents, and operators. It can add value to all three constituencies.
 - Signing for the visitor center should be clear and obvious. International standards would provide assurance to potential visitors.
3. Limited visitor information is provided at the airport.
 - The airport is the gateway for the city and the territory. Programming and service could be strengthened even if done on a voluntary basis.
4. Hours of operation for shops and restaurants are inconsistent.
 - High vacancies and closed shops contribute to concerns about safety and security.
5. Lack of systematic program of hospitality and service training in the city.
 - Developing and implementing minimum standards for hospitality and service would be one way to strengthen the city's value proposition and recognize excellence in the industry (e.g., NorthernMost Host Program)
6. Overlapping jurisdictions with respect to trails, signage, and interpretation.
 - Programming needs to look at the whole experience and negotiate signage, maintenance, and obligations of overlapping jurisdictions.
7. Yellowknife is a hub for excursions into the NWT.
 - Travel into other parts of the territory could include pre and post stops in Yellowknife.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS IN RELATION TO BUILDING STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

8. Current lack of local DMO or hotel association representing Yellowknife.
 - Lack of hotel association or tourism association discourages sharing of information and advocacy in an organized, timely manner.
9. NWT Tourism is a strong marketing partner and already aligned with the city's brand.
 - Alignment complements Yellowknife as a destination and a gateway for the territory.

10. Operators in the NWT outside Yellowknife are potential strategic partners for value-added experiences.

- A broad base of high-end adventure activities are available in the NWT (e.g. hunting, fishing, hiking, wilderness camping, lodge retreats, etc.). This is an opportunity to expand the base and increase the length of stay through value adds in Yellowknife.

11. The airport has a direct influence on all travellers to Yellowknife.

- The airport is minutes from the downtown. Strengthening the visitor experience will benefit all stakeholders. In addition, the airport has access to unencumbered land which may represent a future opportunity for capital investment.

12. ITI (and GNWT) has a vested interest in a strong and healthy tourism economy in Yellowknife

- The GNWT supports economic diversification through tourism development.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS IN RELATION TO DEVELOPING SUPPORT FOR THE INDUSTRY INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

13. Lack of a cultural strategy in Yellowknife. Festivals and events tend to be volunteer-led and resourced.

- Events are important for residents and visitors. The City could help to expedite and support where possible.

14. Licensing of out-of-town operators can be a problem in terms of quality, impact on the community, and local knowledge.

- It is important all operators meet the same standards regarding business licencing and commercial vehicle licencing.

15. Availability of skilled seasonal labour and access to short-term accommodation is an ongoing challenge.

- Consider working with educational and vocational institutions in Yellowknife to develop a labour pool of local skills and talent.
- Lack of short-term accommodation is an impediment to attracting employees, particularly on a seasonal basis.

16. NWT communities outside Yellowknife see the city as a competitor.

- Enhancing Yellowknife's value proposition through programming, quality and service can strengthen relationships with other tourism operators and communities in the territory.

17. Recognition and licencing of Airbnb's, VRBOs, and B&Bs in Yellowknife is inconsistent.

- Ensure there is consistency across accommodation options regarding health, safety, and service as they are important to protect the integrity of offering.

18. There is a lack of capacity for meetings and conferences.

- Lack of capacity is an issue in the fall and winter. Spring and early summer may be better options but not necessarily aligned with the conference calendar.
- Additional meeting facilities would complement existing hotels and add a venue for breakout and programming.

19. Accommodation availability particularly during peak season is a challenge.

- Limited fixed roof capacity particularly during the fall and winter is an impediment to increased visitation.

20. Residents generally understand and are supportive of tourism.

- Engagement and communication are important to ensure alignment with resident values.
- Residents and business owners can be important advocates and champions for tourism.
- Understanding the economic value of the visitor economy, including GDP, taxes and employment is one way to build political and resident support for tourism.
- Developing a strong visitor economy needs political support over the long term.

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS IN RELATION TO BUILDING DESTINATION AWARENESS INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

21. Positioning the city as the best place to see aurora is not supported by on-the-ground amenities or interpretation.

- Augmenting dark sky vistas with on-the-ground investments to complement and enhance the experience can strengthen the competitive position.

22. NWT Tourism has a portfolio specifically for business events which can be a strategic partner and advocate.

- The creation of a convention bureau is an important resource for Yellowknife to focus on business events.
- As a capital city, Yellowknife can be on the rotation for events and conferences sponsored by national organizations (e.g., TIAC, Destination Canada, ITAC, etc.).

23. Lack of insight into the “Yellowknife experience” – what visitors are spending, doing, and saying about the city.

- Baseline data is required to measure success, understand visitor dynamics, and to set targets for performance goals.
- Recognizing tourism as an important economic sector opens opportunities for collaboration and programming with the city.

24. Outdoor adventure and water-based recreation are opportunities for Yellowknife during the summer season.

- Great Slave Lake is an important anchor for summer-based recreation. Incorporating water-based activities – SUP, canoeing, kayaking, motorboat, etc. could be an extension to any summer program.
- The Ingram Trail is a key asset - a scenic driving corridor through Precambrian landscape, lakes, and forests with numerous outdoor recreation opportunities.

25. There is a strong and diverse arts community within the Yellowknife region.

- The eclectic mix of businesses and artists lends itself to walking tours and exploration. The highest rated attractions in Yellowknife by Tripadvisor were operated by local artists.

26. Influx of military, government, and business all represent opportunities for outreach and repeat visitation.

- Pre- and post-leisure activities around business and government travel is an opportunity to increase length of stay and build awareness.

27. The City operates a website and social media channels for tourism in Yellowknife (Extraordinary Yellowknife) but information requires curating and updating on a regular basis.
28. Destination Canada, the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada, and NWT Tourism are all opportunities to lever Yellowknife's products and experiences.
- Indigenous interpretation and programming that touches all experiences from aurora to wilderness adventure, could be a strong competitive advantage for Yellowknife.



Tourism Initiative Evaluation Rating System (TIERS) Analysis

The Tourism Initiative Evaluation Rating System (TIERS) analysis is a framework for evaluating a broad range of proposed initiatives to bring focus to those initiatives that would be the most meaningful for the destination. It is a qualitative framework that includes criteria such as the following:

- Destination Enhancement - considers whether the initiative has the potential to generate excitement and praise for the destination/host community, whether it can be a catalyst for change, increase interest in visitation, expand the scope of products/services offered, and truly differentiate the destination/host community. Scoring options vary from “significant” to “not likely”.
- Timeline to Realize Benefits - assesses the timeframe for payback to the destination in terms of return on investment, economic benefits to the community, and incremental visitation or extension of visit. A short timeline is less than two years; a long timeline is greater than five years.
- Complexity of Project to Realize Benefits - assesses the capital cost required, ownership, and the number of stakeholders that need to be involved to see the project through. A low risk/uncomplicated initiative would have minimal costs and require no partners; a high risk/complicated venture would entail high capital costs, ongoing operational obligations, and a multitude of stakeholders.
- Resource Requirements - examines ongoing operational obligations in terms of staff and costs. The scope would be a low level of investment where time and costs are nominal, to a high level of investment.
- Alignment with Sustainable Tourism - assesses the fit between the proposed initiative and support for environmental, socio/cultural, and economic sustainability. The scoring system ranges from “unlikely” to “highly likely”.
- Provides Opportunities for Residents and Local Business Owners - assesses the likelihood of the proposed initiative to deliver direct support for community stakeholders. Scoring options would vary from “yes” to “negligible”.
- Connects and Supports the Vision for the Destination - examines the alignment between the proposed initiative and the values shaping the vision for Yellowknife. Range of responses would vary from “yes” (strong support) to “negligible” (not aligned with the vision).

Each of the criterion in the TIERS analysis was ranked equally with a maximum value of 5 and a minimum value of 1. The average of each criterion was then combined to produce the overall score for the initiative and informed the project team how each initiative should be prioritized. The TIERS analysis results are reflected in the tables in the main strategy which outlines the four goals and their corresponding initiatives.