

GOING PLACES

NOVEMBER 2020

Regina's Scott
Collegiate students
explore food tourism
pathway

Canada Nice and Stay
Open – themes for
marketing during
COVID-19 pandemic

Certified Clean It Right
businesses put health
and safety first

Speeding recovery
by growing shoulder
season and winter
travel

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COVER IMAGE

Asia Littlechief, student in Food Tourism and Hospitality Pathway, Scott Collegiate, Regina

BOOKMARK INDUSTRY WEBSITE

Industry.TourismSaskatchewan.com is a one-stop site for news from Tourism Saskatchewan. It features information about partnership and funding opportunities, research, education and training programs, upcoming events, and more.

Past issues of *Going Places* are available on Industry.TourismSaskatchewan.com/news/going-places-newsletter.

Saskatchewan comprises lands covered by Treaties 2, 4, 5, 6, 8 and 10, the traditional lands of the Cree, Dakota, Dene, Lakota, Nakota and Saulteaux peoples, and the traditional homeland of the Métis.

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Certified Clean It Right businesses put health and safety first

Tourism Saskatchewan's new Clean It Right program is a convenient online training tool to reduce the spread of COVID-19, protect customers and staff and help businesses stay open.

Clean It Right was developed by the Manitoba Tourism Education Council (MTEC) in May and adapted by six other provinces, including Saskatchewan. The training enables businesses to clearly demonstrate a commitment to safety and cleanliness, and regain consumer confidence.

Research undertaken by Destination Canada indicates that nearly 60 per cent of Saskatchewan residents expect to see cleaning and sanitizing procedures take place in common and high traffic areas during a dining experience or hotel stay. Fighting COVID-19 demands greater attention to sanitation. Businesses that lead by example are more likely to earn customer trust, positive reviews and repeat visitors.

The online course, available 24-7, is delivered through three custom modules for key tourism industries:

- Accommodations, including hotels, motels and bed and breakfasts
- Restaurants and food services
- Retail businesses

To earn Clean It Right Business certification, a property must have all cleaning staff complete the program. Designated businesses are authorized to display a Clean It Right window decal and electronic logo to reassure the public of a clean and safe environment.

To enrol staff in the training, visit Industry.TourismSaskatchewan.com. For more information, contact Kari Burgess at 306-933-5913 or 1-800-331-1529, kari.burgess@tourismsask.com.

Clean It Right is supported and endorsed by the Retail Council of Canada, Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce, Saskatchewan Hotel and Hospitality Association, Service Hospitality and Tourism HR Canada.

Subscribe to Industry Update

Tourism Saskatchewan's e-newsletter, *Industry Update*, has become a fundamental channel for communicating with tourism businesses and stakeholders during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Distribution frequency increased in March to address the urgency of the pandemic and provide operators with up-to-the-minute details on public health announcements, government funding programs, and workshops and resources to help industry navigate the current challenges.

A COVID-19 news and resources page was added to Industry.TourismSaskatchewan.com. Stories and news featured in *Industry Update* are added to the COVID-19 page, and details are refreshed as new information is published. This special section of the industry website has become a go-to resource, featuring a comprehensive list of business support links, marketing information, recovery tools, and advice to help businesses stay open.

Subscribe to *Industry Update* and stay informed. Email information.updates@tourismsask.com to start your subscription.

MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

During my 30-plus years in tourism, I have witnessed periods of uncertainty; however, nothing compares to the current situation. In March, COVID-19 brought the tourism industry, worldwide, to an astonishing halt. It was, and continues to be, a scenario that no one could predict. The challenges have been monumental.

Saskatchewan's vibrant tourism sector is driven by proud, hard-working people. Welcoming visitors and treating them to warm hospitality is in your DNA. Providing excellent service and being enthusiastic "ambassadors" for our province is second nature.

It has been heartbreaking to witness our industry struggling. At the same time, your sense of responsibility and your actions to stem the spread of COVID-19 are admirable and deeply appreciated.

When news broke that COVID-19 had reached our province, Tourism Saskatchewan recognized that it had a different role to fulfil in this new reality. Our focus needed to be on connecting with our operators – providing them with information to help navigate an unprecedented situation, listening to their concerns and sharing their insights with provincial and federal decision makers.

Tourism organizations nationwide began co-ordinating action to support our industry. Tourism Saskatchewan quickly came to the table with Destination Canada, the Tourism Industry Association of Canada (TIAC), as well as our counterparts in other provinces and territories.

Together, we launched a collaborative Canada-wide effort to gather insights from operators and visitors and share the data. We pivoted marketing activities to urge Canadians to support local businesses. As spring turned to summer and the province gradually began to re-open, Tourism Saskatchewan's marketing messages encouraged people to make new discoveries and create travel memories here, at home – in Saskatchewan.

We shifted our industry communications into high gear – increasing the frequency of *Industry Update* e-newsletters, conducting operator surveys to gauge the depth of the pandemic's impact, and directing inquiries to our industry website where there are comprehensive resources and programs to ease some of the current pressures.

I am pleased to introduce a fresh new look to *Going Places*. It is important to bring attention to accomplishments in our industry, to stories that are inspiring and to people who are the heartbeat of Saskatchewan's tourism sector.

Winter is here and the beautiful Saskatchewan outdoors is calling – "Come, explore and enjoy!"

Above all, it is critical to consider safety and do our part to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

In closing, I want to share the Tourism Pledge that saw tremendous uptake this summer among travel influencers and operators in our province.

I pledge

- to openly embrace what's ahead
- to see the nice side of change
- to re-explore our open landscapes
- to use this time to reset and create new rituals, and foster an open spirit
- to openly experience more of what Saskatchewan has to offer
- to respect all of the rules intended to keep us safe
- to stay open to change so that all of Saskatchewan can stay open

Mary Taylor-Ash



Jeremy Harrison named Minister Responsible for Tourism Saskatchewan

On November 9, the Honourable Jeremy Harrison was sworn into cabinet, retaining his title as Minister of Trade and Export Development and taking on responsibilities for Tourism Saskatchewan and Innovation Saskatchewan. He was previously Minister Responsible for Tourism Saskatchewan in 2016-2017.

Minister Harrison was elected to the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly in 2007, representing citizens in the constituency of Meadow Lake. Appointed to cabinet in 2009, he held a number of positions, including Minister of Municipal Affairs, Minister of Enterprise Saskatchewan, Government House Leader and Minister of the Economy.

Tourism Saskatchewan welcomes Minister Harrison and looks forward to working with him again.



Meet Board Chair Norm Beug

Norm Beug has become a familiar face at industry events since joining Tourism Saskatchewan's Board of Directors in 2012. In 2013, he was appointed Board Chair. The position has enabled him to meet tourism operators across the province and experience, firsthand, the hospitality and pride that makes Saskatchewan communities great places to visit.

"The most fulfilling thing about my role as Board Chair is the chance to work with people from different backgrounds and see the variety of Saskatchewan tourism experiences," Beug said. "I appreciate the opportunities to meet hard-working operators who share a passion for the business."

Beug is the former Senior Vice President of Potash Operations for The Mosaic Company. In this position, he was responsible for the business units of six mining operations in the U.S. and Canada.

"I have had the great fortune of travelling the world for both business and pleasure, and can say, from experience, that Saskatchewan has many great tourism experiences," Beug added. "People seem to think that the

'grass is greener' elsewhere. I tell them that Saskatchewan has as much, or more, to offer."

Speaking to the variety of board roles that he has held in the private and non-profit sectors, he commented on complexity of Tourism Saskatchewan's mandate, which includes marketing the province as a destination, assisting with industry development, and other responsibilities.

"The experience on Tourism Saskatchewan's Board of Directors is different because there is such a huge offering of experiences and services that are part of the mandate. We exist to help entrepreneurial people deliver a great product to the people of Saskatchewan, as well as visitors. I have come to appreciate the diverse skills that are brought to the table to make that work."

Visit Industry.TourismSaskatchewan.com to learn more about the people who serve on the Board of Directors.



Three new members sit at the Board table



Jessica McNaughton is the founder and CEO of memoryKPR technology Inc., an interactive, digital time capsule tool to save, store, protect and design your story. She recently earned an EMBA from the Levene Graduate School of Business. While living in Alberta, she worked for some of Canada's most respected corporations, including WestJet, RBC and Shell Canada, and was recognized among Calgary's Top 40 under 40.

McNaughton resides in Moose Jaw with her partner Bill and two children. She was a board member with the Moose Jaw Health Foundation and Credit Union National Benefits, and volunteers with a number of local non-profits. Active with the City of Moose Jaw, she is a member of a COVID-19 business response and recovery team.



Shawna Nelson is the Director of Sales at the Sheraton Cavalier and The James Hotel in Saskatoon. She has over 30 years of sales and marketing experience in the hotel and hospitality industry.

A strong advocate for local business, Nelson served on the Greater Saskatoon Chamber of Commerce board of directors, was Past Chair of the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce, and represented Saskatchewan on the Canadian Chamber of Commerce board.

She fulfils a number of volunteer roles, including chair of the SaskTel Saskatchewan Jazz Festival and Saskatoon Hotels Destination Marketing Council; member of Tourism Saskatoon's National Convention Advisory Committee; and chair of Canadian Country Music Week in 2012 and 2017. Nelson received the 2016 Athena Leadership Award from the Business and Women Professionals of Saskatoon.



Kim Wondrasek is the owner/operator of Langenburg ESSO in Langenburg. She and husband Troy, along with business partners, built the ESSO fuel station, convenience store, bakery and car wash in 2015. Her career and business experience includes a decade in the economic development field as past Business Co-ordinator for Parkland College, CEO of the Saskatchewan East Enterprise Region, and General Manager of Yellowhead Regional Economic Development Association.

Active in the community, Wondrasek serves on the board of the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation and was a councillor for the Town of Langenburg. She was on the inaugural board of directors for the Family & Friends Community Foundation.

Irene Seiferling serves Board of Directors for eight years

Tourism Saskatchewan extends gratitude to Irene Seiferling for her dedicated service to the Board of Directors. She was appointed in 2012 and was pivotal in the organization's smooth transition to a Treasury Board Crown Corporation.

Possessing solid business acumen and governance expertise, Seiferling was a strong asset to the skills-based board from the beginning of her tenure. She was exceedingly dedicated to her role as Chair of the Governance Committee and inspired colleagues to lead with integrity and seek ways to improve how a board functions.

Seiferling's term concluded in July 2020. She is admired as a consummate professional and team player. Her contributions to Tourism Saskatchewan and to the province's tourism sector are deeply appreciated.



IN CONVERSATION

Todd Brandt reflects on career highlights and winding down during a pandemic



Todd Brandt retired from his role as President & CEO of Tourism Saskatoon in September. His departure marked the culmination of a 37-year career in tourism, 22 of those with Tourism Saskatoon. Under his leadership, the organization grew to take on new responsibilities and cement the city's reputation for hosting national and international sport competitions, major conferences, world-class concerts and more.

Before his last day on September 15, he took time to chat with Tourism Saskatchewan about some of his experiences and a legacy that will long serve Saskatchewan's tourism sector.

COVID-19 presented a serious, unforeseen twist to your concluding career chapter. How did your plans change in the last six months?

I'd been planning retirement for some time and informed the board of directors on February 3. Then, the world changed. In consultation with board members, we agreed to defer my initial end date – it was impossible to walk away from an industry that I was part of for almost 40 years under these circumstances. I committed to assembling a set of building blocks, so that whoever takes over the position doesn't have to start in crisis mode. Working with a very competent staff, we created an eight-week "Survival Plan." We were all trying to figure out what was going on in this world and what we needed to do. We then came up with a seven-month recovery plan for tourism in Saskatoon. With strong support from partners – Tourism Saskatchewan, the City of Saskatoon, Destination Canada and the Government of Canada – we managed to pull together the resources to get us through 2020 and well into 2021.

It's been a tough time for industry. What have you seen that has kept you positive and hopeful?

Two things come to mind and show true Saskatchewan spirit. The first is better collaboration within the industry and even within our own departments at Tourism Saskatoon. COVID-19 demanded it, but it is also part of our heritage in this province – to work together when things are tough.

Adaptability is second. Within our staff, people set aside job descriptions to bear down and get work done on projects they might not have considered before. Crisis forces you to get rid of baggage – the things that aren't immediately important – and focus on what you can do now and plan to do later.

What have been some career highlights?

I've been on about 52 bid and host organizing committees for different events in Saskatoon during the past 22 years. My first major committee was the 2000 Labatt Brier. The year before, we organized a Saskatoon blitz at the Brier in Edmonton. It was exciting to see nine busloads of Saskatonians arrive in Edmonton for Saskatchewan Day. The Brier fully engaged me in the community as far as event planning.

The 2007 JUNO Awards in Saskatoon stands out. With three national music awards held in Saskatchewan that year, there was a pan-provincial focus on the music industry. The disappointment of having to cancel the 2020 JUNO Awards at the midnight hour was crushing, knowing what the 2007 celebration meant for the city and province.

One of my most fulfilling experiences was being part of a monumental change for our industry – the establishment of a destination marketing program (DMP), working with the Saskatoon and Regina Hotel Associations. We spent a lot of time on the road talking to communities across Saskatchewan and encouraging them to establish their own DMP and have access to dollars, driven by visitors, that could support marketing and innovation.

What advice would you like to leave with industry?

First, get prepared for a return to travel. I've been at this a long time and have seen travel bounce back harder and faster than people think. COVID-19 has been the biggest challenge that we've ever encountered; however, I still see demand and pressure building. Saskatchewan has abundant space and natural areas, without crowds. It's important to figure out how to turn these strengths into an opportunity. Other destinations are going to be ready to go to market. We have to be there, too.

Secondly, find people who are willing and capable of working an issue and getting it resolved – and keep them in your organization. I look at the team at Tourism Saskatoon and their strong capacity to deal with the current challenges and figure things out. In every business, no matter who you are, you need to find those gems and hold onto them.

Finally, we have to look at our own destination from a variety of perspectives, instead of dismissing the everyday stuff as boring and mundane. We are far more interesting than we think. Never take our natural environment and the things that we have here for granted. We are so rich in natural and cultural heritage resources, and that is interesting to people who are travelling across Canada or across the world. We really are a fascinating people and province.

See page 19 for announcement of Tourism Saskatoon's new President & CEO.

Congratulations!

Todd Brandt received national recognition from the Tourism Industry Association of Canada (TIAC) on November 18. At the conclusion of TIAC's two-day virtual 2020 Tourism Congress, Brandt was presented the Tourism Toronto Canadian Tourism Lifetime Achievement Award. The award honours outstanding professional and personal contributions to the tourism sector. Recipients demonstrate "leadership, vision and innovation built on a solid foundation of strong values and sound business strategies."

RESEARCH AND TRENDS

Speeding recovery by growing shoulder season and winter travel



Lac La Ronge Provincial Park

A 2018 Destination Canada report examined constraints to tourism growth in Canada. Given compression issues at popular destinations during the summer, shoulder season and winter experiences were seen as having great potential.

No one anticipated a worldwide pandemic, shutdown of international travel and health risks associated with indoor activities. With COVID-19 halting trips to sun destinations this winter, Saskatchewan residents will be looking for safe travel options close to home. Will embracing winter and enjoying outdoor recreation become the norm?

Tourism Saskatchewan and the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport teamed up with Environics Research to gather information that identifies how to attract new visitors to Saskatchewan provincial parks and encourage year-round enjoyment. As part of the research study, participants were asked to share their perceptions and experiences with travel in the shoulder and winter season.

Weather not a barrier for everyone

Travellers largely prefer visits during the milder months. They know what to expect and can easily plan for minor upsets concerning the weather. Come winter, the conditions can be more extreme and unpredictable. For those travellers who appreciate the fresh air and snow and want a weekend escape or longer, consider offering a combination of safe outdoor and indoor activities.

There are many residents who traditionally head south in the fall and do not consider winter travel in Saskatchewan. For these residents, trip planning can be daunting. Encouraging them to book a winter experience will involve a calculated approach. First, plant some compelling ideas for a trip.

Next, show them the possibilities. Be clear about the details of the trip and ensure their experience is as seamless as possible. Be prepared to help them on short notice. Winter travel plans can be weather dependent and impulse driven.

Make travel planning easy

Most winter travellers prefer specific weather conditions – fresh snow, crisp air and reasonable temperatures, minus wind. February and early March tend to be the ideal time for winter exploration in Saskatchewan. Winter sports, such as cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, skating, fat biking, ice fishing, snowmobiling or dogsledding, are potential draws. Many visitors also want options for guided or small group activities, preferring to travel in numbers for safety.

Consider a combination of activities to entice guests. Start with ensuring cozy accommodations and providing some indoor options, as well as outdoor. For many people, the ideal winter trip includes sitting by the fire with a hot beverage or playing board games with the family when the temperature drops or the snow starts to fall. A nice perk is an outdoor hot tub for relaxing after a winter hike or a day of cross-country skiing. Amenities, such as a full kitchen or kitchenette, Wi-Fi (to keep younger children engaged or stream Netflix during bad weather), and nearby grocery stores or restaurants, add to a complete and comfortable winter travel experience.

Tempting travel offers take the guesswork out of trip planning. Turn to page 9 for advice on creating and posting packages and exclusive offerings that will appeal to guests.

Here are five tips for enhancing winter and shoulder season offerings:

- Ensure that marketing materials provide potential customers with a clear, compelling vision of their winter trip. Show them the possibilities.
- Offer a combination and variety of indoor activities (board games, movies, hot tubs, etc.) and outdoor activities (tobogganing, dogsledding, skiing, ice fishing, derbies, etc.) to engage visitors of all ages, no matter what the weather brings.
- Expect the unexpected – short notice reservations and a flexible cancellation policy will help mitigate concerns about unpredictable weather.
- Packages sell – affordable accommodations with attractive deals and discounts are highly appealing. Consider creating all-encompassing travel offers or packages.
- Consider guided winter activities to reassure less experienced winter travellers and provide safe, memorable adventures.

Destination Canada tracks resident feelings about travel

Saskatchewan attitudes toward visitors will be a key factor in the tourism industry's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The opinions expressed by residents are an important consideration as plans are made to welcome visitors back to the province when it is safe to do so.

In late May, Destination Canada began tracking sentiment to understand the level of "welcome" that residents of each province/region feel toward visitors. Approximately 1,800 responses to the resident sentiment questions are collected from Canadians weekly, through an online survey. The respondents include approximately 100 Saskatchewan residents who represent a mix of rural and urban communities.

The information ahead is current to November 17, 2020.

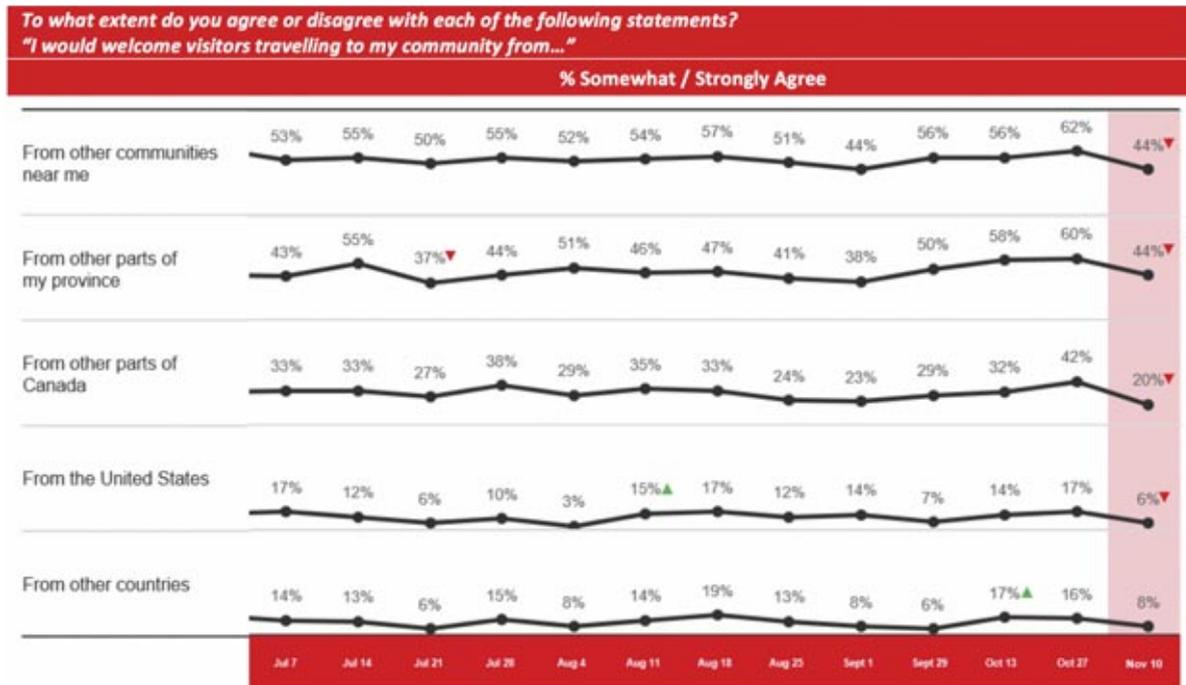
How are we feeling about visitors?

Sentiment toward visitors from within the province remained relatively stable from July to mid-October, with more than half of residents agreeing that locals would be welcome in their community.

The welcome level for visitors from other parts of Canada peaked at 42 per cent in late October. Sentiment has been lowest toward visitors from the U.S. and overseas. The U.S. level fell to 3 per cent in early August and hovered in the low to mid-teens for much of the fall.

Welcoming sentiment decreased significantly in the first two weeks of November. This was due to a surge of new COVID-19 cases reported in Saskatchewan and other parts of Canada, specifically short-haul markets in Alberta and Manitoba. These figures represent the lowest levels of domestic welcoming sentiment since the beginning of the pandemic.

Saskatchewan residents were asked:



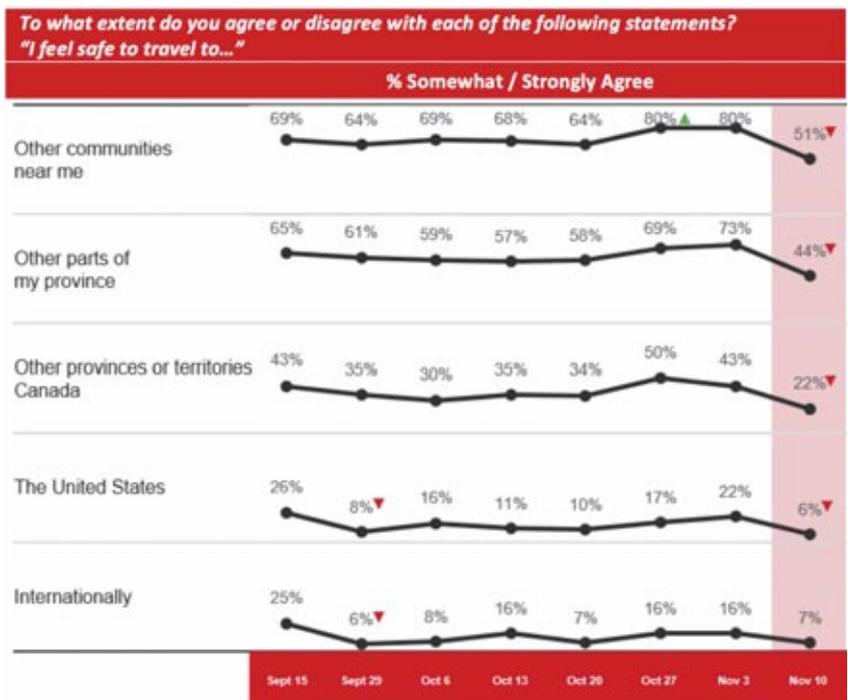
▲ indicates significantly higher than previous week at 95% confidence
▼ indicates significantly lower than previous week at 95% confidence

Where might we travel?

In September, Destination Canada began asking residents if they feel safe travelling to various destinations. As of mid-October, the research shows that Saskatchewan residents are somewhat comfortable travelling to nearby communities within the province, though more hesitant about venturing to other parts of the province. In response to increasing COVID-19 cases in parts of Saskatchewan, feelings of safety declined significantly in early November.

Saskatchewanians continue to have reservations about visiting other parts of Canada, the U.S. and international destinations. Feelings of safety are likely influenced by Ontario and Manitoba introducing travel lockdowns and social gathering restrictions to slow the spread of the virus. Sentiment toward U.S. and overseas travel has fluctuated since mid-September, as news of prolonged border closures and increasing global COVID-19 cases dominate news cycles.

Saskatchewan residents were asked:



▲ indicates significantly higher than previous week at 95% confidence
▼ indicates significantly lower than previous week at 95% confidence

What's happening in other parts of Canada?

In Atlantic Canada, where there are few cases of COVID-19, the sentiment for local travel is high – 81 to 89 per cent of residents feel safe travelling within their province. Extreme caution is still exercised when it comes to travelling elsewhere in Canada (28 per cent), the U.S. (11 per cent) and overseas (11 per cent). This trend demonstrates that local and hyper-local travel will continue to be favoured, even after newly reported case numbers start to decline.

Visit destinationcanada.com to track how Canadians, including Saskatchewan residents, are feeling about travel.

Source:
Destination Canada, Weekly COVID-19 Resident Sentiment, 2020-11-03
Destination Canada, Weekly COVID-19 Resident Sentiment, 2020-11-10

Turn to page 20 for more Research and Trends.

Tourism Statistics and Research section featured on Industry.TourismSaskatchewan.com

Tourism Saskatchewan is committed to providing industry partners with high quality and timely data and insights, which help to enhance the effectiveness of marketing and destination development activities in the province.

A new section on Industry.TourismSaskatchewan.com is dedicated to providing industry with timely information and reports that highlight

tourism and industry trends, regional tourism activities, labour force statistics, and the results of primary and secondary research projects conducted both internally and by external research partners.

Visit Industry.TourismSaskatchewan.com/statistics-and-research often and use the tools and reports provided to inform business decisions.

MARKETING SASKATCHEWAN

Canada Nice and Stay Open themes shape tourism marketing during COVID-19 pandemic



Castle Butte

COVID-19 hit hard and fast. It brought tourism to a standstill and signalled unprecedented challenges for the industry.

No area was untouched. Border closures, travel restrictions, temporary business lockdowns and necessary public health measures to contain the virus affected tourism destinations and operators throughout Canada. Destination marketing organizations put long-term visioning and long-haul campaigns on hold to focus on efforts that could bring some immediate relief to operators and heal the visitor economy.

Destination Canada and tourism partners across Canada, including Tourism Saskatchewan, promptly rallied as a national team to tackle issues, monitor the pulse of the industry and develop strategies for re-opening and recovery as public health orders were amended and some restrictions lifted.

Partners grasped opportunities presented by the sudden, unexpected changes and embraced campaigns that focused on resident markets. *Canada Nice* became a unifying theme, with provinces, territories and local jurisdictions adapting messages and creating unique content to highlight that niceness prevails – in people, places and communities.

Tourism Saskatchewan, in concert with Destination Canada, provided support to destination marketing organizations for paid marketing campaigns to encourage resident travel and stimulate short-term spending. Funding was also made available for the creation of content that aligns with the national *Canada Nice* theme for recovery.

A series of compelling new *Saskatchewan Nice* content pieces (videos, photographs, articles) celebrates uniquely nice people, places and stories. By the time that the project concludes in March 2021, there will be a variety of material showcasing Saskatchewan experiences, including shoulder season and winter activities.

The content will be a valuable part of Tourism Saskatchewan and Destination Canada campaigns to expand the domestic market and, when travel resumes, appeal to international markets.



Prince Albert National Park

Stay Open, Saskatchewan

The marketing and content support of the *Canada Nice* initiative are elements of Tourism Saskatchewan's *Pathway to Recovery* plan for the province's tourism industry that was developed in the spring. Objectives and activities are listed under three phases – response, recovery and resilience.

Stay Open, Saskatchewan became an additional, meaningful theme as stages of the Government of Saskatchewan's *Re-Open Saskatchewan* plan proceeded and some tourism experiences gradually resumed. "It was not business as usual, but business under a new reality with new, necessary health and safety measures," Amy McInnis, Tourism Saskatchewan Marketing Manager said.

"*Stay Open, Saskatchewan* emphasizes the commitment shared by tourism operators and businesses to delivering great travel experiences, keeping people safe and doing our part to contain COVID-19," she added.

Marketing comes full circle

"Different, but familiar" is how McInnis described the sudden shift to exclusively domestic markets and the tactics required to inform, reassure and inspire Saskatchewan residents. Each decision considered a number of factors – timely research, public health orders, guidelines in the *Re-Open Saskatchewan* plan, and the co-ordinated efforts of Destination Canada and its partners.

"The focus on local seemed a natural fit," McInnis said. "Early on, messages were about encouraging support for local services, such as food take-out, delivery or curbside pickup. As some restrictions lifted, the push was on discovering new experiences or visiting a new community or destination, while practicing safe, social distancing and respecting health guidelines."

Marketing efforts across Tourism Saskatchewan's social media channels emphasized Saskatchewan pride, while thanking residents for helping to keep people safe and prevent the spread of COVID-19.

For information about marketing Saskatchewan as a travel destination, contact Amy McInnis at 306-787-2199, amy.mcinnis@tourismsask.com.

Krugofest lifts spirits during COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic silenced hundreds of events across Saskatchewan. Their absence had a serious impact on the visitor economy and fueled uncertainty about the future.

Throughout the summer, a number of festivals kept their fans engaged through online performances and activities. As certain restrictions lifted, drive-through concerts were permitted in some communities.

In Regina, a group of community-minded citizens seized a bold idea and organized a safely-distanced summer concert series that lifted spirits and raised funds for the Regina Food Bank.

Krugofest was the brainchild of Kirk Morrison, co-founder and CEO of Krugo, a popular group travel app. Morrison brought together the forces to program four evenings of rooftop concerts adjacent to the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel & Conference Centre. The concerts took place on August 6, 8, 14 and 15.

Over 1,600 attendees enjoyed performances by popular Saskatchewan recording artists – Jess Moskaluke, Corb Lund and The Sheepdogs. Audiences watched from the comfort of their hotel balcony while the talent entertained from a rooftop across from the DoubleTree's north-facing suites.

Regina restaurants, breweries and distilleries partnered in the event, which generated an estimated \$200,000 in revenue among local entertainment and hospitality vendors. Part of the proceeds from tickets sales, roughly \$15,000, went to the Regina Food Bank.



Krugofest was a community effort that saw entrepreneurs, businesses and artists work together to create a safe event and bring back the sounds of live music and cheering audiences.

Check out *The Story of Krugofest* on Tourism Saskatchewan's YouTube channel.

Travel offers enhance marketing efforts and campaigns

TRAVEL OFFER



Ride the Slide at Delta Saskatoon Downtown

Delta Hotels by Marriott Saskatoon Downtown

Sept 3, 2020 to Dec 31, 2020

Ride the new three-story waterslide! Special rate includes family-sized

STARTING AT:

\$129

BOOK NOW

The Saskatchewan Hotel & Hospitality Association (SHHA), working with a number of tourism partners, is leading an ambitious marketing campaign to help generate immediate business and mitigate the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The hospitality industry and all of its aspects have been 'thrown overboard,' and everyone is doing their best to 'swim to shore.' These survivors will require significant support to begin the enormous task of restoring an entire industry," Jim Bence, SHHA President and CEO, said.

"Resiliency, creativity and connectivity are key to rebuilding and setting a new course for the tourism sector," he added, acknowledging the importance of working collaboratively and responsibly to alleviate fears and regain consumer confidence.

Border closures, travel restrictions and safety concerns have Saskatchewan residents rethinking winter travel plans and considering "staycations" and local options. The province-wide campaign consists of television, radio and out-of-home advertising, guided by a multi-faceted digital marketing plan that targets Saskatchewan residents. Given travel restrictions and concerns, more residents than ever will consider vacationing in Saskatchewan this fall and winter.

The campaign's theme is straightforward – "Book a two-day Saskatchewan getaway" encourages overnight travel. Central to its success is building a large inventory of enticing travel offers on TourismSaskatchewan.com. The site features a popular Travel Offers section where potential visitors can shop for packages and exclusive offerings.

Overall, the campaign focuses on increasing confidence in travel by highlighting the commitment of participating hospitality businesses to the health and safety of their guests.

Tourism operators and businesses can list their travel offers for free. The service is available year round, and options are flexible and varied.

A travel offer can include a packaged deal (accommodation, transportation, meals, etc.); value-added incentives, such as attraction passes or a meal included in the price; or discounts for a specific amount or percentage.

Travellers want assurance that tourism businesses are safe places to visit and are adhering to health guidelines to prevent the spread of COVID-19. A key factor in driving immediate business is to increase consumer confidence by highlighting the precautions undertaken and communicating the pledge to keep guests safe. New or refreshed travel offers are an opportunity to demonstrate best practices, ease concerns and inspire Saskatchewan residents to explore the province.

Advice and information about creating travel offers is available on Industry.TourismSaskatchewan.com.

Email information.updates@tourismsask.com to inquire about posting offers.

DESTINATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Enrol in free, flexible AWEsome Experience Design Studio

Tourism Saskatchewan is offering a new online course to explore experiential tourism. The AWEsome Experience Design Studio is a free eight-module program for operators. It will be available on Industry.TourismSaskatchewan.com in December.

Course content is based on the foundation of experiential tourism AWEshops, previously hosted by Tourism Saskatchewan from 2016 to 2019. These sessions inspired ideas and concepts for distinct, authentic tourism product offerings. AWEshop participants were introduced to principles that encourage focus on the small details to create unexpected, memorable guest experiences.

The AWEsome Experience Design Studio is structured so that participants can proceed through the multi-media modules at their own pace. An online workbook enables them to record ideas and plans, and have a solid outline of a potential tourism product that is unique and achievable.

Enrolment and course details will be posted on Industry.TourismSaskatchewan.com. For more information, contact Denise Stroeder at 306-787-2825, denise.stroeder@tourismsask.com or Kari Burgess at 306-933-5913, kari.burgess@tourismsask.com.

Watch for upcoming *Industry Updates* that will report on the program launch.



The popular Han Wi Moon dinners, hosted at Wanuskewin in Saskatoon, are an offering that emerged from the AWEshop process. The outdoor dining experience treats guests to a decadent meal made from foraged and locally-sourced ingredients, served at sunset. To complete the evening, everyone gathers around a campfire to enjoy Dr. Ernie Walker's reflections on Wanuskewin's history, as well as Dakota storyteller Curtis Standing's ancient Star Stories.

Due to COVID-19, Han Wi Moon dinners were cancelled in 2020, but are scheduled to resume in June 2021. In October, the *Globe and Mail* highlighted the dinners among recommended night sky viewing experiences to consider next year.

Wanuskewin's newly renovated site opens December 1. The new additions to the main building cap off a \$40 million renovation and feature an expansive conference and event space. New cultural exhibits blend state-of-the-art technology and tactile learning opportunities. Exhibits range from pre-contact to contemporary stories about Indigenous people and traditions of the Northern Plains.

Outdoor tours and activities include viewing Wanuskewin's bison herd. A schedule of winter events includes the Kōna Winter Festival. Visit wanuskewin.com for information.

Tourism career planning starts with new interactive resource

The online, interactive *Guide to Tourism Careers in Saskatchewan* is a new resource for educators, students, career counsellors and newcomers to Saskatchewan. It provides information on the wide range of tourism careers and features the stories of 46 professionals working in Saskatchewan's tourism sector.

Chapters address tourism's five industries: accommodation; food and beverage services; recreation and entertainment; transportation and travel services. Career profiles include a description and main duties, recommended education and training programs, and a special feature about a Saskatchewan resident working in that job.

The guide contains information about programs offered by Tourism Saskatchewan, Saskatoon and Regina Industry Education Councils, Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission, Saskatchewan Polytechnic, University of Saskatchewan, University of Regina and a number of private colleges and trainers.

Access the free *Guide to Tourism Careers in Saskatchewan* on Industry.TourismSaskatchewan.com/education-and-training/educators-resources.

Scott Collegiate students explore food tourism pathway



Kelley Christopherson (centre) with students Asia Littlechief (left) and Waden Kay (right)



Asia pulls bannock from oven



Waden serves smoked bison tostada

The popularity of food tourism offers huge potential for a destination like Saskatchewan, where agriculture is a way of life and cultural diversity creates an array of flavours. Inspiring the next generation of chefs and culinary workers is fundamental to expanding food tourism and delivering exceptional guest experiences.

Scott Collegiate, in Regina's North Central neighbourhood, is nurturing an appreciation of good food among students and equipping them with the skills to excel in the hospitality industry.

Kelley Christopherson leads the Food Tourism and Hospitality Pathway at the school, where she has taught for over 15 years. She is the driving force behind Scott's involvement with the Saskatchewan Tourism Education Council (STEC), the Canadian Academy of Travel and Tourism (CATT) and a variety of programs and partnerships that position students for meaningful careers in the tourism sector. Her self-proclaimed mission is to build student confidence and help them find a passion that can turn into a career.

The Food Tourism and Hospitality Pathway was introduced four years ago when the new Scott Collegiate and *mâmaweyatitân* centre was built. Pathway students hone their skills in the *mâmawi* café, where experience is the teacher. Under the guidance of Jamie Deis, Red Seal Chef and Scott Collegiate's kitchen technician, students are immersed in the work of operating the café on weekdays and learning cooking, customer service and other skills.

"It is a team-oriented community that allows students to experience what a career or job can look like, building on work ethic and taking initiative," Christopherson said. "When the Pathway students graduate, they are employable."

Pre-COVID-19, the *mâmawi* café saw both students and community members in line for the delicious noon lunches. Since reopening in September, the café's services are limited to Scott Collegiate students and staff.

Enhanced health and safety procedures are in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Temperatures are taken before students enter the kitchen. Masks are mandatory throughout the school. In addition to frequent hand washing, work stations are sanitized every 30 minutes. Directional signage and arrows guide safe physical distancing and keep noon lineups flowing smoothly.

Pathway students are assembled into small cooking teams for their kitchen experience. Grouping the same team members together from week to week helps to limit contacts, maintain consistency and build camaraderie.

The new school year marked the start of a pilot project for Christopherson and her students, who are testing new Tourism 10, 20, 30 curriculum designed for Saskatchewan schools. Tourism Saskatchewan participated in the curriculum development, with Workforce Development Consultants Kari Burgess and Lynne Kennedy contributing expertise to the writing group. STEC's Service Best and Service First programs are recommended options to help students fulfil curricular outcomes and pursue industry certifications.

The new curriculum emphasizes the variety of careers in tourism, including opportunities for entrepreneurs and skilled tradespeople. Students are encouraged to see the world, starting with their own community, through the lens of a traveller and consider the cultural and historical contributions, geographical assets and stories that shape dynamic travel experiences.

"Pathway students have a lot of experience and come with different knowledge, especially about Indigenous culture and traditions," Christopherson added, noting the interest and prospects in Indigenous tourism. "Scott Collegiate is in a unique position because it is a school immersed in culture. Our student population is mostly First Nations, and Indigenous teachings are part of our programs. I constantly reinforce the opportunities in this industry and stress to the kids that they are the ones who can talk about their culture."

Learn more at mamawicafe.ca or connect with the café on Facebook ([@mamawicafe](https://www.facebook.com/mamawicafe)) and Instagram ([@mamawicafe](https://www.instagram.com/mamawicafe)).

After introduction to the Food Tourism and Hospitality Pathway program in Grade 9, participants take credit classes in commercial cooking throughout Grades 10-12. They undertake Service Best training, earn three levels of CATT certificates and a number of *emerit* certifications, and complete their Saskatchewan Youth Apprenticeship Passport. A work placement within Regina is completed in their final year. They graduate with over 300 hours of kitchen experience and skills that far exceed entry level.

New business hub to aid tourism recovery from COVID-19 fallout

Tourism Saskatchewan is on track to launch a new business resource hub that will provide operators with valuable tools, information and services to rebuild a strong, resilient tourism industry.

The project was expedited in the spring, as part of Tourism Saskatchewan's comprehensive *Pathway to Recovery* plan. A proposal to Western Economic Diversification secured funding to take immediate action on the business hub concept and advance the capabilities of Industry.TourismSaskatchewan.com.

A complete overhaul of the website will create a single access point to a comprehensive range of business tools and resources. Technological enhancements will enable personalized user experiences and provide quick, convenient access to information that supports a variety of business needs.

Services and features will include:

- Business recovery resources
- Funding and training opportunities
- Advice and guidance for business startups
- Resources for diversifying markets and product offerings
- Marketing advice and opportunities

Industry.TourismSaskatchewan.com will continue to be a reliable, up-to-date source for news, advice and resources related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Watch for *Industry Updates* about the status and launch of the business hub in early 2021.

Dakota Dunes Resort opens to the public



Ribbon cutting marks opening of Dakota Dunes Resort on the Whitecap Dakota First Nation. Photo courtesy of Dakota Dunes Resort.

On October 8, the highly anticipated Dakota Dunes Resort opened its doors to guests. The property is owned and developed by Whitecap Dakota First Nation, south of Saskatoon, and is the area's first full-service resort experience.

Supported by Indigenous Services Canada, the resort is on traditional Whitecap Dakota Unceded Territory. It is managed by Atlific Hotels.

A ceremonial ribbon cutting marked the occasion and involved Elders, Chiefs and a number of dignitaries. The Wahpeton Drum Group performed traditional honour and victory songs.

A news release issued on the day outlined the property's striking features and design – the work of aodbt architecture + interior design, in association with Lemay Michaud Architecture Design:

"The 155-room resort stands as a tribute to its Indigenous heritage with angular window trims and exterior wood panels echoing the traditional tipi. This thoughtful nod to the Whitecap Dakota Nation culture carries through to the resort's guest rooms by way of art and design with soothing neutral tones, rich wood furnishings and an artistic representation of traditional Whitecap Dakota culture in every room."

Additional features include a 10,000 sq. ft. conference centre and the Moose Woods Home Fire Grill, which offers a farm-to-table dining experience. The hotel adheres to stringent health and safety measures under the American Hotels & Lodging Association's Stay Safe program, which focuses on enhanced cleaning practices, social interactions and workplace protocols to address the challenges and expectations presented by COVID-19.

The resort complements tourism developments on the Whitecap Dakota First Nation that include the award-winning Dakota Dunes Golf Links and Dakota Dunes Casino. The destination is a component of Saskatchewan's first Indigenous tourism corridor – a partnership between Beardy's & Okemasis' Cree Nation, Wanuskewin and Whitecap Dakota First Nation. The corridor establishes a cluster of Indigenous experiences "connected by history, community, land, river and highway."

Visit dakotadunesresort.com for more information.

Tourism Saskatchewan and Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada sign Memorandum of Understanding



Left to right: Keith Henry, ITAC President and CEO; Mary Taylor-Ash, Tourism Saskatchewan CEO; Kelly Fiddler, ITAC Board of Directors

In February, Tourism Saskatchewan and the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada (ITAC) signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in support of Indigenous tourism development in Saskatchewan. The memorandum established a foundation for other partnerships to support Indigenous tourism. It also signalled movement on a comprehensive Indigenous tourism strategy for Saskatchewan that was commissioned by ITAC in 2019.

Within weeks of the signing, the tourism industry was in free fall as COVID-19 put countries in lockdown and shuttered travel.

From 2014-2019, Indigenous tourism in Canada was on a solid growth trajectory. New tourism offerings created new jobs. The industry's contribution to Canada's GDP rose from \$1.4 billion to nearly \$2 billion. Over the last three years, ITAC supported a 100 per cent increase in the number of market-ready and export-ready Indigenous tourism businesses across the country.

According to the Conference Board of Canada, Saskatchewan saw increases in the number of Indigenous tourism operators - from 63 in 2014 to 90 in 2017. As a result, the number of jobs rose by 32 per cent, from 2,728 to 3,606. The provincial GDP contribution increased by 23 per cent to a total of \$116.7 million in 2017.

"The MOU is important in that it committed ITAC and Tourism Saskatchewan to a longer term relationship," Keith Henry, ITAC President and CEO said. "There are a number of actions that we agreed to do. COVID-19 didn't stop the work, but gave us more time to set up some things in terms of support for Indigenous businesses and having an industry-led voice there."

In April, ITAC quickly pivoted to create a COVID-19 recovery plan for Indigenous tourism in Canada and address serious projections for 2020 that included 32,000 job losses, 800 permanent business closures and a \$1.4 billion loss in direct GDP.

In its advocacy efforts, ITAC stressed a number of areas for investment, including: top up of the \$25,000 short-term grants available to Indigenous businesses; longer-term financing tools; and greater access to capital through Aboriginal financial institutions.

"We advocated for \$16 million from the federal government and were successful - that was really important to us," Henry said. "Roughly 30 Indigenous businesses in Saskatchewan received support through the grant process. It works out to an extra one million dollars that ITAC is investing into Saskatchewan directly to stabilize those local businesses."

In collaboration with destination marketing partners across Canada, ITAC shifted to promoting domestic tourism. A new Destination Indigenous website was created to share Indigenous stories and provide inspiration to travellers seeking authentic experiences. A new campaign, titled *Escape from Home*, offers travel itineraries, packages and suggestions. Research was also undertaken to gain insights into the Canadian market.

"All of the work has brought us to a point where we have a full four-year plan that will help Indigenous tourism get back on track as quickly as possible - hopefully by 2024 at the latest," Henry said. "COVID-19 has had a devastating impact. What we are doing now is pivoting, again, to develop a second wave response. We are preparing an updated set of tactics, particularly for development and marketing areas, to ensure that our industry doesn't completely collapse."

"Indigenous experiences enrich Saskatchewan's tourism offerings," Mary Taylor-Ash, Tourism Saskatchewan CEO said. "Support is pivotal during these dark times for the operators in our province and throughout Canada. Tourism Saskatchewan values its relationship with ITAC and appreciates the leadership and actions that are precisely focused on the industry's recovery and stability."

Check out indigenoustourism.ca/corporate/ for more information about ITAC and its COVID-19 response.

Saskatchewan Tourism Awards of Excellence celebrated on Facebook Live

The 31st annual Saskatchewan Tourism Awards of Excellence Gala was scheduled to take place on April 2 in Regina. Plans changed when the COVID-19 pandemic reached Canada in March. Both the gala and the 2020 HOST Saskatchewan Conference were cancelled, and the announcement of the 12 Saskatchewan Tourism Awards of Excellence recipients and three Tourism Builders postponed.

Using advanced technology and a new virtual format, Tourism Saskatchewan paid tribute to the honorees during a Facebook Live event on November 10. Tourism Saskatchewan Board Chair Norm Beug and CEO Mary Taylor-Ash hosted the celebration and announced the Saskatchewan Tourism Awards of Excellence recipients for 2019.

Watch the replay on [Facebook.com/TourismSaskatchewanIndustryCommunications/](https://www.facebook.com/TourismSaskatchewanIndustryCommunications/).



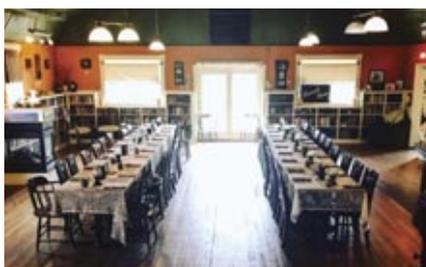
Business of the Year Award (Over 20 Full-Time Employees)

Wanuskewin, Saskatoon

Wanuskewin has a proud legacy as a centre of excellence. The national historic site has earned widespread recognition for

achievements driven by a mandate to share Indigenous culture through educational programming, immersive experiences, and culinary and visual arts. Sights are set on being a top destination in Canada for Indigenous cultural experiences. Wanuskewin recently completed an ambitious fundraising campaign that doubled its original goal and brought in \$40 million. This success has enabled major site improvements, including the expansion of galleries, a new learning centre and upgrades to the gift shop and restaurant. Wanuskewin reclaimed 40 acres of farmland and planted it to natural grassland for the return of Plains bison to the area. The effort is an important project in grasslands restoration and balancing the ecosystem.

Additional finalists: Saskatchewan Science Centre, Regina; Skyxe Saskatoon Airport, Saskatoon



Business of the Year Award (Under 20 Full-Time Employees)

The Happy Nun Café, Forget

The Happy Nun Café creates an intimate dining and cultural experience for up to 1,100 guests each month. The owners handcrafted a

visitor experience with a unique blend of local food ingredients, live music and art. The café staff, known as the "Happy Nun Family," are highly knowledgeable about the cuisine, as well as local history and the deep cultural roots of the tiny Forget community. Effective marketing is a critical part of the café's incredible success, especially considering the remote location of the venue. The Happy Nun Café also collaborates with local businesses to create cultural experiential packages for overnight stays. Social media marketing and a subscription newsletter, combined with traditional marketing, are the perfect blend for its target audience. Plans to capitalize on the location include camping and an outdoor gathering space for music festivals and events.

Additional finalists: Grotto Gardens Country Market, Maple Creek; Rebellion Brewing Company, Regina



Community Event of the Year Award

The Boomtown Cup, Shaunavon

A highlight of Shaunavon's Boomtown Days and Stampede, the 2019 Boomtown Cup attracted over 1,200 spectators – an increase

from 800 the previous year – to watch riding lawnmowers race with surprising speed. Visitors, racers and pit crews gathered for a full day of fun at the annual event. Enthusiastic residents, businesses and even RCMP officers raced jacked-up riding lawnmowers at speeds up to 70 km per hour for the \$1,000 grand prize and trophy. After the race, visitors gathered for an evening meal catered by Harvest Eatery's award-winning chef, Rusty Thienes, followed by a cabaret. Improvements to the event included bleachers, a Calcutta auction and additional entertainment for all ages.

Additional finalists: Showdown in Cowtown, Maple Creek; The Big Float, Manitou Beach



Fred Heal Tourism Ambassador Award

Mane Productions, Saskatoon

Through marketing and public relations, Mane Productions promotes Saskatchewan as a travel destination. Owner Mandy Pravda has contributed to the

tourism industry for over 10 years. As a marketing, social media and event specialist, Pravda has worked with almost every major public event in Saskatchewan, including the Canadian Country Music Awards, SaskTel Saskatchewan Jazz Festival and Ness Creek Music Festival. In 2019, the Waskesiu Chamber of Commerce and local accommodation properties contracted Pravda to create a strategic overhaul on branding and content building for the Waskesiu destination area, followed by the execution of a two-year international marketing plan. One of the main goals was to improve and expand offerings and increase travel to the area in the shoulder season. The plan's digital strategy included a revamp of six websites and expansion of social media platforms that promote the offerings of the Waskesiu Lake area in Prince Albert National Park throughout Canada and the United States.

Additional finalists: Meewasin Valley Authority, Saskatoon; Western Trophy Outfitters/Great Grey Outfitters, Saskatchewan



Gil Carduner Marketing Award

Wanuskeewin, Saskatoon

In 2019, Wanuskewin was in the spotlight at the Canadian Tourism Awards, receiving the Indigenous Tourism Award for the second time. While site upgrades and renovations

were underway, activities proceeded and the park recorded a five per cent increase in visitation and sales. Wanuskewin attributes its success in 2019 to sustaining momentum, “marketing to the hearts of guests” and earning media attention for a host of activities, programs and new developments at the site. The second annual Kona Winter Festival welcomed more than 2,000 attendees and saw record-setting sales in the gift shop and restaurant. Han Wi Moon Dinners were a resounding, sold-out success. These evening dinners, held outdoors, present an enriching, immersive guest experience through the enjoyment of Indigenous cuisine, performing arts and storytelling.

Additional finalists: Canadian Western Agribition, Regina; SaskTel Saskatchewan Jazz Festival, Saskatoon



Indigenous Tourism Experience Award

Aski Holistic Adventures, Cumberland House

Aski Holistic Adventures is located on the Saskatchewan River Delta, 60 km northwest of Cumberland House. The company offers remote, nature-based tourism

experiences that embrace holistic living, herbal medicine and eco-therapy. Owner Michela Carrière launched the venture in 2018, working alongside of her family’s outfitting business. She is an experienced outdoor guide and herbalist, and teaches living *Mino-pimatisiwin*, the Cree way of life that includes being healthy in mind, body, spirit and emotions. Cree culture and traditions influence every aspect of the business. Visitors are treated to adventures that explore the natural wonders of the Saskatchewan River Delta and foster meaningful connections to the area, its history and people. Carrière is a role model for Indigenous youth and leads school presentations that promote entrepreneurship and tourism.

Additional finalists: Living Sky Casino Powwow, Swift Current; Wanuskewin, Saskatoon



Marquee Event of the Year Award

2019 Tim Hortons NHL Heritage Classic, Regina

The NHL Heritage Classic was a chance for hockey fans to see an outdoor NHL game played at Mosaic Stadium – a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Young hockey players and fans attended the event featuring the Winnipeg Jets and Calgary Flames. It was the first regular season outdoor NHL game played in Canada in a province without an NHL team. The free outdoor festival included the Stanley Cup on display, Hockey Hall of Fame exhibits, trading card events, live concerts, and autograph signings. The event drew about 20,000 visitors and helped to generate \$20 million of overall economic activity in Saskatchewan.

Additional finalists: Canadian Western Agribition, Regina; 2019 Western Canada Summer Games, Swift Current



Rookie of the Year Award
Nutrien Wonderhub, Saskatoon

The Nutrien Wonderhub children’s museum entertains families with fun exhibits and inspirational programming. The museum’s mission is to foster creativity, curiosity, and

a lifelong love of learning in children and their adults. Exhibits reflect the diversity of Saskatchewan communities and the unique local heritage, culture and landscape. It took five years of hard work and perseverance for volunteers, Board members, staff, design and construction teams to make the vision a reality. The completed space is now a state-of-the-art facility with 25,000 sq. ft. of galleries and 11 permanent interactive exhibits. Between June and December 2019, Nutrien Wonderhub welcomed over 104,000 guests. The Facebook following tripled during this timeframe, from 3,000 to almost 9,000. Future growth plans include working with members to continue providing an exceptional visitor experience. Outreach exhibits will visit underserved communities throughout Saskatchewan.

Additional finalists: Odlá Restaurant and Market, Saskatoon; Aquatic Adventures, Regina Beach



Service Excellence Award
Northern Lights Vintage Spa, Maple Creek

Northern Lights Vintage Spa offers holistic wellness services in an old world setting with vintage décor. The spa offers a growing selection of services that are considered the cutting-edge

of wellness. Treatments are customized for the unique needs of each client. Therapeutic services include homeopathic medicine, thermography, counselling services, acupuncture, advanced foot treatments and aesthetic services. A beautiful reception area, themed treatment rooms, calming music and the scent of essential oils create the start of an immersive spa experience. Every room is welcoming and the team is dedicated to ensuring that each client leaves feeling centered, relaxed and pampered. A small boutique offers a selection of Canadian-made wellness products. The spa’s commitment to attentive and generous service resulted in the business doubling year over year, despite a number of challenges that included a devastating fire.

Additional finalists: Farm One Forty, Vanscoy; Scott Lake Lodge, Scott Lake



Tourism Employee of the Year Award

Arnold McKenzie, Legislative Assembly Service of Saskatchewan, Regina

In 2019, Arnold McKenzie celebrated his 35th year of service as an Information Officer at the Legislative

Assembly Service of Saskatchewan (LAS). Over his 35 years, McKenzie dedicated himself to developing tours and programming, and providing visitors with memorable experiences. He was a fount of knowledge about the history of the Legislative Building and the province of Saskatchewan, and well-known by tourists and school groups alike. His good humour and love of people saw him requested by many booking tours of the Legislative Building. In his time with the LAS, McKenzie developed an excellent rapport with the public and displayed a phenomenal ability to make people feel at ease and engaged on his tours. He trained two generations of Visitor Services staff and passed on a wealth of experience and information. McKenzie retired in mid-2019.

Additional finalists: Katie Willie, Wanuskewin, Saskatoon; Robert Holden, Firesong, Fowler Lake



Tourism Employer of the Year Award

CAA Saskatchewan

Established in Saskatchewan in 1917, CAA is an internationally recognized brand with a presence in every province in Canada, representing 5.2 million

members, and an affiliation with the 50-million-member American Automobile Association (AAA) in the United States. In May 2019, CAA was named the most trusted brand in Canada by Gustavson Brand Trust Index. Over the past 10 years, CAA Saskatchewan's goal has been to provide excellence in customer service, which has proven to translate to higher engagement and satisfaction for its employees and customers. Two knowledgeable and experienced staff members lead training for new and existing employees and are in-house facilitators for Service Best Customer Service and Selling is Service training. As an Employer of Choice, CAA Saskatchewan strives to attract and retain staff through a mix of incentives, opportunities for advancement in the tourism industry and a respectful, dynamic workplace.

Additional finalists: The Atlas Hotel, Regina; Gold Eagle Lodge, North Battleford



Travel Media Award Jenn Sharp, Saskatoon

Jenn Sharp's entertaining culinary stories promote Saskatchewan as a savoury travel destination. Sharp has been a journalist, food writer and editor in the province for over a decade. She was the

editor of *Bridges* at the *Saskatoon StarPhoenix* and *QC* at the *Regina Leader-Post* from 2011-2015, where she told stories that connected people to their communities and promoted Saskatchewan on a larger scale. Currently, Sharp is a freelance journalist for Postmedia Network, where she writes the weekly Flat Out Food column. Her culinary writing has also appeared on CBC Saskatchewan and Eat North. Her first book, a food-focused travelogue called *Flat Out Delicious: Your Definitive Guide to Saskatchewan's Food Artisans*, was published in April by TouchWood Editions. During her research for the book, Sharp started social media accounts on several platforms that publicize food artisans, sustainable agriculture, Saskatchewan's abundant natural beauty and its robust local food system.

Additional finalists: Kevin Dunn, Saskatoon; Karen Pinchin, Boston, MA

TOURISM BUILDER AWARD RECIPIENTS



Brad Muir, Anglin Lake

Brad Muir has left an indelible imprint on Saskatchewan's tourism industry during almost 40 years of involvement and leadership. He is a proud ambassador for the province and credited with promoting its natural beauty and stewarding ecological health of the lands and waters, while expanding visitors' knowledge. Inspired by the province's northern lakes and boreal forest, he has shaped memorable experiences for travellers from near and far. His work has furthered understanding of the relationship between delicate ecosystems and human activities. Muir was a nature/heritage interpreter in Prince Albert National Park for 30 years. He helped lay the groundwork for experiential, nature-based tourism in Saskatchewan. In 1997, he launched Sundogs Excursions, which offers dogsledding experiences and fosters appreciation of the animals, the boreal forest ecology and the guest's place

in the ecosystem. Sundogs Excursions became an award-winning company and a Canadian Signature Experience. Muir wears many hats – host, interpreter, teacher, mentor, photographer, as well as author of numerous articles about national parks, nature and dogsledding. Through his volunteer work, he helped develop Heritage Interpreter certification standards, train interpreters and mentor operators. He is widely admired for his intelligent and affable way of promoting ideas for tourism and encouraging others to develop and implement their passions.



Gordon Olson, Big River

Gordon Olson has been a tourism champion and leader for more than 30 years. His commitment to the Ness Creek Site, near Big River, has transformed part of the boreal forest into a popular, year-round destination where music, art, culture and recreation are celebrated. Olson has a gift for forging partnerships and encouraging people to dream big and take risks. His drive for overcoming obstacles and getting the job done is unyielding. He recognized that an open meadow in the forest, which once pastured cattle, could take on a new life. The Ness Creek site today hosts four annual music festivals, a biennial international artists collaboration, art and music camps, fall faire and annual winter festival. With 20 km of cross-country ski trails, snowshoe trails, cabin rentals and other features, the site is a popular winter getaway. Olson always sees the "big picture" and his vision has inspired enhancements, such as a permaculture forest garden and 4,000-sq. ft. event facility. He is described as

"an alchemist in bringing the right people and resources together, and imbuing them with his passion and child-like wonder at the beauty of this space. That's what creates the magic of Ness Creek."



Dr. Ernie Walker, Saskatoon

Dr. Ernie Walker, O.C. is a driving force behind Wanuskewin, a national historic site and one of Saskatchewan's flagship attractions. His connections to the area run deep, stretching back to his youth. In the 1980s, he worked with Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders to develop the concept for Wanuskewin. He set in motion partnerships with the Province of Saskatchewan, City of Saskatoon, Meewasin Valley Authority and University of Saskatchewan. Walker has led archaeological excavation in the Opimihaw Valley for over 40 years, making it the longest continually operating dig site in Canada. His work confirms that for over 6,400 years, Wanuskewin has been a gathering place visited by every cultural group indigenous to the Northern Plains. He has worked tirelessly on the campaign to expand Wanuskewin and seek designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. As a

place where the arts, science, ecology, Indigenous history and culture, and the environment all come into focus, Wanuskewin has made a strong case. Walker's vision has driven an ambitious renewal plan with goals for expanding the land base and returning pure Plains bison to the area. In December 2019, Wanuskewin introduced its new residents – six bison calves from Grasslands National Park and five adults from the United States, with ancestral ties to Yellowstone National Park.

ExploreSask Photo Contest showcases impressive talent and images

Tourism Saskatchewan is pleased to announce the winning submissions in the 2020 ExploreSask Photo Contest. The competition, launched in June, received over 3,800 entries by the September 15 deadline.

One winning photo, together with a selection of honourable mentions, were chosen for each of the six categories. The striking photographs

Grand Prize Winner: Craig Hilts, Swift Current, SK

PEOPLE

Winner: Megan Lacelle, Cabri, SK

Honourable Mention: Mariane Andrade, Regina, SK; Indrasish Banerjee, Regina, SK; Landon Johnson, Saskatoon, SK; Robin Lafond, Shell Lake, SK; Jeff Ortiz, Regina, SK

PLACES

Winner: Craig Hilts, Swift Current, SK

Honourable Mentions: Keegan Birrell, Regina, SK; Colleen Edwards, Herbert, SK; Chad Letain, Regina, SK; Lee Miller, Regina, SK; Laurie Murray, Saltcoats, SK; Wendy Richards, Regina, SK

PRAIRIE

Winner: Lee Miller, Regina, SK

Honourable Mentions: Wayne Iverson, Regina, SK (two images); Casey Marshall, Regina, SK; Lee Miller, Regina, SK; Stacy Symenuk, Central Butte, SK

capture the province's natural beauty and dynamic spirit, and feature extraordinary landscapes, diverse experiences, magnificent wildlife and the unique character of Saskatchewan people.

Visit [TourismSaskatchewan.com/Photo-Contest](https://www.tourismsaskatchewan.com/Photo-Contest) to view the award-winning images.

WATER

Winner: Larry Easton, Regina, SK

Honourable Mentions: Larry Easton, Regina, SK; Craig Hilts, Swift Current, SK; Lee Miller, Regina, SK (two images); Sarah Rolles, Saskatoon, SK

WILDLIFE

Winner: Tracy Kerestesh, Melville, SK

Honourable Mentions: Brooke Bzdel, Wynyard, SK; Craig Hilts, Swift Current, SK; Tracy Kerestesh, Melville, SK; Chad Letain, Regina, SK; John Cameron MacNeal, Watson, SK; Jenna Thiessen, Saskatoon, SK

WOODS

Winner: Jenna Thiessen, Saskatoon, SK

Honourable Mentions: Keegan Birrell, Regina, SK; Lynette Cuming, Saskatoon, SK; Wayne Iverson, Regina, SK; Heather Parker, Balgonie, SK; Clara Superbie, Saskatoon, SK; Gerrard Rousseaux, Regina, SK



Top row, left to right: Craig Hilts (Grand Prize Winner/Places); Megan Lacelle (People); Lee Miller (Prairie)
Bottom row, left to right: Larry Easton (Water); Tracy Kerestesh (Wildlife); Jenna Thiessen (Woods)

Saskatchewanderer Leah Mertz turns challenges into new opportunities and discoveries



2020 Saskatchewanderer Leah Mertz



Relaxing at Waters Edge Eco Lodge



Campfire moment at Great Blue Heron Provincial Park

Saskatoon-based musician, voiceover artist and content creator Leah Mertz was introduced as the 2020 Saskatchewanderer in February. She dove straight into planning a busy schedule of visits to communities, destinations and events throughout the province. When not on the road, her focus was on editing content, posting stories and videos on social channels and engaging with the more than 100,000 Saskatchewanderer followers.

COVID-19 brought travel and large gatherings to an abrupt halt, and challenged Mertz to explore Saskatchewan in new ways, shift some topics and employ different storytelling approaches. One of her first projects after lockdown was a YouTube video titled *Being a Farmer During a Pandemic* that emphasized the safety of Canada's food chain and examined the uncertainty and stress among agricultural communities in the early weeks of the pandemic.

By mid-June, Mertz was out on the road more, exploring the province and bringing attention to tourism businesses and operators who were doing their utmost to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Food became a recurring theme that highlighted Saskatchewan's diverse flavours and delicious menus – from the Baby Got Bannock Food Truck in Prince Albert to Dejma's Curry House in North Battleford.

"The pandemic really made me appreciate the people that bring our province's hospitality industry to life . . . so much dedication, drive and sacrifice goes into the things we enjoy every day," Mertz said. "As far as innovative actions and responses to COVID-19, there were many restaurants that straight up built their own drive-through service in their parking lot. D'Lish by Tish Cafe in Saskatoon was one of the first that I saw doing this, and truly showed people's tenacity and will to overcome."

Mertz also acknowledged the fact that restaurants are increasingly using contact-free QR code menus. "They are a simple way to give people peace of mind when they dine out," she said.

Being the Saskatchewanderer during a global pandemic tested Mertz to experiment with different techniques to share Saskatchewan stories. Initial plans to collect comprehensive video footage and assemble a number of "mini" travel documentaries gave way to approaches that addressed the seriousness of the pandemic, adhered to public health orders and stressed the importance of physical distancing, hand hygiene, masks and recommended precautions to prevent transmission of COVID-19. She became an advocate for safe and responsible travel in addition to being an ambassador for Saskatchewan.

Mertz is making the most of every moment in the last weeks of her term. She shifted to photo journalism-style pieces complemented by video to feature as many tourism destinations and businesses as she can in the time remaining.

Water's Edge Eco Lodge in Meadow Lake Provincial Park has been on her "must visit" list for some time. She finally made the trek in October.

"The year-round operation is the pinnacle way to take in the natural beauty of the area while enjoying comfortable accommodations," Mertz said. "It's a truly family operation with many hard-working people involved. They are also avid about it being an environmentally sustainable operation and are mindful of this in everything they do."

"No matter what time of year, Water's Edge Eco Lodge is a must-stay destination," she added. "Guests can enjoy cross country skiing and ice skating in the winter, bountiful wildlife in the spring, water sports and hiking in the summer, and a spectacular bouquet of autumn colours in fall."

Follow the Saskatchewanderer on Facebook (facebook.com/skwanderer), Twitter ([@SkWanderer](https://twitter.com/SkWanderer)) or Instagram ([@saskatchewanderer](https://instagram.com/saskatchewanderer)). Keep up with the latest blogs on YouTube (youtube.com/user/skwandererofficial) or saskatchewanderer.ca.

Approaching its 11th year, the Saskatchewanderer program is a partnership between Tourism Saskatchewan and the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport. It engages a full-time, four-season "ambassador" whose discoveries are shared on social media and promote the many reasons why Saskatchewan is a great place to live, work and visit.

Conexus Credit Union came on board as the new title sponsor in 2020. CAA Saskatchewan was back in the driver's seat as official vehicle sponsor, and provided the Saskatchewanderer with a vehicle, CAA membership and gas vouchers.

Remembering William Shurniak, S.O.M., M.S.M., LL.D (Hon)

Saskatchewan's tourism and cultural industries lost a champion and visionary with the passing of William (Bill) Shurniak in August at the age of 89.

Shurniak was born on the family farm at Limerick, SK and educated at the local school. His banking career began at the Imperial Bank of Commerce in Assiniboia, followed by 35 years in postings across Canada, and in Jamaica and Hong Kong. In 1984, he returned to Hong Kong for a CFO position with Hutchison Whampoa Limited and remained active in the Li Ka-shing group of companies. In 2019, he reflected on his seventy years of employment with essentially two companies.

Aside from his work in finance that would take him around the world, Shurniak was an avid art collector. He amassed a collection of original paintings, sculptures and artifacts that included works by Canadian and European artists, Indigenous art from Canada and Australia, Asian pieces, and hand-crafted items from across the globe.

In 2005, he returned to his family home and opened the Shurniak Art Gallery in Assiniboia to share his impressive collection with the public. The gallery was a gift to Saskatchewan on its 100th birthday. "Art is to be appreciated by people of all walks of life," he frequently said.



The Shurniak Art Gallery put Assiniboia on the map in art circles and became a valuable tourism asset for the area. Displays include works from the permanent collection and visiting solo exhibitions by invited artists. The facility also provides office and exhibition space to the Assiniboia and District Arts Council. An annual artist retreat (postponed in 2020) became a popular summer event that attracted visitors to the community.

Shurniak received Honorary Doctor of Laws degrees from the Universities of Regina, Saskatchewan and Western Ontario. He was inducted into the Saskatchewan Order of Merit in 2009. The Governor General of Canada presented him with the Meritorious Service Medal in 2016.

Stephanie Clovechok named Tourism Saskatoon President & CEO

Tourism Saskatoon announced that appointment of Stephanie Clovechok to the position of President & CEO in October. Clovechok takes over from Todd Brandt, who recently retired after leading the organization for 22 years.

She joined Tourism Saskatoon as Vice President in 2017. Prior to her move to Saskatchewan, she worked with Travel Alberta in Calgary. As Vice-President, she led the development of strategies to sophisticate Saskatoon's presence on the world stage. Throughout 2020, she has been instrumental in positioning Tourism Saskatoon and sector partners on a path to recovery and rebuilding a prosperous visitor economy.



Heritage Saskatchewan earns UNESCO accreditation

In October, Heritage Saskatchewan announced that it received non-governmental organization (NGO) accreditation from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage (ICH). Following the ICH UNESCO General Assembly's Convention in September, Heritage Saskatchewan was recognized for its competence in the field of ICH.

More than 178 countries have signed the Convention. Although Canada is not a signatory, nine Canadian heritage and cultural organizations have been successful in receiving the NGO accreditation and can, therefore,

participate in educational and advisory opportunities. In its role, Heritage Saskatchewan will act as an advisor to the UNESCO ICH Committee, while continuing to be a leader in safeguarding ICH in Saskatchewan.

UNESCO describes ICH as including "oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts."

RESEARCH AND TRENDS (continued)

Trails linked to better health and economic recovery



Boreal Trail, Meadow Lake Provincial Park. Photo by Ashlyn George.

"Trails could be an important catalyst for economic growth given their focus on local communities and trail usage being a relatively COVID-19 safe activity."

Trekking Our Trails: the Benefits and Significance of Canada's Trail System

In September, The Conference Board of Canada released a report that highlights the valuable role of trails as Canada continues to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic. Trans Canada Trail commissioned the research.

Titled *Trekking Our Trails: the Benefits and Significance of Canada's Trail System*, the report outlines the economic, health and conservation benefits that trails provide.

The Great Trail of Canada is one of the world's longest network of recreational trails and offers a wide variety of activities and routes in urban, rural and wilderness areas. At least six different types of physical activities can be enjoyed – walking/hiking, cycling, paddling, horseback riding, cross-country skiing and snowmobiling.

Despite the wealth of offerings, few studies have evaluated Canada's trails. This new report is timely and underscores the importance of trails in countering some of the negative effects of COVID-19; aiding tourism and economic recovery; improving mental and physical health; and protecting the environment.

Trails lead to economic advantages

Trail construction and maintenance signals employment and benefits at a local level, but also more widely through supply-chain and income-related effects (p5-6). Once complete, they contribute to the economy through user spending on food, equipment, overnight accommodations

and other items. Economic benefits can further increase with strategic promotion of activities and events that showcase trails. Furthermore, property values tend to be higher in areas where there is investment in trails.

Healthy activities in the outdoors

Spending time in nature is healthy. The report draws a correlation between access to trails and increases in physical activity, decreases in chronic illnesses, better mental and physical health and enhanced quality of life. Additional savings are credited to reduced health care costs and fewer accidents because of safer spaces for exercise and transit activities, such as cycling, walking, etc.

Research indicates that physical activity and exposure to nature can improve mental health (p9). This is important to consider, given the fallout from COVID-19 and sky-rocketing levels of mental stress.

Trails contribute to tourism and economic recovery

Citing trails as a catalyst for recovery of the Canadian economy, the report states (p11):

"Living in a pandemic reality, it is crucial that Canada is able to capitalize on many activities that can provide strong economic growth while still remaining relatively safe from COVID-19. Trails are well-positioned to provide a boost to economic activity as they are outdoors and users can easily physically distance. They also provide mental health benefits, which are needed in a time when people are still being encouraged to stay home and may feel isolated."

The document emphasizes the need for more research to determine longer-term strategies for marketing Canada's nature sector and attracting more international visitors to the nation's parks and trails. In the short-term, a focus on the domestic market is recommended. Encouraging Canadians to discover the nation's trails is perhaps more important now than ever before.

These two findings (p3) are especially relevant:

- Trail-trekking is a uniquely safe activity in time of physical distancing. Evidence from both within and outside of Canada indicates growing use of trails during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Worldwide trends show a role for nature-based activities in reviving tourism. Initiatives and collaboration to encourage more Canadians to use trails should be considered.

To read *Trekking Our Trails: the Benefits and Significance of Canada's Trail System*, visit thegreattrail.ca/news.

Source:

Conference Board of Canada. *Trekking Our Trails: the Benefits and Significance of Canada's Trail System*, 2020.

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