



HMATA Strategic Plan 2023 - 2025

Building to be Ontario's #1 resort destination visitor economy

Huntsville Municipal Accommodation Tax Association

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	.3
Introduction and Mandate	.8
Methodology	.9
Situational Analysis	.10
Stakeholder Research & Themes	.11
SWOT	.13
Destination Footprint	.14
Vision and Mission	.15
Strategic Direction 2025	.16
Strategic Priorities	.17
Key Performance Indicators	.30
Major Milestones	.31

Executive Summary

In April 2022 the Huntsville Municipal Tax Association (HMATA) contracted FLOOR13 (F13) to develop a three-year strategic plan, covering the period of 2023 – 2025. At the time, F13 was well along in the process of developing a strategic plan for Muskoka Tourism and had gained valuable knowledge of the Muskoka tourism landscape and the dynamics of the broader destination; F13 has since been able to utilize this knowledge effectively in its examination of HMATA, Huntsville and its upcoming planning period.

While the strategic plan is not intended to act as a Covid pandemic recovery plan, it is intended to provide HMATA with an appropriate focus and direction over this period, aimed at strengthening the organization's governance model, and achieving strong results related to destination brand awareness, strategic alignments and its visitor economy. The HMATA board of directors approved this plan on October 20th, 2022

Project Scope and Methodologies

The project scope includes the following methodologies:

- Situational Analysis
- Stakeholder Research
- SWOT Analysis
- Redrafting of Vision and Mission statements
- Identification of Strategic Direction 2025
- Development of Strategic Priorities
- Strategies and Actions
- KPI's and Milestones

Executive Summary

Stakeholder Research and Themes

A significant amount of research and stakeholder input that was conducted as part of the Muskoka Tourism process was highly relevant to the stakeholder research phase of the HMATA strategic plan. However, it was necessary to conduct research specific to HMATA and Huntsville, and accordingly a Stakeholder Visioning Session was conducted on June 14, 2022, as well as an online survey of stakeholders within the Huntsville tourism area. The research provided a wide variety of input, and the most pertinent points were consolidated into the following themes:

- Huntsville's DNA
- Huntsville's role within the Muskoka brand
- HMATA expectations
- Huntsville success factors

Executive Summary

Redrafting of Vision and Mission Statements

F13 was specifically asked to prepare a set of renewed V&M statements which would reflect the future role and growth of the organization and the destination. The following are intended to commence a Board discussion about the statements' merits and relevance, ultimately leading to board approval of new statements.

Vision:

We will become Ontario's most visited year-round destination made possible by our engaged community and tourism industry.

Mission:

Our Mission is to inspire year-round sustainable growth of Huntsville's visitor economy, by working with our local and regional partners to motivate visitors to enjoy our unique brand of community hospitality and Muskoka experiences.

Executive Summary

Strategic Direction 2025

Strategic Direction 2025 reflects the desired state of HMATA's accomplishments and operating environment as a result of successfully implementing the strategic plan, and provides the focus for the further development of the plan's Strategic Priorities and strategies. Ultimately the successful implementation of the strategic plan will be measured against the degree by which the following *Holy Grail* statement is a reality by 2025:

"As a result of having successfully executed the 2023 – 2025 Strategic Plan, Huntsville has become Ontario's most vibrant and successful four-season resort destination. Strategic partnership opportunities between HMATA and Muskoka Tourism have resulted in quantum increases in repeat visitations throughout the year, driven by the destination's unique brand offering of events that reflect its cultural and sustainable offerings, committed stakeholders and employees, and an enviable community lifestyle."

Executive Summary

Strategic Priorities

Supporting the Strategic Direction 2025, Strategic Priorities are the engine intended to power the organization's growth and achievements during the three-year planning period. The Strategic Priorities are essentially the "how to" of the Strategic Direction 2025, and lead to the further development of actionable strategies and tactics:

1. Establishment of a Huntsville Destination Marketing Organization
2. Maturation of Huntsville as a four-season resort destination
3. Strategic alignment between HMATA and Muskoka Tourism
4. Advancement of the community visitor experience
5. Establishment of a culture of sustainable tourism growth.

The Strategic Priorities are supported by a variety of strategies and actions intended to achieve each one, measured by KPI's and Major Milestones.....ultimately leading to the accomplishment of the Strategic Direction 2025 and overall success for the organization and destination.

Introduction and Mandate

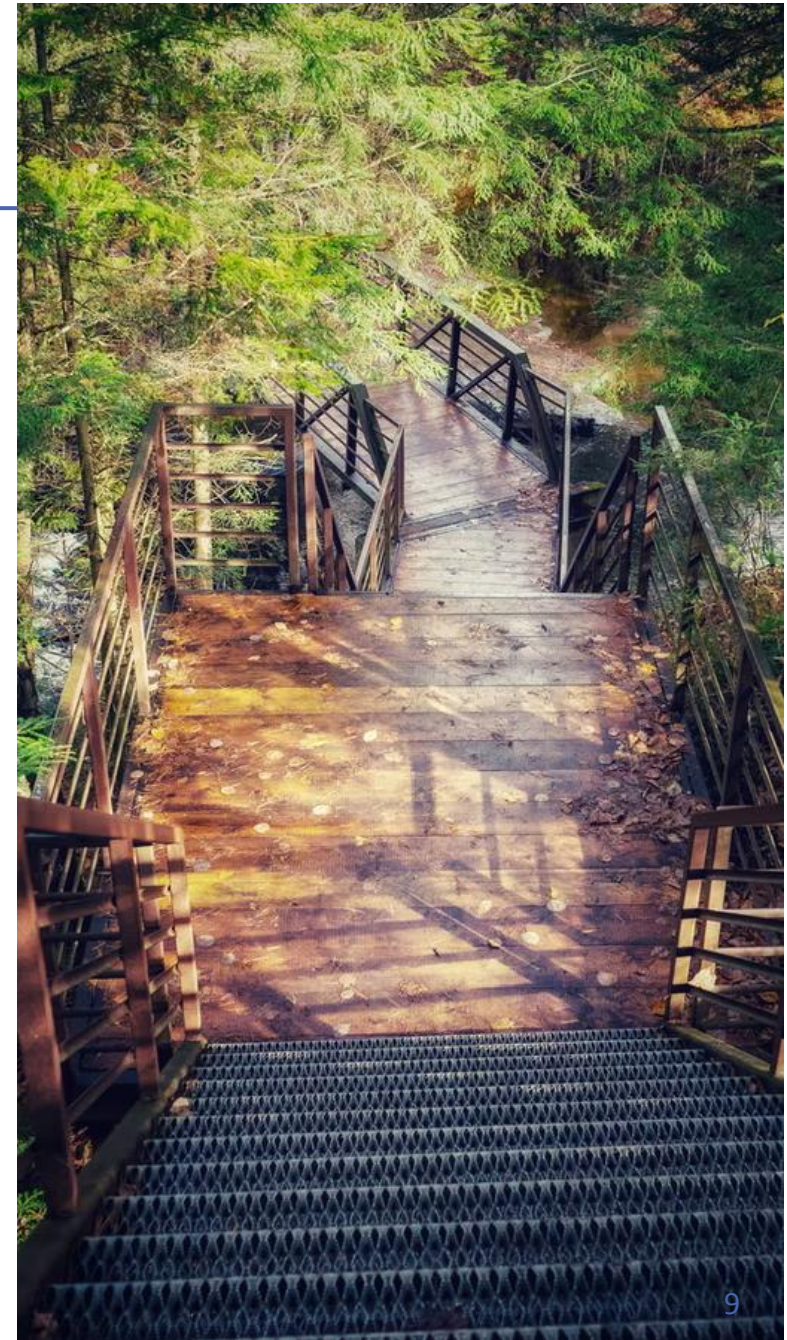
The Huntsville Municipal Accommodation Tax Association (HMATA) was formed in 2020 following the introduction of the municipal accommodation tax by the Huntsville Town Council. The revenues generated from this tax are designed for the promotion of tourism related initiatives meant to increase tourism awareness and generate economic prosperity for the town through its tourism industry. As this tax was introduced at the start of the Covid pandemic, HMATA did not have the opportunity to properly develop a longer-term strategic plan but rather was thrust into a short-term planning cycle.

HMATA is now positioned to better plan for its future and initiate a 3-year strategic plan which will guide it and the Huntsville tourism sector towards a more structured path, and ultimately greater success for the town and its stakeholders. The plan was approved by the HMATA board on October 20th, 2022.



Methodology

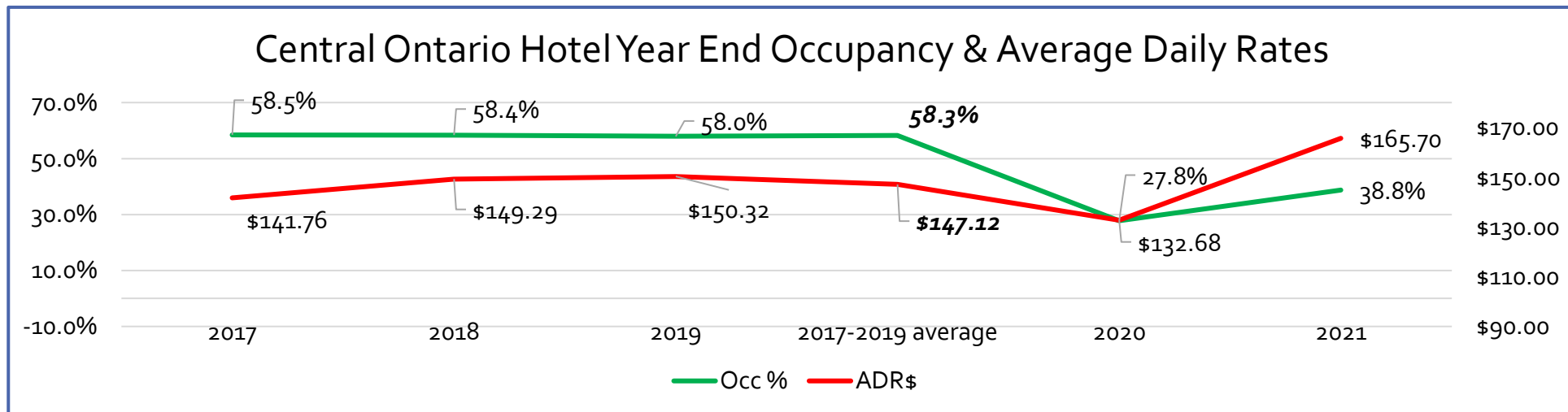
The HMATA tourism strategic plan was elaborated from February to August 2022. The process was comprised of desk top research, in-house data, market analysis, benchmarking and outreach to tourism stakeholders throughout the region, culminating in a comprehensive plan setting a clear strategic path to grow Huntsville's visitor economy.



Situational Analysis

The Huntsville Municipal Accommodation Tax Association (HMATA) has for the last 24 months concentrated on ensuring Huntsville remains top of mind during the Covid pandemic with visitors looking to escape the GTA for a short holiday. Already known as a popular summer destination with a steady pre-pandemic occupancy, HMATA has initiated several marketing programs, and in cooperation with the town, initiated events with the goal to extending the season.

As the world opens up again to longer haul travel, HMATA wants to ensure that the gains achieved over the last few years can continue to gain traction and create a year-round loyal visitor following. Well recognized as a summer destination, HMATA hopes, with the help of its tourism partners and stakeholders, to create demand throughout the year and establish the Huntsville area as a four-season destination.



Source: CBRE National Market Reports

Stakeholder Research & Themes

Stakeholder sessions were held online as well as in-person throughout this process. In all, over 80 stakeholders were reached to garner their thoughts on the future of tourism within Huntsville. Several main themes arose from these discussions.



Huntsville's DNA:

- A four seasons resort destination offering an array of soft adventure connectivity options (Parks, ski, lakes and trails)
- A vibrant arts and cultural scene
- A picturesque downtown and riverfront
- Cottage country
- A strong work-life balance offering throughout the region



Huntsville's role within the Muskoka brand:

- Leverage the Muskoka brand to bolster Huntsville's positioning and notoriety
- Overarching alignment between the two entities on marketing strategies
- Sharing resources and/or jointly coordinating initiatives (business intelligence, media relations, technology)
- Huntsville to advocate for more funding for Tourism Muskoka as keeper of the brand
- Muskoka Tourism to deliver on destination marketing and Huntsville to deliver on local experiences and products

Stakeholder Research & Themes cont'd



HMATA expectations:

- HMATA must define clearly its role within the Muskoka region tourism environment (RTO, Chamber, Tourism Muskoka, BIA's)
- Spearhead growth of visitations and visitor spend within Huntsville (overnight, day visitors and locals)
- Encourage new product development
- Work closely with local stakeholders to move tourism forward and advocate for the industry locally
- Be transparent, accountable and communicate to stakeholders and residents alike



Huntsville's success factors:

- Be Ontario's most successful resort destination
- Increase year-round repeat visitation to the town and region through increased product experiences and options
- Ensure sustainable growth of the local tourism economy to help retain work force
- Increase overall annual occupancy rates
- A recognizable tourism brand

SWOT

STRENGTHS

- Well known tourism destination
- Large hotel inventory
- All season resort (lakes, golf, fishing, skiing, snowmobile)
- Entertainment (Arts and culture scene)
- Ample services
- Adjacent to Algonquin Park
- Airport
- MAT revenues
- Well integrated as part of the Muskoka brand identity

OPPORTUNITIES

- Arts and culture tourism
- The Muskoka brand
- New Canadians markets
- Northern Ontario markets
- Popularity of soft adventure and outdoor activities (trails, Park, lakes)
- International markets
- Large events
- Airbnb MAT fund implementation
- Educate local residents on benefits of a strong tourism economy

WAEKNESES

- Furthest from GTA (drive time)
- Reputation as expensive (playground to the rich)
- Lack of all-inclusive packaging
- Lack of business intelligence
- Polarized local community against tourism growth
- Shoulder seasons (November and April mid week)

THREATS

- Blue Mountain packaging
- Tremblant packaging and direct flights from Toronto
- Rising gas prices
- Anti-tourism populous movement within town
- Labour shortage
- A lack of renewal of existing products

Destination Footprint

Destinations are defined by what they have to offer the visitor economy through their natural assets, infrastructure and reputation. Huntsville has the benefit of several recognizable and marketable assets as part of its footprint. The strategic plan will focus on these as the backdrop for growing Huntsville's visitor economy.



Soft Adventure



Arts & Culture



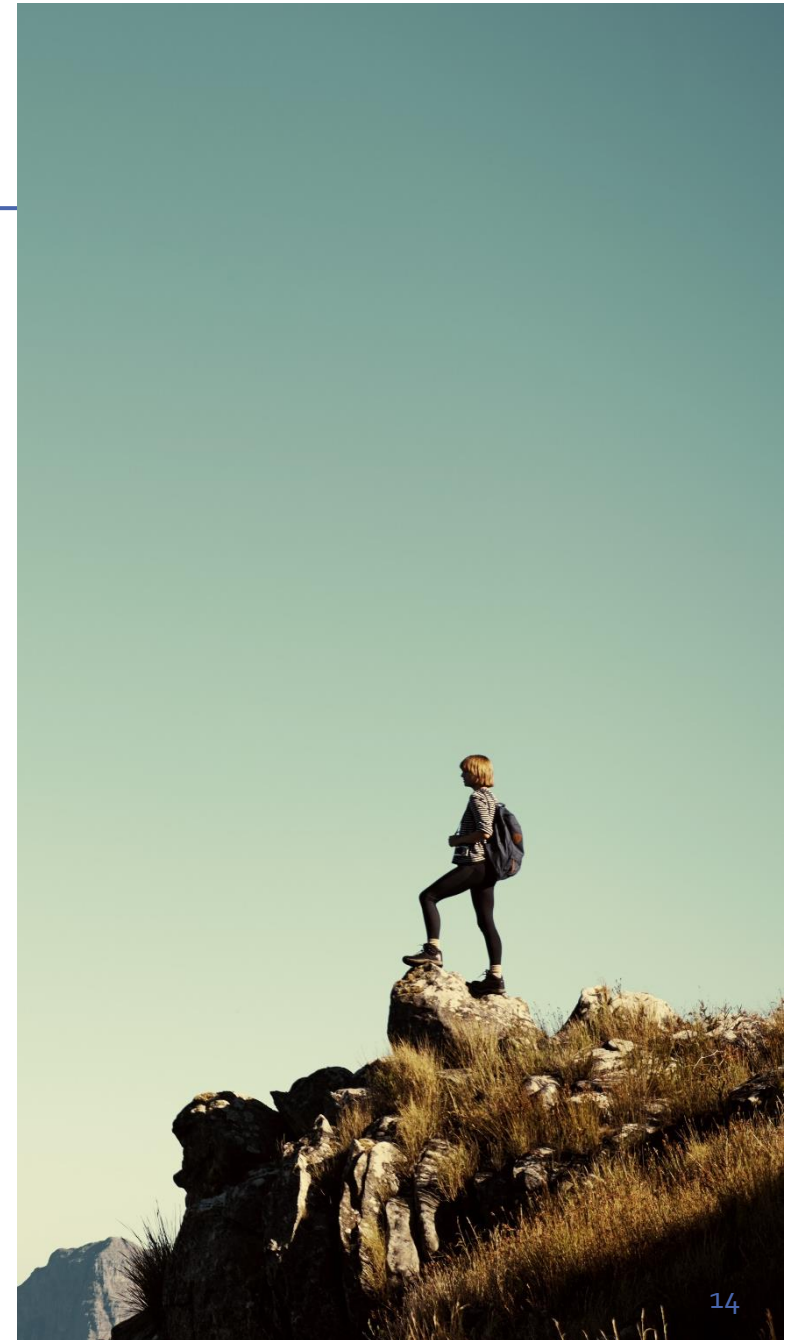
Culinary



Amateur
Sports



Town
Ambience



Vision and Mission

Vision:

We will become Ontario's most visited year-round destination made possible by our engaged community and tourism industry.

Mission:

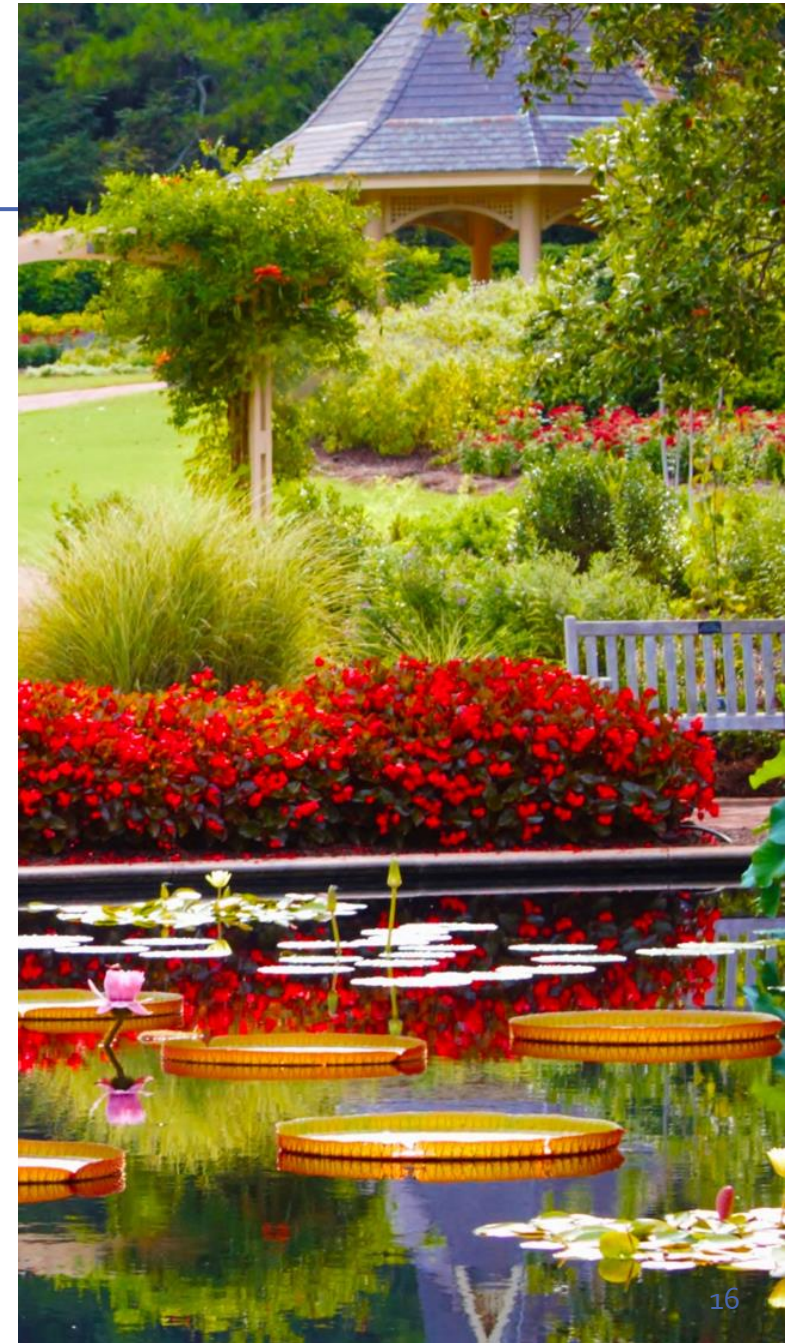
Our Mission is to inspire year-round sustainable growth of Huntsville's visitor economy, by working with our local and regional partners to motivate visitors to enjoy our unique brand of community hospitality and Muskoka experiences.



Strategic Direction 2025

Looking ahead the strategic plan aims to achieve success and economic prosperity for the town and its residents, as well as for its industry stakeholders. In order to ensure a focused planning process, the following **Strategic Direction 2025** has been developed as the Plan's *Holy Grail*:

As a result of having successfully executed the 2022 – 2025 Strategic Plan, Huntsville has become Ontario's most vibrant and successful four-season resort destination. Strategic partnership opportunities between HMATA and Muskoka Tourism have resulted in quantum increases in repeat visitations throughout the year, driven by the destination's unique brand offering of events that reflect its cultural and sustainable offerings, committed stakeholders and employees, and an enviable community lifestyle



Strategic Priorities

Five key strategic priorities have been identified, aimed at supporting the Strategic Direction of the plan and to continuously evolve and grow the visitor economy in the Huntsville area.

- 1- Establishment of a Huntsville Destination Marketing Organization
- 2- Maturation of Huntsville as a four-season destination
- 3- Strategic alignment between HMATA and Muskoka Tourism
- 4- Advancement of the community visitor experience
- 5- Establishment of a culture of sustainable tourism growth



1- Establishment of a Huntsville DMO

Rationale

With the introduction of the MAT in 2020, HMATA now has the means and opportunity to refine its approach to increasing Huntsville's visitations by forming a dedicated Destination Marketing Organization, solely aimed at growing the town's visitor economy. Working in close collaboration with the town and regional partners, HMATA would ensure Huntsville's dominant position as a 4-season destination in Muskoka and within Ontario.

Primarily responsible for marketing the destination, the new DMO would also take a leadership role in:

- Travel trade and group sales initiatives
 - Working with receptive agencies to ensure Huntsville is part of Canadian and/or Eastern Canada itineraries for both group and FIT's
 - Identifying potential business event, sport and association business to bid on
- Business intelligence gathering and distribution
 - Clear, relevant, accurate and timely data gathering on visitor metrics and economic impact
- Stakeholder relations and collaboration
 - Working with local and regional stakeholders to establish relevant marketing initiatives, packaging and promotions
- Media relations
 - Attracting key media to report on Huntsville's product offerings and ensure earned and paid media distribution

Establishment of a Huntsville DMO cont'd

Rationale cont'd

- Product development aggregator
 - Generator of new product experience ideas and seed funding opportunities
 - Bringing together stakeholders to develop new experiences and packaging
- Trends analysis and research
 - Ensure Huntsville remains at the forefront of industry trends and innovations
- Local tourism advocacy
 - Advocating and educating for tourism as a major industry sector for the region
 - Developing communications tools and strategies that inform residents of the importance of tourism as an industry sector for the region

Establishment of a Huntsville DMO cont'd

Actions

Establish a working group of the HMATA board to transition the organization from the Chamber of Commerce to an independent industry-led not-for-profit organization	Q1 - 2023
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Revision of organization's status and mission ○ Review of governance (board) and by-laws. Establish working sub committees of the board (marketing, finance, product development), Board formation based on industry best practices ○ Revision of agency agreement with the town ○ Establishment of accountability and transparency criteria ○ Establishment of organizational KPI's ○ Transfer of existing CRM, intelligence, materials and digital assets 	
Establish legal status of the organization and any shared recourses with partner organization (Chamber and/or Town)	Q1 2023
Hiring of Executive Director and marketing manager	Q2 2023
Visitor-centric rebranding of the organization alone with a stand alone visitor centric web site and digital strategy	Q2 2023
Alignment of priorities with Muskoka Tourism and possible shared assets (business intel, media relations, visitor services, etc)	Q2 2023
Development of annual business/marketing plan	Q4 2023
Initiate stakeholder and community outreach and communications strategy	Q4 2023

2- Maturation of Huntsville as a four-season destination

Rationale

Huntsville, well recognized within Ontario's cottage country, has always benefited from a strong influx of summer residents and visitors alike. The high season (May to September) visitation levels are relatively stable and expected to remain so. The opportunity for substantial visitor growth lies in the shoulder and winter seasons, transforming Huntsville into a true four-season destination. The town and surrounding region already possess a variety of year-round experiences and product offerings, making the extension of the seasons an obvious area of opportunity.

Nevertheless, extending the seasons requires more than simply conducting additional marketing. In order to leverage all aspects of Huntsville's base products, HMATA must broaden its approach and involve the community at large in its planning. This can be translated into the following strategies:

- Deploying a majority of its marketing efforts towards bolstering the shoulder seasons
 - Commit to increasing the spend on target markets year-round
 - Development of additional products and experiences offered during these seasons
 - Enticing tourism partners to do the same
 - Target specific group segments for shoulder and winter seasons (MC&IT, amateur sports)
- Involving the business community in its plans and strategies
 - Ensuring cooperation from the whole of the business community to be tourism focused (remain open longer, offer incentives, participate in programs)

Maturation of Huntsville as a four-season destination cont'd

Rationale cont'd

- Educating the community on the benefits of year-round visitation
 - Enlist residents to play a part in welcoming visitors and realizing the corresponding economic impact
- Working in close cooperation with town authorities to incorporate tourism as a primary industry sector within its economic planning
 - Economic development strategies , by-laws and destination growth

Maturation of Huntsville as a four-season destination cont'd

Actions

Dedicate a majority (70%) of marketing spend to shoulder and winter season promotion	Ongoing
Initiate a product development committee of the board (Chaired by a member of the board with members from the tourism community at large, influencers)	Q2 2023
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Encourage product development initiatives with tourism stakeholders ○ Development of community initiatives in conjunction with the Town 	Ongoing
Work in conjunction with Chamber of Commerce and BIA to involve the business and retail community to participate in tourism initiatives (marketing, incentives)	Ongoing
Leverage the arts and cultural community as a priority product offering year-round	Ongoing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Packaging opportunities with industry partners ○ Joint digital strategy 	
Broaden the soft adventure product offering to include trails, skiing, snowmobiling, snow shoeing, biking	Ongoing
Leverage the culinary offering beyond the usual (food festivals, culinary passport, cooking classes, etc)	Ongoing

3- Strategic alignment between HMATA & Muskoka Tourism

Rationale

The Muskoka brand, so well recognized nationally and internationally, plays a key role in the marketing of the region and its partner towns. Leveraging this most iconic brand seems natural. Nevertheless, confusion still exists within the consumer's point of view as to exactly what the Muskoka brand represents in terms of specific visitor experiences and opportunities. This is hardly surprising given the multitude of entities (17) promoting tourism in the Muskoka region; therefore Huntsville must take a leadership position with its main partner, Muskoka Tourism

Huntsville remains the dominant tourism player in the Muskoka region, having the majority of the hotel inventory and MAT revenue as well as year-round product and experience offerings. Aligning messaging and strategies between the two organizations will help drive the overall visitor centric marketing of the region and help encourage other partners in the region to participate. This will help to establish a clear notion in the consumer's mind of what there is to experience in Huntsville and Muskoka.

Working together with Muskoka Tourism as well as RTO 12, HMATA and its local tourism stakeholders will benefit from a broader marketing strategy leveraging a greater overall in-market spend, ultimately generating more distribution to potential visitors.

Strategic alignment between HMATA & Muskoka Tourism cont'd

Actions

Define priority lanes for each organization	Q2 - 2023
Consider joint services (data gathering, press feed analysis, administrative services)	Q3 2023
Leverage the Muskoka brand as a complimentary brand within Huntsville's marketing initiatives	Ongoing
Ongoing communications between HMATA & Muskoka Tourism: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Joint marketing initiatives ○ Strategic direction (annual planning) ○ Communications strategy to visitors and community alike ○ Media and PR initiatives 	Ongoing
Development of new experience marketing (local and/or regional) which focus on and benefit shoulder and winter seasons	Ongoing
Leverage RTO12 marketing opportunities	Ongoing
Work with tourism stakeholders to leverage both the Huntsville and Muskoka brands within their own marketing initiatives	Ongoing
Stand-alone web presence with complimentary Muskoka initiatives	Ongoing

4- Advancement of the community visitor experience

Rationale

Today's visitor economy landscape has become highly competitive. Destinations have discovered the economic impact tourism can bring to their regions and hence have invested in growing this sector. Nevertheless, a destination's success goes well beyond product and marketing. Successful destinations understand that community participation in the visitor economy is as important as product. Today's traveller wants to connect with a destination on a deeper sense and by extension with its residents, culture and DNA.

Progressive DMO's understand that they play a role in ensuring the community (municipality, businesses, residents) fully participate in the visitor economy to enhance the overall visitor experience. Keeping this in mind, visitor benefits must positively impact residents as well. DMO's can influence the path to purchase but are limited in their ability to control the in-destination visitor experience, having to rely on others to manage this important portion of the visitor experience. The visitor experience can be defined in many ways but nonetheless tends to include some of the following elements:

Tangible

- Access
- Wayfinding
- Infrastructure
- Services
- Transportation
- Product access and variety

Non-tangible

- Hospitality
- Respectfulness
- Inclusiveness
- Courtesy
- Sharing
- Storytelling

Advancement of the overall community visitor experience cont'd

Actions

<p>Establish an open dialogue with municipal authorities and participate in planning where possible</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Economic development ○ Permitting ○ Parks and recreation ○ Roads and infrastructure 	Ongoing
Work with municipal authorities on the implementation of the city wayfinding strategy	2023
Present annual tourism business plan to municipal council	Yearly
Work with municipal authorities to designate tourism as major economic sector for the region and designate a tourism champion on town council	Q2 2023
Establish a top 10 list of potential tourism development investment projects with the economic development office	Q4 2023
Develop a community communication strategy in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce	Q3 2023
Initiate a yearly Tourism Town Hall session for the public to review past results and inform about coming initiatives	Q1 Yearly
Establish a visitor services strategy (info centre, apps, wayfinding)	2023-24

5- Establishment of a culture of sustainable tourism growth

Sustainable tourism touches on the environmental concerns of reduce, reuse and recycle but also on generating growth of the visitor economy within a region, while respecting and having a positive effect on local residents and the community at large. Positioning the destination with this in mind will help to properly identify the type of clientele best suited for Huntsville .

Several key elements involved in sustainable tourism growth include:

- Building and offering tourism products that work in harmony with existing infrastructure, hence reducing the overall impact of their introduction
- Consulting the community on tourism growth
- Dispersment of visitors throughout the region to minimize overflow
- Ensure visitors are aware of Huntsville's vision to minimize impact on the community
- Involve local Indigenous communities to play a part of Huntsville's tourism story and experiences
- Look to create legacy programs that can be used to bolster the appeal of the destination for the business events and sports markets
- Involve the local business community to participate in Huntsville's tourism story and initiatives to ensure visitors are exposed to these partners
- Create more opportunities to extend the length of stay to promote the concept of slow tourism
- Promote Huntsville's natural setting and the benefits related to health
- Work with the municipality and tourism stakeholders on initiatives that reduce the region's carbon footprint

Establish a culture of sustainable tourism growth cont'd

Actions

Create an industry sustainability working group with participation from the municipality and business community

Q3 - 2023

- Goal to develop a tourism sustainability plan
- Align with municipal sustainability plan where possible
- Ensure tourism industry buys into principles and implements measures where possible
- Communicate and create awareness of initiatives to the greater community and visitors

Use the Global Destination Sustainability Movement index as a guide to move toward accreditation

2024

Key Performance Indicators

A fully operational independent DMO by end of year 2023

A joint HMATA/MT shoulder and winter marketing program by Q3 2023





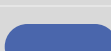


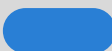


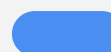


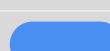
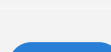
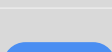
A completed tourism sustainability plan adopted by stakeholders by 2024

Two new shoulder season tourism experiences in market by end of year 2025

20% increase in shoulder & winter visitation by year end 2025 over 2017-2019 average

10% increase in occupancy by year end 2025 over 2017-2019 average

Major Milestones

	2023				2024				2025			
	1 st Q.	2 nd Q.	3 rd Q.	4 th Q.	1 st Q.	2 nd Q.	3 rd Q.	4 th Q.	1 st Q.	2 nd Q.	3 rd Q.	4 th Q.
Transition committee												
ED hiring												
Rebranding HMATA												
Product dev committee												
Priority lane setting w/ partners												
Joint services plan												
Annual business plan												
Community comm's plan												
Annual results reporting Town Hall												
Top 10 dev priority list												
Visitor services strategy												
Sustainability strategy												



Tourism Strategic Plan 2023-2025

Huntsville Municipal Accommodations Tax Association

37 Main Street East
Huntsville, Ontario, P1H 1A1

© Copyright (2022) All Rights Reserved

Produced by FLOOR13

