2025-2030
OKOTOKS TOURISM STRATEGY
Rooted in Charm, Built for Impact

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Land Acknowledgement	3
Executive Summary	4
Tourism in the Greater Okotoks Story	5
Why Tourism? Why Now?	5
Tourism & Community Priorities	6
Understanding the Current State of Tourism in Okotoks	7
Methodology	7
Community Engagement	9
Visitor Snapshot	11
The Future of Tourism in Okotoks	13
A Destination Ready to Flourish	13
Quadruple Bottom Line for Tourism in Okotoks	14
Building the Future of Tourism in Okotoks	15
Pillar 1: Tourism Management & Collaboration	15
Pillar 2: Destination Development	16
Pillar 3: Product and Experience Development	18
Pillar 4: Marketing & Promotion	18
Next Steps	20
Bringing the Strategy to Life	20

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Town of Okotoks acknowledges the original stewards of this land that we know and call Treaty 7 Territory, which includes the Blackfoot Confederacy First Nations the Kainai, Siksika and Piikani. The Stoney Nakoda First Nations, which includes the Bearspaw, Chiniki and Goodstoney, the Dene First Nation of Tsuut'ina and the Metis Nation of Alberta. We Vow to continue honouring and respecting the Indigenous Peoples Sacred and Traditional ways of life and will carry on this special relationship with the land so that generations to come can enjoy, use, and live off the land as their ancestors did. We honour and respect this space, the water, the animals, and all the beings who have a spirit and have been here long before us

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2025-2030 Tourism Strategy will provide the Town of Okotoks with a clear, actionable framework to manage tourism in a way that supports local businesses, preserves the community's small-town charm, and reflects what residents value most.

Okotoks already attracts visitors drawn to its vibrant events, natural beauty, unique shops, and welcoming atmosphere. However, until now, there hasn't been a unified approach to guide tourism growth. This strategy offers a shared vision, ensuring that tourism develops in ways that benefit both visitors and residents alike.

Grounded in extensive community input, research, and the Town's unique strengths, the strategy is about more than simply welcoming more visitors. It's about using tourism to create local jobs, enhance public spaces, protect the environment, and celebrate what makes Okotoks truly special.

Pillar 1: Tourism Management & Collaboration

The Town will take the lead in tourism planning, working closely with residents, businesses, and community partners. A dedicated Tourism Advisory Group will help guide decisions, ensuring that tourism development is shaped by the community's voice.

Pillar 2: Destination Development

Improvements to signage, visitor information, and public spaces will make Okotoks even more accessible and inviting. These enhancements will not only enrich the visitor experience but also foster local pride and benefit residents.

Pillar 3: Product & Experience Development

The Town will champion events and activities that showcase Okotoks' unique identity and community spirit. These experiences will encourage visitors to stay longer, explore more, and return again and again.

Pillar 4: Marketing & Promotion

Okotoks will be promoted as a friendly, charming, and distinctive destination. Marketing efforts will highlight authentic local stories, businesses, and the qualities that set the community apart.

This strategy aligns with the Town's broader goals and vision for the future. Underpinning this strategy will be a detailed implementation plan that outlines next steps, clarifies responsibilities, and establishes clear measures of success.

Tourism is woven into the fabric of everyday life in Okotoks. With strong leadership, meaningful community involvement, and thoughtful planning, tourism can be managed in a way that benefits everyone while keeping Okotoks true to itself.

TOURISM IN THE GREATER OKOTOKS STORY

Why Tourism? Why Now?

Telling the Okotoks Story Through a New Lens

Tourism in Okotoks is already happening. Every week, our community welcomes regional day-trippers, families visiting loved ones, weekend marketgoers, sports teams, and boutique shoppers. They're drawn here by the same things our residents value: a walkable downtown, vibrant local culture, family-friendly events, and access to nature.

What's been missing is a coordinated approach. Until now, tourism has grown organically, without a shared vision to guide its direction. Without a strategy, we risk missed opportunities, infrastructure strain, and growth that doesn't reflect community values.

Now is the time to act. Visitor demand is shifting away from mass tourism and toward authentic, small-town experiences rooted in local identity. Okotoks is naturally aligned with this trend. Our proximity to major markets, strong sense of place, and growing arts, culture, and recreation assets position us to welcome more visitors in a way that strengthens not replaces what makes our Town special.

At the same time, we acknowledge resident concerns around traffic volumes, perceived rapid community growth, and the potential impact of increased visitation. This strategy responds to those concerns by focusing on managed, sustainable tourism that enhances quality of life for residents while supporting economic growth. It sets the vision for how tourism will grow in Okotoks, outlining key actions and focus areas to guide future decisions, investments, and collaboration.

This Tourism Strategy will build directly on the Okotoks Economic Development Strategic Plan (2024-2029), which identifies tourism as a key sector for economic diversification. Aligned with that broader vision, this strategy ensures that tourism development supports local entrepreneurs, attracts new investment, and delivers long-term benefits for residents, businesses, and the broader community.

Tourism in Okotoks is growing. We're seeing more visitors, higher event attendance, and greater interest in local attractions. But without clear direction, this growth could cause problems and make it harder to reap the full benefits.

Residents, businesses, and regional partners have voiced strong support for thoughtful, values-driven tourism development. They want to see their voices reflected in how we grow.

Tourism is not separate from local life. It's an extension of it. Visitors are drawn to the same things residents value. When planned with intention, tourism becomes a tool to enhance those assets, reinvest in local amenities, and support community priorities.

Tourism & Community Priorities

Tourism in Okotoks is not a standalone service; it is an important component that supports several key Town goals across multiple strategy frameworks including:

- **Municipal Development Plan**: to support complete, walkable and sustainable communities
- **Economic Development Strategic Plan**: Tourism is one of the three key sectors in the Strategic Plan to help diversify the economy, support entrepreneurs and grow the visitor economy
- **Event Strategy**: to strengthen year-round programming and drive cultural vibrancy
- **Culture, Heritage & Arts Master Plan**: to highlight local assets and creative industries
- **Social Needs Assessment & Strategy**: to foster pride of place and inclusive experiences
- **Climate Action Plan**: to champion sustainable, low-impact travel and environmental stewardship

UNDERSTANDING THE CURRENT STATE OF TOURISM IN OKOTOKS

Methodology

This Tourism Strategy reflects a two-phase approach to tourism planning in Okotoks, grounded in community input and aligned with the Town's broader strategic priorities. An implementation plan will underpin this strategy in Phase 2, detailing actions, responsibilities, and measures of success.

Phase One

The State of Tourism in Okotoks involved the completion of the Current State of Tourism in Okotoks report in December 2024. This foundational report provided a baseline assessment of the local tourism landscape, including strengths, gaps, and emerging opportunities.

Key Takeaways

1. Tourism is already happening:
Many local businesses and events attract visitors, even if they don't identify as part of the tourism sector. This shows that tourism is active and growing, though not always formally recognized.

2. Okotoks has strong tourism foundations:
The Town's charm, vibrant arts and culture, community events, walkable downtown, and welcoming atmosphere create authentic experiences that make Okotoks appealing to visitors.

3. Efforts are fragmented and need strategic alignment:
While tourism activity exists, it is not coordinated. Businesses and organizers are often working independently without a shared direction or unified approach to grow tourism effectively.

4. Stakeholders want leadership, collaboration, and clear direction:
Businesses are eager to support tourism growth but are looking to the Town to lead with a clear strategy, consistent communication, and stronger opportunities for joint planning and promotion.

5. Stronger data and broader recognition is needed

Tourism is not always seen as a community priority, which limits investment and coordination. Businesses also identified a lack of reliable visitor data as a challenge, making it difficult to track trends, identify gaps, and make informed decisions.

Phase Two

The 2025-2030 Tourism Strategy builds on the insights and achievements of Phase One establishing a clear vision and direction for the next five years.

This phase defines a comprehensive strategy and outlines key actions to guide decision-making, align partners, and promote sustainable tourism growth. Upon adoption, this strategy will be underpinned by a detailed implementation plan that specifies how the strategy and key actions will be executed including timelines, responsible stakeholders, and refined success measures to support progress tracking and accountability.

While a detailed implementation plan will follow, this strategy was shaped by community input at every stage starting with early insights in Phase One and confirmed through validation in Phase Two. This approach ensures the path forward reflects local priorities and builds shared ownership of Okotoks' tourism future.

Community Engagement

The Town is committed to engaging with key impacted and interested parties when making decisions that have the potential to impact them. The engagement for this project was at the **CONSULT** level of the spectrum.

The graphic below shows how we reached out to the community during the tourism strategy process this past spring. Through social media, newsletters, local media, the Shape Our Town project page, and in-person outreach, we connected with thousands of residents to ensure their voices helped shape the future of tourism in Okotoks.

How We Engaged

ACTIVITY	WHO WE ENGAGED	LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT	TOTAL PARTICIPANTS	DATE
Pop-Up Events	3 events at high traffic locations for community residents at the Okotoks Recreation Centre & Seniors Centre	CONSULT	80	April 17, 2025
1:1 Interviews	Interviews with local business owners		50	April - May 2025
Business Focus Groups	5 Facilitated roundtables with business owners, tourism operators, event organizers, culinary entrepreneurs, and sports tourism stakeholders		100	April - May 2025
Business Survey	For local businesses		145	April 2025
Online Questionnaire	For local community members		48	May 2025
	TOTAL		**423**	

The Tourism Strategy was shaped by a wide range of voices from across Okotoks. We connected with long-time residents, new families, business owners, seniors, students, youth, and even visitors. Their experiences, ideas, and concerns helped guide the direction of the strategy and made sure it reflects what matters most to our community.

Engagement Outreach

11 ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

423 BUSINESSES & RESIDENTS ENGAGED

MEETING PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE AT

5 Focus Groups

3 Pop-Up Events
(Recreation Centre & Seniors Centre)

50 One-on-One Interviews
(with Businesses)

NEWSLETTERS AND EMAILS

2,402 Business Beat Newsletter subscribers

463 Citizen Panel Newsletter subscribers

1,100 Targeted emails to businesses

PROJECT PAGE (SHAPE OUR TOWN)

288 Subscribers

685 Page Views

599 Page Visits

MEDIA (NEWSPAPER & RADIO)

8 Western Wheel Ads

3 News Articles
(Okotoks Online & Western Wheel)

1 Radio Campaign

2 Online Website Banners
(Okotoks Online & Western Wheel)

SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

20 on Town and Economic Development social media channels from April to May 2025

62,580 total reach on all platforms (Facebook, Instagram & X)

SIGNAGE

2 LED Digital signboards
(32nd Street & Southridge Drive)

+ Multiple posters and/or sign boards in Town & Community facilities
(Municipal Centre, Recreation Centre, Library, Eco Centre, Vikings Rental Centre, Schools, Seniors Centre)

Key Community Engagement Insights

Theme	What We Learned
Preserve Small-Town Identity	Business owners/operators and residents emphasized the importance of protecting Okotoks' character and authenticity.
Expand Year-Round Offerings	There is strong support for more tourism experiences in the shoulder and winter seasons.
Enhance the Visitor Experience	To improve the visitor experience, residents suggested things like better signs, maps, event guides, and online info to help people find their way around town.
Ensure Inclusive, Community-Led Growth	A desire for tourism that reflects local values and benefits residents first.
Clarify Leadership & Coordination	Broad support for housing tourism leadership within Economic Development to unify direction and execution.

These key word represented what the community indicated should be part of the future vision for Tourism in Okotoks.

Visitor Snapshot

Understanding who visits is essential for shaping a tourism strategy that supports local businesses, enhances visitor experiences, and guides future planning. By identifying key patterns and behaviours, we can make informed decisions to strengthen our position as welcoming destination.

According to Travel Alberta's Foothills Tourism Development Zone Discovery Report (2023), regional tourism trends reveal the following:

- Most visitors come from nearby areas, especially major urban centres like Calgary.
- Half of all visitors return more than once a year, reflecting strong regional loyalty and sustained interest in the area.
- Visits typically span approximately 45 hours, suggesting an opportunity to encourage longer stays and increase local economic impact.

For the Town of Okotoks, these insights offer valuable direction for how we can better engage visitors, support the local economy, and position ourselves as a vibrant part of the regional tourism landscape.

THE FUTURE OF TOURISM IN OKOTOKS

A Destination Ready to Flourish

Growing Okotoks' Visitor Economy from the Ground Up

Okotoks is at a pivotal moment. Nestled in Alberta's Foothills, just minutes from Calgary, our Town blends small-town charm with big opportunity. With stunning natural landscapes, a vibrant downtown, and a community rooted in creativity and connection, Okotoks is ready to grow as a tourism destination intentionally, sustainably, and authentically.

Okotoks welcomes visitors with small-town charm, unique local stories, and authentic experiences inviting everyone to explore, linger, and feel truly connected. This vision sets the tone for how we approach tourism: grounded in who we are and inspired by what we can become.

Unlike destinations that grow quickly around big attractions, Okotoks offers something different. Our research shows that people come here because it feels friendly, safe, and real. Many visit to see friends or family for the day, but when they explore, they discover cool shops, fun cafés, public art, and vibrant local events. They enjoy the quiet, welcoming atmosphere and often want to return.

That's why we're moving forward with a tourism vision rooted in community identity, sustainable growth, and meaningful collaboration. Our strategy embraces what makes us unique while activating new experiences that extend our seasons, lengthen stays, and create shared value for both residents and visitors.

Okotoks is proud of what makes it special. We want to build on our unique identity to become a top destination for people looking for an authentic small-town Alberta experience in every season. With a clear direction, Okotoks is ready to move forward in a way that stays true to who we are and benefits everyone. We're ready to:

- Grow visitation from day-trippers into overnight stays
- Deliver unforgettable experiences through local culture, nature, and events
- Support small businesses and entrepreneurs as part of our tourism ecosystem
- Advance Indigenous collaboration and inclusive tourism
- Attract investment while preserving what makes Okotoks special

Quadruple Bottom Line for Tourism in Okotoks

This strategy uses a quadruple bottom line approach looking at tourism through four lenses: economic, social, environmental, and cultural. This means we're not just focused on bringing in visitors, but also making sure tourism supports local jobs and businesses, strengthens our sense of community, protects nature, and celebrates what makes Okotoks unique. This balanced approach helps tourism grow in a way that benefits everyone and stays true to who we are.

Purpose

The purpose of tourism in Okotoks is to support and reflect our unique community identity by embracing the power of place and placemaking. It's not just about attracting visitors; it's about ensuring tourism adds meaningful value to life in Okotoks. That means creating opportunities for local businesses, fostering pride in our Town, protecting the environment, and strengthening our economy. By highlighting the distinct character and sense of belonging that define Okotoks, tourism helps tell our story in an authentic way , one that resonates with both residents and visitors alike , while creating benefits that enrich the entire community.

People

Tourism supports residents first. It creates jobs, sustains local businesses, and invests in public spaces and events that locals enjoy year-round. It also strengthens social cohesion and connections, builds community pride, and invites inclusive participation across all ages and backgrounds.

Planet

Sustainability is embedded into the tourism strategy. By promoting walkability, low-impact travel, and respect for natural spaces, Okotoks can grow visitation without compromising its environment. Nature is a core part of our identity, and we are committed to protecting it for future generations.

Prosperity

Tourism brings new dollars into the local economy. It supports entrepreneurs, encourages spending in shops and restaurants, and creates opportunities in events, culture, sports, and accommodations. Strategic growth in the visitor economy helps diversify revenue while strengthening Okotoks' long-term resilience.

Building the Future of Tourism in Okotoks

The Okotoks Tourism Strategy will be built around four strategic pillars that set the foundation for how tourism will be managed, developed, and promoted over the next five years. These pillars reflect community values and respond directly to what residents, businesses, and stakeholders shared through engagement. Together, they provide a strategic framework to guide tourism development in a way that supports economic growth, enhances quality of life, preserves Okotoks' unique character, and fosters a thriving, year-round visitor economy.

Each pillar outlines a clear vision for what success looks like and includes key actions to guide implementation. This ensures that tourism growth is intentional, inclusive, and aligned with community priorities creating a destination that works for both residents and visitors.

Progress will be measured through clear indicators tied to each of the four strategic pillars. This will support evaluation, funding alignment, and transparent public reporting.

Underpinning this strategy is a strong commitment to data-driven decision making. As part of the subsequent implementation plan, we will evaluate ways to enhance tourism data collection and analysis, with a focus on understanding visitor patterns such as origins, timing, activities, spending, and impacts on local businesses.

This process will carefully consider factors such as ease of data collection, cost, and ongoing maintenance to identify the most feasible and effective approaches. This data will enable the Town to make more informed decisions, measure tourism's impact accurately, uncover new opportunities, and ensure that tourism in Okotoks can grow in a way that delivers lasting benefits creating a vibrant, welcoming destination that reflects the heart of the community.

Pillar 1: Tourism Management & Collaboration

By working together, the Town can help make sure tourism in Okotoks reflects what people care about being welcoming, protecting nature, supporting local shops, and keeping the small-town feel. Good tourism needs strong leaders and teamwork with the community. This part of the strategy is about making sure many voices are heard, including local residents, business owners, and people of different ages and backgrounds. Tourism in Okotoks isn't led by just one group it's shaped by the community and supported by the Town.

Phase One of the strategy revealed foundational gaps that must be addressed before meaningful tourism growth can occur. These include infrastructure, leadership, funding, and data. Phase Two responds directly to these challenges by identifying key early actions within each strategic pillar starting with the foundational work outlined here in Pillar 1.

Desired Outcome	Key Actions	Success Measures
Tourism in Okotoks is guided by strong leadership and teamwork. With the Town and community working together, tourism grows in a way that supports local businesses, reflects what people care about, and makes life better for both residents and visitors.	Establish a community-based Tourism Advisory Group to provide input and help guide tourism development.	Diversity of Advisory Group membership representing a range of community sectors.
	Strengthen partnerships with Travel Alberta and Indigenous Tourism Alberta to align efforts and share authentic stories.	Number of collaborative tourism projects completed with external partners annually.
	Implement sustainable funding models, such as a Tourism Marketing Fee, to support long-term tourism investment.	Percentage of residents and businesses who agree tourism reflects community values and benefits the local economy.
	Ensure tourism activities and initiatives reflect Okotoks' identity through ongoing community input and collaboration.	
	Build a business case for a sustainable tourism funding model, including tax-based options, and present recommendations to Council.	
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Pillar 2: Destination Development

Destination development is about making Okotoks a place where visitors feel welcome and can easily find their way around. This includes improvements like clear signage, accessible information, walkable connections, and inviting public spaces that make exploring the Town enjoyable. These investments not only enhance the visitor experience but also benefit residents and build local pride.

Placemaking strengthens this approach by intentionally designing spaces that reflect Okotoks' identity and character. It connects tourism with planning, engineering, and economic development recognizing that how we shape and activate our public spaces plays a key role in how people experience a place. By applying the principles of placemaking, Okotoks can grow as a visitor destination while protecting what makes the community unique and livable.

Desired Outcome	Key Actions	Success Measures
Okotoks is a welcoming, well-connected destination with accessible public spaces, enhanced amenities, and thoughtfully designed environments that enrich the experience for both residents and visitors alike.	Expand access to visitor information and support throughout the community.	Increase in visitor information points (tourism brochure rack, information centres, digital platforms) available across the community.
	Enhance tools to improve navigation and access to local attractions and services.	Number of digital and print visitor resources created or updated annually.
		Number of new tourism-supportive ameneties added in high-traffic areas (e.g. water fountains, bike racks, picnic areas)
		Percentage of visitor who report ease of navigation around town in surveys.

Pillar 3: Product & Experience Development

Tourism thrives when visitors are offered meaningful, high-quality experiences that reflect the character of a place. This pillar is about supporting the development of experiences that are authentic to Okotoks its stories, its creativity, its natural beauty, and its people. It also encourages new offerings that meet seasonal demand, increase time spent in town, and connect visitors more deeply to the community.

Desired Outcome	Key Actions	Success Measures
A diverse range of tourism experiences reflects Okotoks' identity, encourages longer visits, and contributes to local business growth. Tourism becomes a source of community pride, supports off-season vibrancy, and creates shared economic benefits.	Establish a community-based Tourism Advisory Group to provide input and help guide tourism development.Growing the number of visitor experiences that reflect Okotoks' identity, culture, and environment.	Increase in new or improved tourism experiences launched each year.
	Strengthen partnerships with Travel Alberta and Indigenous Tourism Alberta to align efforts and share authentic stories. Increase tourism-aligned offerings connected to local events and activities.	Number of seasonal or event-based experiences that attract visitors..
	Expand opportunities for Indigenous tourism experiences in the Okotoks region.	Number of local businesses offering visitor experiences
		Increase in visitor length of stay across all experiences.

Pillar 4: Marketing & Promotions

Marketing and promotion shape how Okotoks is seen by visitors. This pillar ensures that tourism messaging is authentic, well-targeted, and aligned with the Town's brand identity: friendly, charming, unique. It focuses on creating a clear tourism identity that highlights what makes Okotoks special and sharing that story in ways that attract the right visitors, support local businesses, and keep awareness strong throughout the year. It also includes developing dedicated tools and channels like websites, social media, and print materials to showcase tourism experiences and inspire deeper engagement.

Desired Outcome	Key Actions	Success Measures
Okotoks is recognized as a unique and welcoming destination through values-driven marketing that authentically reflects its local identity, strengthens business growth, and fosters a strong sense of community pride.	Establish a strong tourism brand that aligns with Okotoks' brand and communicates its distinct identity.	Community and business satisfaction with the new brand, measured via community engagement.
	Highlight seasonal experiences, local businesses, and attractions to drive visitation and community engagement.	Increase in visitors to the Town's tourism webpage.
	Leverage key events to promote extended visits and increased spending in the local economy.	Social media engagement (likes, shares, mentions) on the Town's tourism focused content.
	Elevate authentic local stories and voices to deepen connection and reinforce a sense of place.	Average length of visitor stay during promoted events.
		Increase in local stories/voices featured in marketing materials, videos, and social content annually.

NEXT STEPS

Bringing the Strategy to Life

This document charts an identity-driven vision for the future of tourism in Okotoks. Turning that vision into real, tangible results will require careful planning and strong collaboration. To support implementation, the Town will develop a detailed implementation plan that specifies how the strategy and key actions will be executed, including timelines, stakeholders involved, and a refinement of success measures for tracking progress and accountability. This implementation plan will ensure tourism development progresses with clear direction, shared accountability, and transparent decision-making.

To measure success and stay on track, the Town will monitor key performance indicators (KPIs) such as the number of new tourism experiences, visitors to the Town's tourism webpage, and the satisfaction with the new tourism brand. These metrics will provide valuable insights into what's working well, highlight areas for improvement, and keep all stakeholders informed and engaged.

These tangible indicators will help ensure the strategy remains grounded in community input, supports business growth, and strengthens Okotoks' position as a welcoming and authentic destination. Collaboration is at the heart of this effort.

The Town will partner with local businesses, Indigenous communities, and regional organizations to co-create the subsequent implementation plan and begin implementing priority initiatives. This inclusive approach ensures that tourism development reflects the community's values and benefits everyone.

The anticipated impact of this strategy is significant: attracting more visitors, boosting local businesses, and enlivening public spaces and events all while preserving the unique qualities that make Okotoks special, including its small-town charm, natural beauty, and vibrant local culture.

Achieving these goals requires a collective effort. The Town cannot do it alone. Residents, business owners, community groups, and visitors all have vital roles to play. By staying engaged, sharing ideas, and working together, Okotoks can grow into a welcoming, dynamic, and sustainable destination.