

Charting the Course Together

Trent Hills Tourism Development Plan

23 January 2024



Acknowledgements

We recognize the traditional keepers of this land and, specifically our neighbours of the Alderville First Nation, with a formal territorial acknowledgement. Welcome to the Gunshot Treaty Lands of 1788. It is on these lands and on the shores of the big lake, the Mississauga Anishinabeg met with the Crown to facilitate the opening of these lands for settlement. Let us be reminded of the responsibility we all have in making sure that we respect these lands and waters that give us life and sustain our livelihoods.

Charting the Course Together, Trent Hills' 3-year Tourism Development Plan is the result of a stakeholder-driven and community-focused research approach that strived to engage a breadth and diversity of stakeholders in the Municipality of Trent Hills and Northumberland County. We thank all the residents, business owners and operators, organizational representatives, and tourism partners, who participated in the in-person industry and resident open house, industry and resident survey, and partner session. This Tourism Development Plan would not have been possible without your input, perspectives, and feedback.

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The research that informs this *Charting the Course Together: Trent Hills Tourism Development Plan* was facilitated by Bannikin, a Canadian-based professional services company operating within and beyond travel and tourism.

Bannikin team members worked closely with the Trent Hills Chamber of Commerce and the Municipality of Trent Hills to ensure meaningful engagement of key stakeholders to produce a plan informed by local context and global trends. Bannikin specializes in strategy and development projects along with integrated communications work for a wide array of client-partners including businesses, various levels of government, industry associations, and not-for-profit organizations.

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Executive Summary

The Trent Hills Chamber of Commerce, along with our partners at the Municipality of Trent Hills, Northumberland Tourism, and Regional Tourism Organization 8, began developing a 3-year Tourism Development Plan for Trent Hills in June 2023. We engaged Bannikin, a Canadian-based professional services company to facilitate the research and plan development processes.

From the start, our goal was to have a stakeholder-informed plan to guide destination development across the next three years. We used a stakeholder-driven and community-focused research approach that applied primary and secondary research techniques, including:

- Document review of visitation data, visitor-satisfaction research, trends research, past plans and reports, as well as a tourism asset inventory;
- Visitor-hat research of online channels that market and promote Trent Hills;
- Competitor research into two competitor destinations;
- In-person industry and resident open house;
- 3-day in-market trip;
- Industry and resident survey; and
- Virtual partner session.

Charting the Course Together sets a long-term vision that:

Trent Hills is known as a welcoming and inclusive year-round destination with picturesque rural landscapes that are best experienced by land and water routes. Visitors know that Trent Hills is a place where culture and the outdoors come to life across three distinct communities. Residents and businesses are ambassadors for Trent Hills and recognize the value tourism brings to their quality of life.



To work towards this vision, the plan identifies four key areas of opportunity for tourism development over the next three years, including, tourism infrastructure development, stakeholder engagement, product development, and destination marketing. 15 tourism development strategies are associated with these areas of opportunity, including:

1. Conduct a soft infrastructure for tourism needs assessment
2. Develop a destination signage strategy
3. Advocate for improved transportation infrastructure
4. Work with partners on street beautification initiatives
5. Build awareness around value of tourism to Trent Hills
6. Recognize volunteer and industry contributions to the Trent Hills tourism economy
7. Identify vulnerabilities and ways to build resilience into tourism assets
8. Work with food, drink, and agricultural businesses to celebrate Trent Hills' food culture as part of the visitor experience
9. Develop and activate branded routes leveraging Trent Hills' land and water trails
10. Enable industry to develop and offer bookable experiences
11. Create new itineraries that encourage visitors to connect with destination USP
12. Continue supporting community-led initiatives that are visitor-facing

13. Streamline Trent Hills destination branding and narrative
14. Encourage visitors to stay longer and explore more deeply
15. Empower all visitors to make outdoor recreation part of their stay

The Trent Hills Chamber of Commerce will lead the implementation of these 15 strategies; however, we recognize the important role that collaboration will play in our success. We look forward to working with our partners to identify available resources and supports that can be leveraged and maximize the positive impacts of tourism for Trent Hills' residents, businesses, and visitors.

The future of Trent Hills is bright, and we are committed to helping our community capitalize on tourism to achieve its full potential.

Abbreviations, Glossary, and Resources

Abbreviations

- **2SLGBTQ+:** Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, plus
- **BIPOC:** Black, Indigenous, People of Colour
- **CBIA:** Campbellford Business Improvement Area
- **DMO:** Destination Marketing Organization
- **DMMO:** Destination Management and Marketing Organization
- **HRA:** Hastings Revitalization Association
- **RTO8:** Regional Tourism Organization 8
- **USPs:** Unique selling propositions
- **WBA:** Warkworth Business Association

Glossary

- **Destination:** the place that visitors intentionally travel to or the place on a trip where a visitor spends the most time. Where destination marketing and management organizations (DMMO) exist, a destination can also be understood by the boundaries they use.
- **Destination management:** the process of overseeing the delivery of activities associated with tourism in a place.
- **Destination marketing:** the strategic communication of information about a destination and its tourism product.
- **Destination management and marketing organization:** An organization that oversees the management and marketing of a destination.
- **Destination stakeholders:** anyone or anything that has a vested interest in a destination and can have some of their needs met by collaborating with other stakeholders in the destination, including individuals, businesses, and organizations in the local community, public, private, and not-for-profit sectors.
- **Tourism:** the activities associated with and enjoyed by visitors. Structurally, tourism is complex. It is made up of industries from several sectors, each with its subsectors. It is connected to many aspects of our lives, including our societies, cultures, economies, and environments.

- **Tourism asset:** the physical or non-physical things available for tourism in a destination. Examples of physical things include businesses, historic buildings, trails, parks, and cultural centres. Examples of non-physical things include welcoming and friendly environments, stories connected to a place, and picturesque views and vistas.
- **Tourism products:** the grouping of tourism assets that can be enjoyed by visitors as experiences in a destination. Examples include a food and beverage cycling tour, a honey-tasting experience, and a heritage walking tour.
- **Tourist:** visitors who are staying overnight or travelling beyond 40 kilometres for a same-day trip.
- **Travel:** the activity of moving from one geographical place to another.
- **Visitor:** someone who has decided to travel to a destination that is outside their usual environment, including locals travelling to places within a broader or regional destination.
- **Visitor-hat research:** a research technique that involves putting on a “visitor hat” to learn how a destination is being perceived by prospective visitors. For this project the research team simulated an online trip-planning process to learn about Trent Hills’ brand positioning, potential barriers to booking a trip, etc.

Resources

- Campbellford Business Improvement Area website: <https://downtowncampbellford.ca/>
- Hastings Revitalization Association website: <https://hastingsvillage.ca/>
- LGBTQ2 Travel Study (2020) by Crestview Strategy for Tourism HR Canada and Canada’s LGBTQ+ Chamber of Commerce PDF link: https://cglcc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Final_LGBTQ2-Travel-Study_2020-web.pdf
- Northumberland Tourism industry website: <https://www.northumberland.ca/en/business-and-development/northumberland-partners.aspx>
- Northumberland Tourism visitor-facing website: <https://www.northumberlandtourism.com/en/index.aspx>
- Ontario Cycle Tourism & cycling Activity Report - 2021/2022 (2022) by Transportation Options and Ontario by Bike PDF link: https://www.transportationoptions.org/uploads/8/7/2/0/8720033/cycle_tourism_cycling_activity_report_2021_2022.pdf
- RTO8 website: <https://rto8.com/>
- The Benefits of Connecting Canadians: The Economic, Environmental and Public Health Impacts of the Trans Canada Trail (2023) by Econsult Solutions for Trans Canada Trail PDF link: https://tctrail.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/23-054-TR_Impact-Study_EN_Nov%E2%80%9321.pdf?_gl=1*2qxbj8*_up*MQ..*_ga*MTM2NzU2NTYxOC4xNzA0NzQ1NjA5*_ga_Z63TFVPQJ6*MTcwNDc0NTYwNy4xLjEuMTcwNDc0NTYyMy4wLjAuMA.&gclid=CjwKCAiA1-6sBhAoEiwArqIGPuGbwEqSmlGg_PvhCe94XeaO8QMldljXayrn58ThkEKzw1UzAruFrRoCydQQAvD_BwE
- Visit Trent Hills website: <https://www.visittrenthills.ca/>
- Warkworth Business Association website: <https://warkworth.ca/>

Part 1: Introduction

Background

The Municipality of Trent Hills is located within Northumberland County along the Trent-Severn Waterway National Historic Site and makes up part of the Oak Ridges Moraine. Our place is made up of communities including Campbellford, Warkworth, and Hastings. It borders the Township of Alnwick/Haldimand to the west, the Township of Cramahe and the Municipality of Brighton to the south, Hastings County to the east, and the Township of Asphodel-Norwood, and the Township of Havelock-Belmont-Methuen in Peterborough County to the north.

Trent Hills is part of the Johnson-Butler Purchase, also known as the Gunshot Treaty lands (1788), and subsequently the lands of the Williams Treaties of 1923. It forms part of the traditional territory of the Michi Saagiig Nations, including Curve Lake, Hiawatha, Alderville, and Scugog First Nations, and the Chippewa Nations, including Rama, Beausoleil, and Georgina Island First Nations, collectively known as the Williams Treaties First Nations.

We, at the Trent Hills Chamber of Commerce, along with our partners at the Municipality of Trent Hills, Northumberland Tourism, and Regional Tourism Organization 8 (RTO8), began developing a 3-year Tourism Development Plan for Trent Hills in June 2023. We recognized the potential of tourism for our community and the importance of a plan that would help us grow in a way that responds to visitor demand while meeting the needs of residents.

The Trent Hills Chamber of Commerce has managed tourism in Trent Hills for many years with funding from the Municipality of Trent Hills, and various supports from our other partners. Until now, our work has included marketing and promotion initiatives, some tourism infrastructure investment, and strategic planning. However, we know the next step for us is to develop a plan to inform and expand the Chamber's work to support tourism destination development in Trent Hills over the next three years.

Project Overview

From the start, our goal was that by February 2024, Trent Hills will have a stakeholder-informed Tourism Development Plan to guide destination development across the next three years. To achieve this goal, we identified four (4) objectives for the project process:

1. To establish a strong understanding of the current state and context of tourism in Trent Hills.
2. To meaningfully engage and encourage connections amongst diverse destination stakeholders, while growing awareness and appreciation for tourism.
3. To co-create an inspiring long-term vision and goals for the destination, along with related strategies and actions to achieve these goals over the next three years.
4. To develop an implementation plan, inclusive of timelines, responsibilities, budgets, and performance indicators for bringing the Tourism Development Plan to life.

We used a stakeholder-driven and community-focused research approach to inform our 3-Year Tourism Development Plan. As part of this, we used a variety of primary and secondary research methods to establish a strong understanding of the current state and context of tourism in Trent Hills, and to engage a diversity of destination stakeholders and encourage connections amongst them. These research and engagement methods included:

- Document review of over 30 documents for background and context, including a tourism asset inventory, visitation data, visitor-satisfaction research, trends research, past plans, and reports.
- Visitor-hat research of online channels that market and promote Trent Hills.
- Competitor research into two competitor destinations.
- In-person industry and resident open house with 25 industry members and 14 resident attendees.
- 3-day in-market trip (mid-week in September)
- Industry and resident survey with responses from 38 industry members and 130 residents.
- Virtual partner session with 10 organizational representatives.



What is a Tourism Development Plan?

Charting the Course Together, our 3-year Tourism Development Plan is a guiding document for us at Trent Hills Chamber of Commerce to market, manage, and further develop tourism in our community. Importantly, this is Trent Hills first Tourism Development Plan and will mark our transition from primarily a destination marketing organization (DMO) to a destination management and marketing organization (DMMO).

The strategies we've identified in this plan are informed by our abilities and resources as an organization across the three-year timeline. This said, we know collaboration is essential for the successful implementation of this plan. We can't and shouldn't do this alone. For this reason, we are excited to connect with key stakeholders and our partners to identify opportunities and alignments for collaboration moving forward that will make Trent Hills a better place to live, visit, and invest.

Part 2: Tourism in Trent Hills

Destination Overview

We are fortunate to have a breadth and diversity of tourism assets across Trent Hills. We understand tourism assets as physical things, places, and events that attract and serve visitors. Some examples include accommodations, conference and meeting facilities, golf courses, equipment rentals, sporting event and tournament facilities, parks and natural areas, water routes, trails and cycling routes, art galleries and venues, museums/cultural centres, landmarks, festivals and events, agritourism businesses, food service operators, beverage producers, retail shops, organized water/ land-based activities, and community and visitor infrastructure.

With almost 200 tourism assets, we have a significant number of accommodations (e.g., cottage resorts, bed and breakfasts, motels, inns, campgrounds, marinas, etc.), food and beverage providers (e.g., food service operators, agritourism providers, food and beverage producers, etc.), and outdoor assets (e.g., water routes, land trails, cycling routes, parks and natural areas, etc.). However, many assets are only available for a limited period during the year. Only 44% of all assets in Trent Hills are on offer year-round. These are primarily food and beverage, accommodations, retail, and outdoor assets.

Most assets are located closer to Campbellford, followed by Warkworth, then Hastings. Some assets intersect multiple communities such as water routes, land trails, and cycling routes. Some of our main tourism assets include the Trent-Severn Waterway, Ferris Provincial Park, including the Suspension Bridge, regional water routes, land trails, and cycling routes, tangible and intangible cultural heritage (e.g., architecture, antiques, local stories and culture, etc.), Downtown Warkworth, the Westben Centre for Connection and Creativity Through Music and Nature, festivals and events, food and beverage, and our rural-small-town Ontario feel, to name a few.

Overall, Trent Hills offers visitors a mix of a rural agricultural community with urban pockets and surrounded by a major waterway. We know there are significant opportunities to grow our tourism offerings, while also benefiting the people, including residents and business owners, that make Trent Hills a great place to live, visit, and invest.

Context

Tourism Landscape

As mentioned before, we, at the Trent Hills Chamber of Commerce, manage tourism in Trent Hills, with financial support from the Municipality of Trent Hills. One of our primary areas of focus is managing the Visit Trent Hills website. (To learn more about Visit Trent Hills, visit our [website](#).) We work with many tourism partners including industry-specific organizations; however, our main tourism partners include:

- **Regional Tourism Organization 8 (RTO8):** Also known as Kawarthas Northumberland, it is funded by the Ontario Ministry of Tourism Culture and Sport to promote regional tourism activity in the area branded Kawarthas

- Northumberland. It was created through the Tourism Competitiveness Study completed by the province in 2009. To learn more, visit their [website](#).
- **Northumberland Tourism:** As part of Northumberland County's Economic Development department, Northumberland Tourism works to grow and assist tourism-related businesses in Northumberland County through promotion and positioning the County as a 4-season destination. Northumberland Tourism also provides visitor-facing supports and resources through its consumer [website](#), and industry-facing supports via its industry [website](#).
 - **Campbellford Business Improvement Area (CBIA):** A non-profit organization whose mandate is to assist in the revitalization and promotion of downtown Campbellford, including promoting member businesses, beautification, streetscapes and safety enhancement, sponsorship of community events, leveraging levied funds, and holding monthly meetings. To learn more, visit Campbellford BIA's [website](#).
 - **Warkworth Business Association (WBA):** A member-based unregistered non-profit volunteer organization, whose activities include managing the Warkworth community website and email list, production of the annual Warkworth brochure, and promoting member businesses. The WBA also maintains and oversees the rental of the Warkworth Town Hall for community usage and events. To learn more, visit Warkworth Business Association's [website](#).
 - **Hastings Revitalization Association (HRA):** A non-profit volunteer organization that aims to connect area residents, businesses, and service clubs to revitalize the village of Hastings. Their activities include leading community projects and events. To learn more, visit Hastings Revitalization Association's [website](#).

In the larger context of tourism in Southern Ontario, we know there are many destinations with similar offerings to ours, from Peterborough to Haliburton and Scugog to the Blue Mountains, that are attracting similar visitor segments to us. A key takeaway from research into competitor destinations is the importance of partnerships between different tourism organizations. In our context, this underlines the value of continuing to work with RTO8 and our three business associations. Particularly, ensuring information related to tourism is up-to-date and consistent across all communications channels for visitors and residents to receive a clear and consistent message. A second key takeaway is the importance of promoting tourism assets across geographic areas and operating in different seasons. This is to ensure tourism does not develop a reliance on only a handful of main attractions. Finally, a third key takeaway is the value of working with neighbouring municipal partners to find opportunities to grow regional tourism offerings. Visitors don't see jurisdictional boundaries, and this is important to consider in tourism development.

Visitation

When it comes to our current visitors, we know most are coming from the larger region, including City and County of Peterborough, Prince Edward County, Cobourg, Trenton, Port Hope, Belleville, Bowmanville, and the Greater Toronto Area, including Pickering and Mississauga. At the same time, we know many of these visitors are middle-aged adults who travel by vehicle and are interested in outdoor activities. Below are the six visitor segments outlined by Environics Analytics Group's PRIZM that capture demographics, lifestyles, consumer behaviours, and settlement patterns of visitors to Trent Hills.

- **Down to Earth:** Interested in the outdoors, birdwatching, snowmobiling, and own outdoor equipment. They like to spend their time close to home.
- **Country Traditions:** Interested in gardening, boating, fishing, camping, and swimming. They spend on pets, toys, and sporting goods, and vacations often involve a cottage stay.
- **Scenic Retirement:** Interested in golfing, fitness, walking, gardening, community theatre, and visiting casinos.
- **Happy Medium:** Interested in home-based pursuits like gardening, woodworking, and sewing as well as outdoor activities like canoeing, rowing, and snowmobiling.
- **Boomer Bliss:** Enjoy downtowns, art (e.g., theatre, art galleries, city parks, etc.), outdoor activities like golfing, and boating, going for dinner at casual restaurants. They have more disposable income than other groups.
- **Backcountry Boomers:** Interested in fishing, hunting, and gardening, as well as crafts, knitting, collecting coins, and stamps.

We know the importance of continuing to attract these existing visitor segments, and finding opportunities to encourage longer stays by using our tourism assets to engage their other interests. However, in addition to our current visitor segments mentioned above, it is also important to grow new and emerging visitor segments for Trent Hills. One example is 2SLGBTQ+ travellers, which is a broad and diverse visitor segment. According to the LGBTQ2 Travel Study (2020) by Crestview Strategy for Tourism HR Canada and Canada's LGBTQ+ Chamber of Commerce, 2SLGBTQ+ travellers are interested in countryside destinations, as well as food and beverage activities, viewing popular tourism attractions, nature-related activities, and arts and culture.

A second example is connecting even more with recreational boaters, which according to Destination Northern Ontario's Northern Ontario Boating Product Development Strategy (2019), tend to travel more than non-boaters, spend an average of \$400 per trip, tend to have an average of 3-night trips, tend to travel with more participants than non-boaters, and are more likely to fish, camp, and swim than non-boaters. Also, approximately 40% of all boaters in Canada are in Ontario.

A third example is trail users, including cyclists. Trans Canada Trail explains that there are many economic, environmental, and public health benefits to residents along trails. According to Ontario By Bike, a significant number of cyclists purchase goods and services while using trails, including staying overnight at accommodations, and spending on food and beverage, attractions, and other retail.

Additionally, we know that RTO8 and Northumberland Tourism already market to broader visitor segments aligned with our tourism assets. Some of these include Ontario travellers arriving by car, family travellers, travellers interested in arts and culture, travellers interested in soft outdoor adventures, and travellers interested in wellness tourism and retreats. We see an opportunity connect with these visitor segments already coming to the larger Kawarthas Northumberland region and attract them to Trent Hills. Visitors from the Greater Toronto Area and younger visitors interested in spring and winter season road trips between towns with hiking, and food and beverage experiences are also high-potential markets for Trent Hills.

Market Position

Unique selling proposition

We know that key to attracting current and potential visitor segments, are our unique selling propositions (USPs). Some USPs are primary because they attract people to Trent Hills, while others are secondary because they add value to the visitor experience, encouraging visitors to stay longer and plan return visits.

Our primary unique selling propositions include the Trent-Severn Waterway, Ferris Provincial Park and the suspension bridge, our regional water routes, trails, and cycling routes, as well as our unique festivals and events and the Westben Centre. Additionally, our secondary unique selling propositions are our rural countryside landscape with rolling hills, our small-town Ontario feel, our cultural heritage, including our historic architecture and antiques shops, our unique local stories, our downtowns, and some of our food and drink businesses.

We also have emerging tourism assets that align with the demands of our current and potential visitor segments. These emerging assets will require support to develop into primary or secondary unique selling propositions. Examples include the role of local food and beverage, connections between rural and urban areas, road or trailside stops catering to land-based travellers, marinas catering to boaters, and destination-wide linkages encouraging visitors to travel across Trent Hills.

Brand identity

We know that a brand is an essential component of attracting visitors. It reflects the uniqueness of a place, including its USPs, and presents a destination in a way that is memorable and appealing to target audiences, including residents and visitors. As Marty Neumeier said in *The Brand Gap* (2000), "A brand is a person's gut feeling (...). It's not what you say it is. It's what THEY say it is." Noting this, we know our brand is something we need to further develop with our stakeholders, including residents, businesses, and partners. At the same time, we have already identified some key components to pull into our brand identity moving forward. Trent Hills is:

- A year-round destination.
- Home to soft outdoor and rural adventures.
- A small-town Ontario destination.
- Where water routes and land trails meet.
- A cycling destination.
- Water- and land-based (e.g., waterways and natural areas).
- Great for day trips, getaways, cottage stays, weekend trips, and family vacations.
- Full of arts and culture
- Rich in history and heritage, including architecture and local stories.
- Home to food and beverage offerings, including agriculture and agritourism.
- Home to unique local businesses.

Destination Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Challenges/Threats

The below table outlines key strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges/threats for Trent Hills as a destination. Specifically, the strengths and weaknesses are insights specific to the context of Trent Hills, meaning these are primarily experienced by Trent Hills. Whereas the opportunities and challenges/threats, are insights about the broader context of Southern Ontario. This means, these are factors many destinations in Southern Ontario, including Trent Hills, must consider in destination development work.

Trent Hills Tourism Development	
Strengths (Internal)	Weaknesses (Internal)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Proximity to mid-sized urban areas ○ Active and engaged residents, and partners. ○ Existing tourism assets, including natural assets, itineraries, businesses, etc. ○ Dedicated organization leading tourism management/marketing. ○ Recognition of cycling tourism in the Active Transportation and Trail Master Plan. ○ Existing industry programs by RTO8 and Northumberland Tourism. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Aging population and reliance on volunteers to run festivals/events. ○ Limited soft infrastructure for tourism. ○ Limited integration of tourism into municipal policies/plans. ○ Lack of awareness amongst residents and industry about existing tourism supports and resources. ○ Lack of recognition of Trent Hills brand among visitors, residents, and industry and connected image of 3 communities. ○ Limited connection to farming community and agriculture. ○ Limited trip planning information about accessibility options. ○ Inconsistent tourism asset information on different platforms.
Opportunities (External)	Challenges/Threats (External)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Increased demand for travel on weekends, rural areas, and off-peak amongst Ontarians ○ New and emerging visitor segments are already coming to the region. ○ Ongoing regional, provincial, and national marketing and programming efforts ○ Emerging USPs (food tourism) ○ Presence of community-led initiatives that support tourism. ○ Trail users including cyclists spend on accommodations, food and beverage, retail, etc. while using trails. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Economic stress and uncertainty (e.g. could impact disposable income available for travel amongst current markets, especially those with tighter budgets already) ○ Climate change impacts (e.g. unreliable winter snow, crop damage, heat warnings, etc.)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 2SLGBTQ+ travellers in Canada enjoy countryside destinations, food and beverage, nature-related, and arts and culture activities. ○ About 40% of Canada's recreation boating population is in Ontario, with boaters having an average spend of \$400 per trip. | |
|---|--|

Considerations for Tourism Development

Trent Hills has diverse strengths that support our destination's current tourism offerings, and we know there are many opportunities for us to grow tourism. In planning for the future, we need to keep a few things in mind.

1. We know we have many tourism assets, but we also know the availability of these assets changes depending on the season. We must consider how to leverage our existing assets to truly become a four-season destination.
2. We know that Trent Hills is made up of many unique communities, each offering different experiences to visitors. We must consider how to celebrate and welcome visitors to all our communities, while strengthening a collective image as one destination.
3. We know many destinations in Southern Ontario have similar tourism assets to ours. We must consider which tourism assets we should highlight to make Trent Hills stand out from other destinations.
4. We know there is a need to encourage visitors to move around Trent Hills to experience the different tourism assets on offer. We must consider how to leverage our existing land and water routes to disperse visitors and encourage movement using alternative modes of transportation.
5. We know that many visitors are already coming to the larger Kawarthas Northumberland region beyond our municipal borders. We must consider how we will collaborate with RTO8, including through the Trent-Severn Waterway Trail Town program, to attract visitors already coming to the broader region and encourage them to extend their stays.
6. We know there is a need to ensure Trent Hills is a welcoming and inclusive place for visitors coming from a breadth and diversity of lived experiences. We must consider how we will ensure that it is a welcoming and inclusive place, and how we will communicate this to visitors.
7. We know there is a need to attract visitors with a breadth and diversity of interests. We must consider is how we will package and offer experiences that integrate visitors' different interests within one trip, while making it easy for them to find the information they need to plan that dream getaway.

Part 3: Tourism Development Plan

Vision

Charting the Course Together will guide our destination management and marketing efforts at the Trent Hills Chamber of Commerce for the next three years. At the same time, we understand the importance of looking further into the future, beyond the 3-year timeframe. Based on what we heard from our community and partners, our 2030 vision for tourism in Trent Hills is:

Trent Hills is known as a welcoming and inclusive year-round destination with picturesque rural landscapes that are best experienced by land and water routes. Visitors know that Trent Hills is a place where culture and the outdoors come to life across three distinct communities. Residents and businesses are ambassadors for Trent Hills and recognize the value tourism brings to their quality of life.

Guiding Principles

Our Tourism Development Plan is based on six guiding principles that inform the direction that, we at Trent Hills Chamber of Commerce, will take with regards to destination marketing and management. Importantly, the guiding principles below are woven into the areas of opportunity and related strategies of this plan. This means the implementation of this plan will also work towards addressing these six guiding principles.

The guiding principles of our Tourism Development Plan include:

1. A year-round destination.

We will prioritize initiatives that support the expansion of the tourism season. This means across all our activities, we will incorporate diverse imagery in our marketing collateral, we will think about connecting visitors to the information they need to plan trips to Trent Hills across the year, and we will build out our product offering in the winter and shoulder seasons.

2. Climate-conscious tourism development.

From reducing our destination's carbon footprint to adapting our tourism product to the changing climate, we will build sustainability and resilience into Trent Hills. Specifically, this means acting as a resource for Trent Hills' tourism businesses and partners, connecting them to relevant education and training opportunities. This also means applying a climate-conscious tourism development lens to all our work, for example, by promoting low-carbon transportation in our tourism marketing and encouraging the use of drought-resistant plants in partner beautification initiatives.

3. Tourism development for the betterment of our community.

We know that great places to live make great places to visit and invest. We are committed to using tourism development to make Trent Hills a more vibrant place to call home.

When residents and business-owners see the benefits of tourism, they become our strongest ambassadors.

4. An inclusive, welcoming, and accessible destination.

Part of what makes Trent Hills special is that we offer an accessible and approachable destination for many, but we will always strive to do better. In all our destination development work we commit to asking ourselves how our decisions will affect children, youth, seniors, visitors with different abilities, and visitors from diverse backgrounds including BIPOC and 2SLGBTQ+ visitors. This commitment also means we will prioritize training for Trent Hills business owners and frontline staff that will help us to be as welcoming as possible.

5. Destination development backed by research.

We are committed to collecting the data we need to make informed decisions around destination development. Foundational to this is having open communication channels with Trent Hills residents and our partners so that our work is guided by community input. To remain competitive in a tight marketplace and offer a compelling product, we will also continue to collect information around what our visitors are looking for and what competitor destinations are up to.

6. Collaboration as a foundation

Collaboration is at the heart of destination development. For us, this means establishing communication channels and partnership opportunities that will be foundational to implementing our Tourism Development Plan, whether that is working with neighbouring destinations on new initiatives like visitor itineraries, or exploring alignments with partners that work in parallel fields such as resident attraction and workforce development.

Areas of Opportunity

We identified four areas of opportunity and 15 strategies for tourism destination development in Trent Hills. Each strategy is backed by specific actions outlined in our implementation planning documents. A chart summarizing each area of opportunity, objectives, strategies, and outcomes follows.

Tourism infrastructure development

In any destination, tourism requires infrastructure to function. Some infrastructure, like roads and sewers are shared with residents. At the same time, specific investments in soft infrastructure for tourism can considerably improve the visitor experience and destination competitiveness. The objective of this area of opportunity is to activate public and private spaces through soft infrastructure for tourism.

Strategies

1. To start, we will **conduct a soft infrastructure for tourism needs assessment** to inform where we concentrate our efforts and who we partner with. The assessment will look at health and safety infrastructure needs like public washrooms, waste disposal, pedestrian crossings, public parking, etc. along with sport-specific infrastructure needs to improve the visitor experience and adapt to climate change (e.g. snowmobiling, canoeing, swimming, etc.).
2. Signage is a key part of placemaking and empowering visitors to make the most of their time in Trent Hills. We will **develop a destination signage strategy** that includes direction on gateway, wayfinding, and interpretive signage across Trent Hills. Gateway signage establishes a destination in the minds of visitors, whereas wayfinding signage helps visitors locate points of interest and essential infrastructure like public parking. Interpretive signage, both physical and digital, helps visitors make the most of their visit and will provide a platform for us to share stories about our community.
3. As a destination made up of multiple communities, encouraging visitors to move around is essential to spreading out the benefits of tourism. As such, we will **advocate for improved transportation infrastructure** in alignment with the Municipality of Trent Hill's Active Transportation and Trails Master Plan as well as advocate for improvements related to visitor needs, such as outdoor rental equipment, water refill stations and year-round trail maintenance.
4. We know that our downtowns are at the heart of what we present to the world and a key part of our value proposition as a destination. To ensure that we put our best foot forward, we will **work with partners on street beautification initiatives**. Although we need to consult with partners before plans are set, examples of what this could look like include, promoting façade restoration through Community Improvement Program grants and partnering with business associations on public art projects, butterfly-friendly rain garden initiatives, and working to grow visual connectivity and identity for Trent Hills as a destination, etc.

Outcomes

In working within this area of opportunity, Trent Hills will be a vibrant destination with the soft tourism infrastructure needed to support tourism development, while also becoming a better place to live.

Stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder engagement is essential to tourism development. We know that tourism in Trent Hills is built on partnerships between passionate business owners, staff, volunteers, not-for-profit organizations, and government entities. Connecting meaningfully with diverse stakeholders builds support for tourism and helps to identify issues before they develop into problems. The objective of this area of opportunity is to mobilize support and explore alignments in tourism management.

Strategies

5. To set a strong foundation, we will **build awareness around the value of tourism to Trent Hills** by connecting with diverse audiences, including residents, businesses, partners, etc. and sharing information about the importance of the visitor economy to Trent Hills, along with sociocultural benefits, environmentally conscious investments, and other good news stories. This strategy may also require developing new ways of collecting tourism data.
6. We know that the tourism industry and a dedicated group of volunteers are the beating heart of tourism in Trent Hills. To acknowledge the important role of these stakeholders and inspire others to participate, we are committed to **recognizing volunteer and industry contributions to the Trent Hills tourism economy**, including festival and event volunteers. There are many ways this can be done, for example, hosting an annual recognition program.
7. Whether from climate change, global pandemics, demographic shifts or changing visitor demands, we expect future shocks to the tourism industry. To ensure that Trent Hills has the structures in place to weather future storms, we commit to **identifying vulnerabilities and ways to build resilience into tourism assets** so that our unique selling propositions will continue to shine for years to come. This strategy could take many forms, but some examples include inviting experts to speak with our tourism industry on climate change adaptations, strengthening volunteer succession planning for tourism assets, and pursuing a sustainable destination accreditation.
8. Another important area of work is underlining connections between and across the tourism industry. One area we see potential is highlighting Trent Hills agricultural links. To do this, we will **work with food, beverage, and agricultural businesses to celebrate Trent Hills' food culture as part of the visitor experience**. Through this work, it will become commonplace for Trent Hills to appear on the plates and in the glasses of our visitors, bringing our farmlands and rural landscapes to life.

Outcomes

In working within this area of opportunity, Trent Hills will have diverse stakeholders engaged, invested, and informed in the development of tourism in Trent Hills.

Product development

We know that Trent Hills is one-of-a-kind, and we want visitors to know this too! To make this happen, we need to ensure that the tourism product we offer connects visitors to this uniqueness. Everything we celebrate should be accessible so that every visitor can experience it for themselves. The objective of this area of opportunity is to develop tourism products that connect visitors to what makes Trent Hills unique.

Strategies

9. A key tourism asset in Trent Hills is the diverse routes and trails that crisscross the region. Visitors can move around in many ways including by foot, bicycle, boat, car, snowmobile, etc. To turn these into powerful draws, we need to treat these transportation channels as a tourism product, which means **developing and activating branded routes leveraging Trent Hills' land and water trails**. This strategy will make it easier and more compelling for visitors to plan for a diversity of soft adventures across our destination.
10. Another way to grow Trent Hills' tourism product is by **enabling industry to develop and offer bookable experiences**. We know that visitors seek meaningful experiences that connect them with the places they visit. Bookable experiences that showcase our unique selling propositions will reinforce our destination narrative, enabling us to promote these with integrity. Importantly, we will need to work with industry to ensure that visitors can sign up for these new experiences online. This strategy is likely to leverage existing programs and training offered by our partners.
11. Similarly, we see the importance of providing multiple ways for visitors to interact with our unique selling propositions (USPs), including self-guided options. That's why we will **create new itineraries that encourage visitors to connect with destination USPs**, showing off our tourism assets while catering to the needs of current and potential visitors.
12. We know that visitors today are looking for authentic experiences that are community-based, activities that locals naturally partake in. To ensure a continued supply of these kinds of visitor offerings, we will **continue supporting community-led initiatives that are visitor-facing**, whether that is through organizing networking events or providing marketing support.

Outcomes

In working within this area of opportunity, Trent Hills will be known as a place where visitors come to easily interact with our tourism products that genuinely reflect the stories and uniqueness of our destination.

Destination marketing

With a strong tourism product established, we will market Trent Hills to current and potential visitors. The objective of this area of opportunity is to position Trent Hills as a one-of-a-kind destination while connecting visitors to Trent Hills. This means inspiring visitation and providing the information visitors need to plan a trip around their interests.

Strategies

13. To seize this area of opportunity we will **streamline Trent Hills destination branding and narrative**. This means confirming the Trent Hills destination narrative, messaging, and associated brand in alignment with our USPs, celebrating these across our channels and working with our marketing partners to empower them to do the same.
14. We will also **enable visitors to stay longer and explore more deeply**. Visitors come to Trent Hills for a variety of reasons, we want to motivate them to extend their trips by showing them how our destination aligns with all their interests. This means connecting with cottagers, boaters, festival, and event visitors, and visiting friends and family markets to show them what other meaningful experiences they can have in Trent Hills. Another way to do this is to tap into regional and provincial campaigns and initiatives, and pulling in travellers visiting nearby destinations.
15. Finally, we know that soft outdoor adventures are foundational to the Trent Hills Visitor experience, but not everyone has the skills or information to incorporate this into a trip. For that reason, we will focus on **empowering all visitors to make outdoor recreation part of their stay**. Key to this will be making trip planning tools readily accessible. For example, providing tip sheets for bike-packing and licensing requirements or mapping out water access points, pet-friendly spaces, accessible venues, and different kinds of trails.

Outcomes

In working within this area of opportunity, Trent Hills will become a more accessible and desirable destination. Not only will we inspire visitation, but we will also empower our visitors to plan trips that meet their needs, thereby increasing visitor satisfaction and encouraging repeat visitation.

Tourism Development Plan Overview

Area of Opportunity	Objective	Strategies
Tourism infrastructure development	To activate public and private spaces through soft infrastructure for tourism.	1. Conduct a soft infrastructure for tourism needs assessment
		2. Develop a destination signage strategy
		3. Advocate for improved transportation infrastructure
		4. Work with partners on street beautification initiatives
Stakeholder engagement	To mobilize support and explore alignments in tourism management.	5. Build awareness around value of tourism to Trent Hills
		6. Recognize volunteer and industry contributions to the Trent Hills tourism economy
		7. Identify vulnerabilities and ways to build resilience into tourism assets
		8. Work with food, drink, and agricultural businesses to celebrate Trent Hills' food culture as part of the visitor experience
Product development	To develop tourism product that connects visitors to everything that makes Trent Hills unique.	9. Develop and activate branded routes leveraging Trent Hills' land and water trails
		10. Enable industry to develop and offer bookable experiences
		11. Create new itineraries that encourage visitors to connect with destination USP
		12. Continue supporting community-led initiatives that are visitor-facing
Destination marketing	To position Trent Hills as a one-of-a-kind destination, while connecting visitors to Trent Hills.	13. Streamline Trent Hills destination branding and narrative
		14. Encourage visitors to stay longer and explore more deeply
		15. Empower all visitors to make outdoor recreation part of their stay

Part 4: The Next Three Years

We will action Trent Hills’ Tourism Development Plan using an implementation plan. The implementation plan is an internal document that outlines additional details associated with each strategy, including roles, timelines, key performance indicators, etc.

Although the Tourism Development Plan has been designed to be implemented by our team at the Trent Hills Chamber of Commerce, we recognize the important role that collaboration will play in ensuring its successful implementation. We will work with our partners to identify available resources and supports that can be leveraged to maximize the positive impacts of tourism for our residents, businesses, and visitors.

Timeline

Across the next three years, we will move to implement all 15 strategies. The chart below depicts when we foresee implementation for each strategy will begin. Please note, some strategies may involve implementation efforts across multiple years.

Year	Strategies to begin implementation
Year 1 (2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conduct a soft infrastructure for tourism needs assessment 2. Develop a destination signage strategy 3. Advocate for improved transportation infrastructure 5. Build awareness around value of tourism to Trent Hills 6. Recognize volunteer and industry contributions to the Trent Hills tourism economy 8. Work with food, drink, and agricultural businesses to celebrate Trent Hills’ food culture as part of the visitor experience 10. Enable industry to develop and offer bookable experiences 12. Continue supporting community-led initiatives that are visitor-facing
Year 2 (2025)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Develop and activate branded routes leveraging Trent Hills’ land and water trails 11. Create new itineraries that encourage visitors to connect with destination USP 13. Streamline Trent Hills destination branding and narrative 15. Empower all visitors to make outdoor recreation part of their stay
Year 3 (2026)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Work with partners on street beautification initiatives 7. Identify vulnerabilities and ways to build resilience into tourism assets 14. Encourage visitors to stay longer and explore more deeply

Questions and Contact

If you are interested in supporting the implementation of our Tourism Destination Development Plan, please contact Nancy Allanson, CEO at the Trent Hills Chamber of Commerce. We know a successfully implemented plan will involve working together with many other partners and stakeholders.

- o Email: nancy@trenthillschamber.ca
- o Telephone: 705-653-1551

Please keep an eye on our website (<https://www.visittrenthills.ca/>) for information about the implementation of *Charting the Course Together: Trent Hills Tourism Development Strategy*.

