



Visitor Services Strategy

January 17, 2021

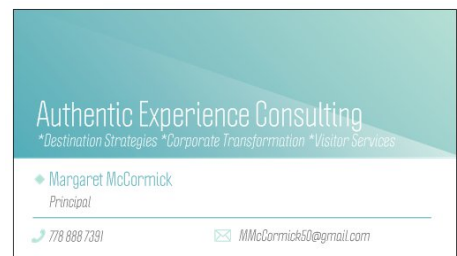


Table of Contents

1	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
2	INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY	5
3	SITUATION ANALYSIS	6
3.1	TRIP PLANNING/VISITOR BEHAVIOUR AND THE IMPACT ON VISITOR SERVICES	6
3.2	STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT	8
3.3	TOURISM IN SALMON ARM	12
3.4	STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK	17
3.5	VISITOR SERVICES IN SALMON ARM	19
3.6	ASSETS AND INFORMATION DISTRIBUTION	21
3.7	BEST PRACTICES	28
3.8	VISITOR SERVICES OPERATING MODELS	32
3.9	ADDING DIGITAL VISITOR SERVICES TO THE MIX – WHAT DOES THAT LOOK LIKE?	33
3.10	WHAT ABOUT 2021?	33
3.11	SWOT	34
4	STRATEGIC DIRECTION DECISION	36
4.1	VISITOR SERVICES IN THE SHUSWAP IS AT A CROSSROADS	36
4.2	WHAT ROLE DOES THE CITY WISH TO PLAY?	36
4.3	STRATEGIC PRINCIPLES	37
4.4	SHUSWAP TRAILS DIGITAL DEPENDENCY	37
5	STRATEGY	38
5.1	VISION AND GOALS	38
5.2	PLAN	38
5.3	TACTICS	39
5.4	DETAILED BUDGET	43
5.5	TIMELINE	45
5.6	OPERATING MODEL	45
6	APPENDIX	48
6.1	DESTINATION BC VISITOR EXPERIENCE STRATEGY	48
6.2	2020 VISITOR SERVICES NETWORK PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS	48
6.3	SALMON ARM CHAMBER OF COMMERCE VISITOR SERVICES CONTRACT	48
6.4	SHUSWAP TRAIL ALLIANCE TRAILFORKS DATA	48
6.5	SHUSWAP TOURISM WEBSITE – SALMON ARM BUSINESS EXPOSURE	48
6.6	SHUSWAP TOURISM 2019-2020 REVIEW	48
6.7	IMPLICATION MATRIX	49

1 Executive Summary

The vision of the Salmon Arm Visitor Services Strategy is *“through innovative and collaborative initiatives, Salmon Arm visitor services delivers an outstanding visitor experience to visitors to the Shuswap, making return trips and great recommendations a regular occurrence.”* These foundational elements provide direction for the City’s very first strategy and are woven throughout this document.

Being the very first, it is extremely important that the strategy is informed by data, and to that end, a detailed Situation Analysis begins with a look at the customer and specifically changes to visitors pre and in destination planning behaviours. Strategic alignment forms a large part of the analysis due to the complexity of the tourism industry and the unique operating layers within the Shuswap. A review of the tourism infrastructure, visitor services activities and supporting assets and information unveil a number of implications. Wherever possible, facts and data are offered to support the findings.

A series of interviews with stakeholders and best practise operators provide both insights and opportunities. Understanding the importance of new digital distribution channels and looking ahead to the unknown of 2021 are also important considerations. A SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) serves to summarize the analysis.

As the research unfolded, it became clear that a strategic decision by the City is required that involves determining what level of investment the City wants to make in tourism and what improvements in strategic alignments need to be made to get better results. What was also clear, was the absence of an overall tourism strategy.

To date, the City has left tourism marketing and visitor services to its partners and contractors. Lacking an overall tourism strategy that incorporates destination marketing, destination development and visitor services, the partners/contractors have been operating from a variety of sub plans including the MRDT Business and Tactical Plans and the Shuswap Tourism Marketing Plan. While effort has been made to integrate, the roles, responsibilities and decision making have presented challenges. In some cases, tactics have been executed without the opportunity to provide input or approval and may not always be in the best interest of Salmon Arm.

To affect change, the City has the opportunity to more deeply engage and ultimately determine where the role of Destination Marketing / Management resides. Consideration of an overall tourism strategy for Salmon Arm would better inform a future visitor services strategy.

In the meantime, this visitor services strategy is designed to take an omni channel approach delivering visitor services through three key distribution channels and supported by tactics that leverage existing relationships and provide key learnings for the future. Two operating models are recommended for consideration. The City may choose to operate visitor servicing or contract the service to Salmon Arm Economic Development. Pros, cons and considerations are presented in Section 5.6.

Both models rely on new relationships with existing partners. Because the City owns no digital assets, a collaboration with Shuswap Tourism on the digital program tactic is absolutely required. An alternative and unpalatable option would see the City needing to build its own website and social media channels. Should the City decide to contract visitor services to SAEDS, a third service agreement clearly outlining the deliverables and how they are managed against the visitor services contract and MRDT funds specifically is required.

The visitor services vision is supported by five measurable goals.

1. Improved strategic alignment to maximize spend value;
2. Successfully transition from a single to omni channel visitor services model;
3. Provide excellent visitor services experiences;
4. Increase spend, stay and repeat visits in Salmon Arm and the Shuswap; and
5. Support shoulder season experiences.

Three unique but integrated approaches for delivery of visitor services are identified:

<p style="text-align: center;">Bricks & Mortar <u>The Fishing Hole</u> Engaging fish from a single location. The “fish find us” at the fishing hole they return to year after year.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Mobile Outreach <u>We Go Fishing</u> Moving throughout the community during peak times and events, we go fishing to attract and catch schools of fish we have the greatest ability to influence.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Digital Outreach <u>We Let Out the Line</u> Supporting campaigns and digital platforms of our partner Tourism Shuswap, we send out content “bait” and offer our assistance to support fish wherever they are in their ‘lifecycle’.</p>
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These three tactics are further supported by four broader tactics: Business Communication, Tools, People, Partners & Programs and Monitor and Evaluate Success.

A second Digital Outreach Tactic 3A has been scoped to demonstrate the impact if Shuswap Tourism digital program was not part of the strategy. A detailed draft budget and tactic by task has also been developed.

Given the unstable nature of the tourism economy and the increased role being asked of the City, this strategy focuses heavily on the first year with a Try, Test, Learn and Adapt approach. Long term financial investments are minimized, and key learning plays a large role. As the year unfolds, it will become clearer how much momentum the new strategy is able to gain. Expectation is that year two and three will be more stable, tactics will focus on refinement and the possibility of further broadening reach to support the region.

In closing, the author would like to acknowledge all stakeholders who provided input, Councillors Eliason and Cannon who gave permission to explore all options available and also the support of Erin Jackson, Director of Corporate Services whose willingness to look beyond “what is” and towards “what could be” is much appreciated. “Status quo is not an option”.

Margaret McCormick
Authentic Experience Consulting
December 2020

2 Introduction and Methodology

This strategy was developed with valuable input from the City of Salmon Arm, industry stakeholders and partners. It was informed by an extensive online literature review and best practice visitor services interviews which helped to develop the implications, SWOT and Strategic Direction.

The draft strategy and tactics have been developed with care to ensure that there is capacity and willingness to make program adjustments and with the “Try, Test, Learn and Adapt” approach to protect investment and maximize the opportunity for success.

Section 3: Situation Analysis

This section presents an overview of key trends and issues that are impacting or could impact growth and performance of visitor services for the City, including a review of trip planning and visitor behaviour, visitor services trends, strategic alignment, tourism and visitor services in the Shuswap and Salmon Arm, best practises of visitor services in other jurisdictions, and a SWOT analysis.

Section 4: Strategic Direction

Based on insights from the Situation Analysis, the Strategic Direction has been developed and four operating models identified, and a recommendation is provided including the introduction of strategic principles supporting the direction and any operating model chosen.

Section 5: Strategy

This section presents a Year One strategy with notional direction for years Two and Three. Detailed Tactics with budget and timelines as well as a detailed work plan for Year One are also included.

Section 6: Appendix

3 Situation Analysis

Years ago, the Google search results for a Visitor Services Strategy would fit on one page. Today, around the world destination marketing organizations from national to community level are no longer thinking about marketing as campaign driven activities, advertising and brand in isolation but are developing a more holistic view to the visitor journey. Studies and strategies are now including a greater emphasis on trip planning and in destination access to information and many are seeing the journey as an end-to-end relationship in which visitor services plays a greater role.

The following statement from a recent Victoria Australia tourism study sums up the role like this:

“Marketing inspires visitors to want to experience the region and begins to build a relationship that leads to visitor servicing. Visitor servicing builds on the enthusiasm generated by marketing and enhances this with information about a range of relevant accommodation, activities and attractions that encourages the visitor to plan a longer stay in region. Visitor Servicing seamlessly continues the relationship before visitors commit to travelling to region, as well as while they are in region.”¹

The Situation Analysis explores a range of topics designed to inform the strategy. While it is important to address the broader drivers such as visitor behaviour, much has been written on this topic and is easily available through online sources. Therefore, the strategy highlights key findings but focuses specifically on insights most closely relevant to Salmon Arm such as the complex number of strategies that have alignment requirements and the current fragmented structure of tourism services.

Implication for Salmon Arm Visitor Services Strategy highlights can be found at the end of most sections in effort to summarize and provide editorial impact. An Implication Matrix has been created summarizing all implications and which tactic they have been addressed can be found in Appendix 6.7.

3.1 Trip Planning/Visitor Behaviour and the Impact on Visitor Services

Consumer trends have been impacted by global economic downturns, increasing competition from other jurisdictions, the rapidly evolving technological landscape and, most recently, Covid 19. Coming out of Covid, competition for pent up demand will be extremely fierce.

Visitor services will play a key role in recovery, and as has been acknowledged and documented by many tourism destinations, the largest impacts to visitor services have been the Internet, mobile technologies and social networks for trip planning before departure and while in destination. Travellers expect a multitude of **trip planning** information and they will use various methods to verify and sift through all of the information available to them. Multiple information sources are not only expected, they are preferred.

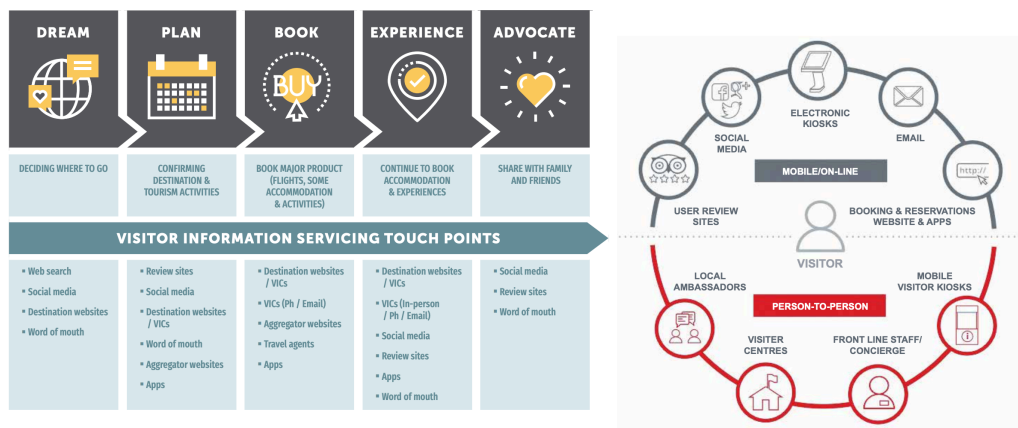
While **in destination**, travellers use word of mouth (locals, visitor centres and tourism businesses) and printed materials (maps, brochures and guidebooks) as information sources; word of mouth is the most

¹ The Future of Visitor Servicing White Paper - Draft, Victoria Australia August 2019

influential.² For some travellers while in British Columbia, visitor centres will continue to represent an important source of word-of-mouth information and opportunity to gather printed materials. Other travellers are less likely to use visitor centres and rely more on pre-trip planning or online sources of information. Millennials (currently aged 22-37 years) are a new generation of travellers that will soon replace Baby Boomers to become the largest travel market segment as their incomes and financial standing grow. The Baby Boomers will continue to travel and bring with them a new travel segment – inter or multigenerational travellers. Millennials who get on well with their Boomer parents are travelling together as a group.³

It is evident that effective and successful visitor servicing must become both omni channel and customized to the unique attributes of visitors to and interested in the destination.

In the 2019 Australian Tourism Council report “National Perspective of Visitor Information Servicing” the author identifies that visitor information servicing touch points take place through all aspects of the trip journey and that in order for visitor servicing to be effective, changes in delivery channels must be implemented. Visitor servicing can no longer consist of one source of information typically within a structure and the responsibility of one organization. Serving the visitor must transition into a holistic approach involving multiple touch points, relationships, organization both online and face to face.



Source: 2019 Australian Tourism Council National Perspective of Visitor Information Servicing

While we are seeing some destinations moving to strictly digital servicing and examples will be provided further on, it is important to understand what going digital only really means and not to see it as a silver bullet or a way to recover funds.

There are many considerations to what a visitor servicing strategy should be and regardless of the selected mix of touch points, the key principles must be:

- people trust recommendations from other humans over brands or organisations. This means; personal service, whether it be online or face to face, transforms information distribution to **information engagement**
- the information needs to be consistent across the whole journey. This means; **the system must be integrated**

² Destination BC In Destination Value of Visitor Centre Research

³ 2019 Australian Tourism Council report “National Perspective of Visitor Information Servicing”

The 2018 Destination BC Visitor Experience Strategy identifies the evolving visitor services delivery as “strategically deploying the human touch where it can be most influential, organizing the tourism system around digital service delivery, and ensuring the tourism system is coordinated in meeting the needs of visitor and service expectations”

Implication for Salmon Arm Visitor Services Strategy:

An integrated omni channel visitor services strategy requires collaboration, cooperation and communication between all the stakeholders. This is an important opportunity that was supported by stakeholders interviewed.

3.2 Strategic Alignment

In order to achieve an integrated solution and have the greatest chance of success, a Visitor Services Strategy needs to be in strong alignment with all levels of decision making. The following section identifies organizations whose strategies are most important to the Salmon Arm Visitor Services Strategy.

3.2.1 Destination BC Visitor Experience Strategy

In 2018, Destination BC developed a Visitor Experience Strategy which set the framework for visitor engagement and experience development.

Four Strategic Themes drive Destination BC’s Visitor Experience Strategy.

1. Managing a Seamless Visitor Experience

Collectively we need to proactively monitor the experience our visitors have along their journey and identify and anticipate opportunities to improve the quality of their overall experience by filling gaps, providing adequate amenities, and reducing pain points.

2. Delivering Quality Experiences and Amenities

The development and management of exceptional experiences, amenities and infrastructure that visitors need to travel to and throughout BC with ease.

3. Building Innovative Approaches to Information and Inspiration Delivery

Collectively we need to be where travellers are looking for planning inspiration, information and assistance — the large platforms and publishers. We need to leverage these widely adopted tools to enhance BC content that will inform visitors and connect them to assistance that will influence a decision to travel or result in a booking. We must also leverage integrated technology systems to enable data-driven proactive trip suggestions.

4. Evolving Visitor Service Delivery

Through expanding and evolving the Visitor Services Network, we can increase BC’s competitiveness by offering remarkable customer service, one-to-one interactions, and travel guidance that elevates our brand proposition.

Implication for Salmon Arm Visitor Services Strategy:

The DBC Visitor Experience Strategy provides an important and useful direction (See Appendix 6.1 for Full Strategy) that evolves the visitor services concept to visitor experience and seamless integration.

3.2.2 Visitor Centre Network Program

The Visitor Centre Network Program has been the hallmark visitor information delivery mechanism for decades. By ensuring consistent training, standards and operating principles are followed as well as providing important mentoring, information sharing and information resources, the Network has been emulated around the world. New Zealand’s iSite program and Australia’s Accredited Information Centre Program (VIC) were both built on British Columbia’s pioneering efforts.

In 2019, Visitor Centres around the province served over 2.9 million visitors in their communities and at their physical locations.

Destination BC recognizes the valuable contribution that Visitor Services provides and provides annual funding support to more than 100 communities in their provision of visitor services.

Until August of 2020, Salmon Arm Visitor Services was operated by the Chamber of Commerce as a contracted service from the City. The Network program provided \$12,500 in support in 2020 and in addition to staff expertise over the past few years has also provided funding for special projects such as an Innovation Fund for new projects and most recently funding for Visitor Centres to implement safety protocols.

Implication for Salmon Arm Visitor Services Strategy:

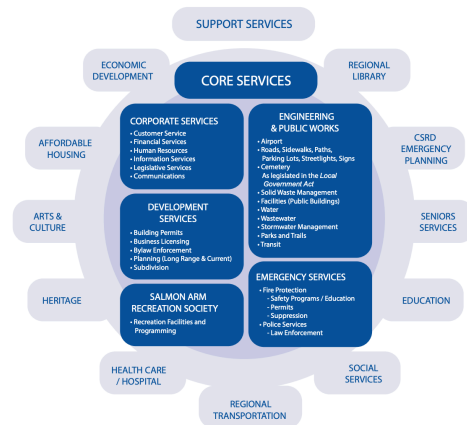
The Visitor Centre Network is a valuable resource and consideration should be given to ensure Salmon Arm remains in the program. Adhering to Terms and Conditions and the provision of reporting are two criteria for membership. (See Appendix 6.2 for T&C)

3.2.3 City of Salmon Arm

Currently the City’s Corporate Strategy does not identify tourism and/or visitor services as a core or supporting service. The City’s traditional approach has been to contract out tourism services (Shuswap Tourism), Economic Development (SAEDS) and visitor services (Chamber of Commerce). More about this relationship can be found in section 3.3 Tourism in Salmon Arm.

Source: City of Salmon Arm Corporate Strategic Plan

FIGURE 5.1 – CORE SERVICES AND SUPPORT SERVICES



Implication for Salmon Arm Visitor Services Strategy:

Some consideration needs to be given to how the City wants to lead and engage going forward and may need to consider where tourism fits in terms of core and or supported services.

3.2.4 Other Important Strategic Alignments

Information sources are provided up and down the supply chain from Destination British Columbia to individual businesses. It is important to understand the role of each and how using and supporting and these channels will be advantageous to this strategy.

Destination Development Highway 1 Corridor Strategy – One of twenty destination development strategies developed throughout the province, this Strategy was produced in 2018 to enhance the competitiveness of the Highway 1 Corridor planning area over the next 10 years and beyond. The strategy was developed as part of Destination BC’s Destination Development Program to support and guide the long-term growth of tourism in British Columbia. Visitor services is identified within the plan and attention should be given to how Salmon Arm will respond in the longer term especially in light of any future marketing and promotion of Highway 1. Note this is a unique strategy in that it crosses several regional boundaries and focuses on the visitor experience from east/west (or vice versa).

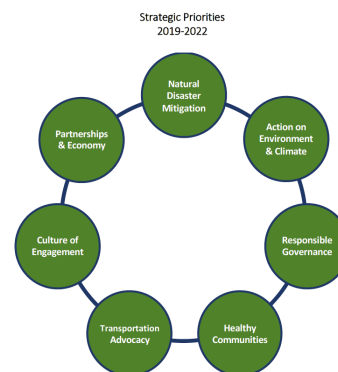
Destination Development Shuswap North Okanagan Strategy – This Strategy is part of the twenty destination development strategies described above. This Strategy focuses on the northern part of the Thompson Okanagan region and has a strong focus on the further development of trails. Frontline training is also an important theme within Industry Readiness which has application to the Salmon Arm Visitor Services Strategy.

Thompson Okanagan Regional Association (TOTA) – TOTA provides destination development guidance and support to the region. TOTA’s 10 Year Strategy Embracing Our Potential was created in 2012 and most recently, TOTA has been providing leadership and direction through the Tourism Resiliency Program. TOTA focuses on the principles of stewardship and sustainability which are important alignment elements. Data intelligence is gathered at a regional level through a contracted service which is used to understand visitor profiles and tailor marketing and engagement.

Columbia Shuswap Regional District Strategic Plan 2019-2022 (CSRD) – As the operating organization of Shuswap Tourism, the strategic direction that the CSRD takes is of critical importance to the City Visitor Services Strategy. Tourism is not identified within the strategy however it can be assumed that it resides in the broader collaborative economic development within the theme of Partnerships and Economy. It is unclear how important the Shuswap Tourism role is to the CSRD and this is of some concern given the dependency that the City has on their program delivery. Stronger defined alignment is necessary to ensure an efficient and effective visitor services program both regionally and within Salmon Arm.

STRATEGIC THEMES

Strategic themes speak to important needs and opportunities on which the Board wishes to focus the organization's resources. The themes are identified in the accompanying graphic; additional details are provided in the pages that follow.



Shuswap Tourism Marketing Plan – at present Shuswap Tourism is not operating from a Strategic Plan. See section 3.3 Tourism in Salmon Arm, Destination Marketing – Shuswap Tourism for details regarding their marketing plan. Strategic alignment with both a Strategic Plan and the Marketing Plan is imperative to the success of this plan.

Salmon Arm Economic Development Strategy – SAEDS is currently developing their new five-year Strategic Plan. As the stewards of MRDT funds and the lead in economic development, strategic alignment is a critical element to the success of this plan. Further discussion about the important role SAEDS plays is captured in 3.3.2.

Salmon Arm MRDT Five Year Business Plan (2017-2022) –The Municipal and Regional District Tax (MRDT) was introduced in 1987, by the Provincial Government, to provide funding for local tourism marketing, programs, and projects. In April 2017 the City successfully applied to the levy the tax.

This MRDT Business Plan is a mechanism to collect incremental funds to support **specific** projects and programs and typically also resides within a broader tourism strategy. Salmon Arm does not have a tourism strategy and as a result, the MRDT Business Plan aligns with regional and provincial strategies.

The roles and responsibilities for Salmon Arm MRDT are:

- The City of Salmon Arm will be the lead applicant, applying to the Province of British Columbia for the authority to levy the Municipal and Regional District Tax;
- The City of Salmon Arm will enter into a Third Party Service Agreement with SAEDS to administer the MRDT revenue on its behalf, in accordance with the Business Plan;
- SAEDS will form an MRDT Committee comprised of tourism stakeholders, which will oversee the Business Plan implementation; and
- SAEDS will work closely with partner organizations including Shuswap Tourism, Salmon Arm Visitor Centre, Shuswap Trail Alliance and others to ensure a collaborative and regionally aligned approach to the MRDT service delivery.

As stated in the Business Plan, the guiding principles of the plan are:

1. The plan will be “Accommodator led” with input and support from broader tourism stakeholders;
2. The Plan will support the implementation of specific local tourism initiatives which have been identified as gaps and high ROI opportunities;
3. The Plan will support and expand the work of multiple tourism stakeholder organizations across the broader Shuswap region; and
4. The Plan will include a collaborative approach, ensuring a strong alignment with strategic plans of partner organizations, including Shuswap Tourism’s Development Plan, Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association’s Tourism Strategy, and Destination BC’s Strategic Plan.

Visitor services initiatives to be developed are expanded information and signage and an Ambassador Program.

Brand Strategy – Understanding the Salmon Arm Brand Strategy Small City, Big Ideas is important to ensure that visual and informational tools developed for this strategy are in alignment. While efforts to consider tourism formed part of its development, this brand is not specific to tourism and has created some challenges with the larger tourism brand strategies of Destination BC, TOTA and Shuswap Tourism. The role that visitor services plays will ultimately help determine the right brand positioning.

Downtown Salmon Arm Strategy – alignment with the DSA strategy and tactics will foster greater collaboration and avoid duplicative efforts.

Shuswap Trails Alliance – As one of the marquee products in the Shuswap, alignment with the Shuswap Trails Strategy will ensure the Visitor Services Strategy is positioned to deliver compelling and accurate information supporting increased visitation and satisfaction.

Indigenous Tourism BC (ITBC) and the Shuswap Indigenous Tourism Strategy – As the broader ITBC Strategy progresses and the new Shuswap Indigenous Tourism Strategy evolves there is tremendous opportunity to create stronger partnerships, feature new products and provide visitor services capabilities and support.

Implication for Salmon Arm Visitor Services Strategy:

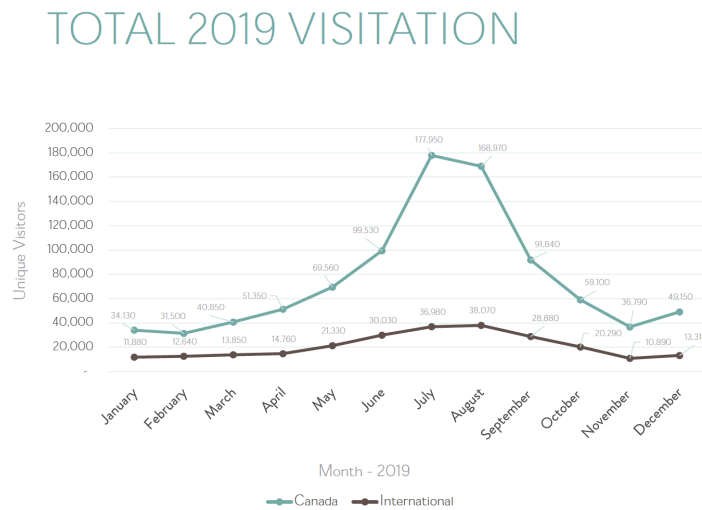
The tourism industry is complex and within the Shuswap there are multiple layers of decision making, which make strategic alignment both a challenge and an opportunity. Time dedicated to understanding, monitoring and making strategic shifts as necessary will benefit the longer-term component of this strategy, reduce potential duplication and support a broader ability to successfully promote and serve visitors to Salmon Arm.

3.3 Tourism in Salmon Arm

3.3.1 Visitor Profile

Salmon Arm is a commercial centre for the Shuswap and the majority of traditional hospitality services such as accommodation and food and beverage are located within the City and area. As a destination, visitors come to Salmon Arm predominantly for outdoor adventure and events such as the Roots & Blues Festival and in shoulder and off-season hockey tournaments. Outside of major events, visitors commonly use Salmon Arm as a hub to activities in and around the Shuswap.

Telus Insights cellular visitor data⁴ obtained through membership with Thompson Okanagan Regional Association confirms summer visitation represents 49% of visitors to the Shuswap both domestic and international. The other three season visitation is distributed fairly equally with Fall 21%, Spring 18% and Winter 12%.



Source: Telus Insights Data

Telus data reports a higher volume of visitors stayed a minimum of one night in the Shuswap than those who were in the Shuswap for the day “daytripper” and peak month for both categories was July.

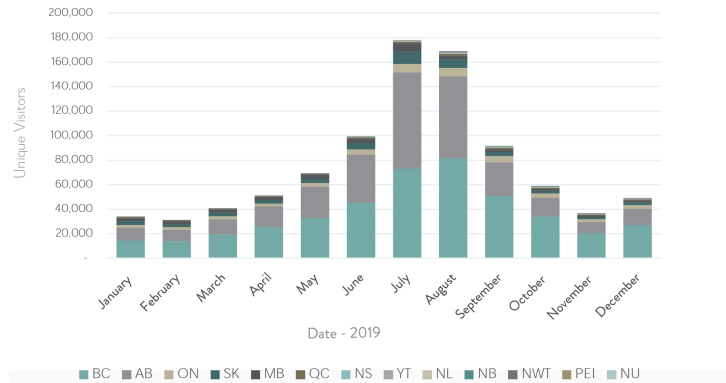
Minimum one night domestic visitors July 146,780
Day trippers July 31,170

⁴ TOTA Shuswap Community Research, 2019 Year in Review

As expected, BC residents represent the largest segment of domestic visitors to the Shuswap annually but in July almost as many visitors were from Alberta. BC July 81,650 AB July 73,050.

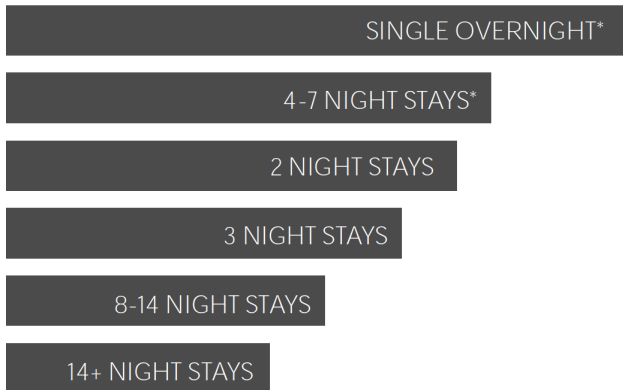
VISITOR ORIGIN BY TOTAL VISITATION

CANADA BY PROVINCE



Shuswap is considered a summer destination as reflected in the length of stay data for both domestic and international visitors.

DOMESTIC LENGTH OF STAY



*4-7 Nights rank first in August



SINGLE NIGHT REPEAT VISITATION DOMINATES ACROSS ALL DOMESTIC MARKETS

PEAKING IN JULY WITH 19K REPEAT VISITS FROM CANADIAN TRAVELLERS

Telus also provides further insights with respect to individual province and country travel visitation and on visitor movement (where they enter the Shuswap). Through Environics Analytics, Explorer Quotient (EQ) profiles visitors

in targeted locations (for example Vancouver) through a greater understanding of when and why different types of travellers seek out entirely different travel experiences.

Implication for Salmon Arm Visitor Services Strategy:

Understanding visitor data, interests and patterns will better enable the opportunity to identify visitor services offerings. For example, given the second largest length of stay category is 4-7 nights and July peaks with repeat visitation, this provides a sweet spot to influence visitor activity.

3.3.2 City of Salmon Arm

The relationship between the City and the tourism service providers is relatively unique in that the City has outsourced tourism services to three different service providers. The challenge is the lack of integrated cohesive system in place between the city and the providers resulting in the City being reliant on all three parties to deliver services with no overall measures or controls in place to address performance or coordinated effort. The contractors are provided minimal direction and in absence of a consolidated strategic tourism plan, are left to determine tactics that may compliment or duplicate services. A desire for clearer direction was articulated by one of the contractors.

It should be noted that the service agreement between the City and Salmon Arm Economic Development to administer MRDT lays out accountability controls that were established at the start of the Five Year Plan implementation. These include the City reviewing and authorizing the annual tactical plan and the annual measurables report, prior to their submission to DBC and Ministry of Finance. The City has a representative participating as a member of the MRDT working group as a non-voting member. A non-voting member's role is to provide information sharing/communication with the goal of ensuring no duplicating work being undertaken by a partner organization and that SAEDS is exploring all partnership opportunities.

The following outlines the roles and relationships of each organization as it pertains to visitor services, the broader tourism mandate and the relationship with the City as well as commentary on strengths and weaknesses of each.

3.3.3 Destination Marketing –Shuswap Tourism

The Columbia Shuswap Regional District (CSRD) is the “designated” Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) for the region. Shuswap Tourism represents the marketing interests of eight distinct areas within the Shuswap including Salmon Arm. The objective is to consolidate marketing efforts at a regional level to better leverage marketing opportunities, programs resulting in a more significant impact than could be achieved individually. The City provides an annual disbursement to the CSRD for services.

Shuswap Tourism is governed by the Board of Directors on which there are two elected officials from the City. Shuswap Tourism receives input but is not directed by a Tourism Advisory Committee comprised of elected officials and tourism businesses. The City has one elected official on this committee. There is no contract or MOU defining services, performance measures or any documented agreement that gives either party clear direction. Shuswap Tourism is not required to provide reporting (Annual Report or other) or planning (Business Plan/Tactical Plan or other) to the City. The Tourism Advisory Committee met only once in 2020.

Shuswap Tourism is in the fourth year of a five-year marketing plan but is not currently operating from a more robust tourism strategy guiding their actions. Shuswap Tourism has traditionally limited their visitor services engagement to the production and distribution of print material.

As identified in Section 3.1 Trip Planning & Visitor Behaviour, the needs of the visitor have changed over the last five years and in response, Shuswap Tourism has evolved their marketing strategy to reflect that change through

more effort towards digital marketing and shoulder and off-season promotion. The recently released 2019-2020 Shuswap Tourism Report, Final Draft showcases the campaigns and program produced.

While Shuswap Tourism has delivered a significant number of initiatives, capacity was identified as a significant issue during the CSRD Tourism Advisory Committee briefing held on November 26, 2020 and tourism and visitor services expertise does not reside within the department. For the past eighteen months Shuswap Tourism has been managed by a contracted economic development officer with no longer term vision for the role articulated in any public documents available.

In 2020, the City provided Shuswap Tourism \$133,691 to support destination marketing.

Implication for Salmon Arm Visitor Services Strategy:

In absence of a strategic plan and staff to deliver, Shuswap Tourism has been focusing on strategies and tactics from its marketing plan which does not include visitor services or visitor engagement, making strategic plan alignment difficult and the opportunity to expand their role to include visitor services unlikely. Decisions about the promotion of Salmon Arm are not within Salmon Arm's control and there is no accountability for the funding that City provides to Shuswap Tourism.

3.3.4 Economic Development/Municipal Regional District Tax (MRDT) – Salmon Arm Economic Development Society (SAEDS)

The City considers economic development a support service rather than a core service⁵. Tourism is not identified as either a core service or support service however arts, culture and heritage are considered support services. While not considered a core service, the Salmon Arm Economic Development Society Five Year Economic Development Action Plan Implementation was identified as an important project in the City 2013 Corporate Strategy.

The economic development contract is currently held by the Salmon Arm Economic Development Society (SAEDS). SAEDS is a non-profit society contracted to provide economic development services for the community and is governed by a Board of Directors comprised of business leaders of the major sectors of the economy.

The mandate of the organization is to:

- Support and provide services to existing businesses;
- Attract new businesses to the community, and
- Assist in developing strategies and programs to foster economic development and prosperity in the community.

The City also contracts SAEDS to manage the Municipal Regional District Tax (MRDT).

From a tourism and visitor services perspective, SAEDS is proactively currently providing event support and marketing support through MRDT funding and has been increasingly moving into the visitor services space as evident by the 2020 and 2021 tactical plans and the recent application to the Community Economic Recovery Infrastructure Program (CERIP) on behalf of the City. The CERIP application for \$289,796 was for three tactics: community signage, digital interactive kiosks and in person mobile visitor outreach. According to SAEDS, if successful the intent is for MRDT staff to oversee the digital kiosks and wayfinding components, and the mobile tactic to be transferred to the City with funds to be directed in alignment with this strategy. The application for the mobile visitor outreach was \$53,340. There is no supporting documentation to explain what this entails.

⁵ City of Salmon Arm Corporate Plan

The 2020 MRDT Tactical Plan (limited execution due to Covid), included expanded visitor information delivery and development of interactive kiosks.

The 2021 MRDT Tactical Plan further identified an increased role in visitor services by changing the Mission from the 2017-2022 MRDT Strategic Plan and the 2020 MRDT Tactical Plan to include **Providing/Supporting exceptional visitor services as one of four Mission statements**. The 2021 MRDT Tactical plan also identifies enhanced visitor services initiatives:

- *City of Salmon Arm Visitor Services Support Funding (to be determined by visitor strategy) Seed funding/flexibility is important.*
- *Front line Tourism Ambassador Series (series of events to arm front line tourism staff with current, high-value information regarding experiences, events and activities and how they can be accessed during the pandemic. This would also include providing print and digital resources to our front line staff to support their visitor response.*
- *Kiosk print collateral distribution at existing visitor kiosks to support visitor access to print materials (racking install and supply of high value, targeted visitor information resources).*
- *Welcome & wayfinding signage.*
- *Interactive visitor information kiosks.⁶*

The budget for visitor services in the 2021 MRDT Tactical Plan is \$56,700.

Implication for Salmon Arm Visitor Services Strategy:

In absence of a tourism and visitor services strategy for Salmon Arm and/or the region, SAEDS has proactively moved a visitor services agenda forward. Tactics identified have been developed through the MRDT process and may require some further refinement and consideration.

3.3.5 Salmon Arm Chamber of Commerce (to Aug 2020)

For over a decade and up to August 2020, visitor services was contracted to the Salmon Arm Chamber of Commerce. The contract was cancelled early due to Covid 19 but the City also had a desire to review the delivery model in light of the changing visitor demographics.

The visitor services contract (See Appendix 6.3) stipulated only on the ground services plus phone and email and was never adjusted to address the digital visitor. The contract also did not address business engagement.

In 2019 the City provided the Chamber of Commerce \$137,400 for contracted services.

Further information about the operation is included in the Salmon Arm Visitor Centre section.

Implication for Salmon Arm Visitor Services Strategy:

Any future contract for visitor services should be reviewed annually and include clear direction, performance targets and key performance indicators.

⁶ Salmon Arm 2021 MRDT Tactical Plan

3.3.6 Salmon Arm Visitor Touch Points

An important component of this strategy is understanding where visitors spend their time when in destination. While limited, the following information will help guide outreach tactics such as mobile visitor services.

Trails – the Shuswap Trails Alliance partners with Trailforks to obtain data on trail use. Trailforks was originally developed as a mountain biking tool and therefore the depth of information about mountain bikes is richer however there is data to also identify other users such as hikers. In 2019 Trailforks identified 1,807 riders and in 2020 (to date) 2,912 riders representing an increase of 61%. An interesting opportunity for visitor services is that 87,9% of riders were classified as visitors (living 30km or farther from the trail). Detailed data is located in the Appendix 6.4. Unfortunately, website analytics were not available from the Shuswap Trails website.

Through one-to-one interviews the RJ Haney Heritage Village & Museum estimate just over 17,000 guests and the Shuswap Art Gallery estimates they see between eight and ten thousand people annually with approximately 50% from outside Salmon Arm and between 250-750 people for Wednesday on the Wharf also a mixture 50/50 of visitors to residents. Other potential touch points without corresponding data include Canoe Beach, Marine Park and Herald Provincial Park.

Roots and Blues Festival 2021 has yet to be confirmed but there is planning underway that envisions a hybrid model that includes both live streaming and smaller in person venues. The 2020 free live-streaming event had 21,000 people (conservative numbers) which indicates that even as a paid event there is appetite for an online experience. As details become available, it will be important to consider how to best serve visitors (in person) and potential visitors (streaming). Historically, Roots & Blues has about 70% of its audience from out of town.

Additional touch points to be considered are major events such as the Salty Dog Enduro and the Lewiston Ultra.

3.4 Stakeholder Feedback

Engagement with industry stakeholders was an important part of the development of this strategy. One on one personal interviews were conducted with key personnel whose organizations or businesses were either directly affected by visitor services or had identified concern regarding the visitor centre closures.

Councillor Debbie Cannon	City of Salmon Arm
Councillor Chad Ellison	City of Salmon Arm
Phil MacIntyre-Paul	Shuswap Trail Alliance
Lana Fitt	Salmon Arm Economic Development Society
Kyle Dearing	Shuswap Tourism
Lindsay Wong	Downtown Salmon Arm
Tracey Kutscher, Kate Fagervik	Salmon Arm Arts Centre
Darby Boyd, David Knight	Shuswap Recreation Society
Susan Mackie	R.J. Haney Heritage Village & Museum
Tovah Shantz	Shuswap Pie Company
Jesse Ziercke	Prestige Harbourfront
Corryn Grayston	Salmon Arm Chamber of Commerce
David Gonella	Salmon Arm Roots & Blues

The interviews were free flowing but focused on the past service and experience, priorities for a new service, the role of visitor services and any potential ideas around a model. The following summarizes the themes most often

referenced in the interview process and where applicable, identifies specific concerns from the organization or business.

Centre

- Majority felt that there should be some type of “bricks & mortar” visitor centre because the human connection is very important.
- Concern about how visitors who are not digitally active would get information.
- No strong opinion on location and both a smaller footprint downtown and a larger regional presence with more services on the outskirts were offered as options.
- When prompted about considerations for the location, accessibility was identified as the previous location had parking issues and it was suggested that over the next year and likely longer, the take up on RV travel may grow the numbers needing adequate parking.
- Centre was viewed as a place to stock print promotional material.

Role

- Some did not have a clear understanding of the role of Shuswap Tourism role verses Salmon Arm Chamber when it came to visitor services and the broader marketing efforts.
- One organization was particularly concerned about the splintering of services and the limited resources that could best be delivered in an integrated approach.
- When probed about engagement with business some felt that the visitor centre was not proactive, but others felt they got what they needed when they needed it.
- All recognized the regional role visitor services plays in Salmon Arm as the commercial and centre hub of the Shuswap.
- A few said there is some duplication of effort and that could be better defined and streamlined.
- A few organizations are also providing visitor services and feel that visitors don’t get clear direction to the primary visitor information source, especially online it is very confusing.

Services

- All agreed that a mix of face to face and digital outreach was the right solution.
- Some identified mobile options as an additional service also voicing the need for clear communication as to where and when.
- All still want access to maps.
- Some said they would welcome staff training to better support their visitors.
- All would like easy to use tools to be able to support their guest enquiries but not so to take away from their business purpose.
- The importance of staying on top of word of mouth and reviews was shared.
- Great customer service is critical - being a trusted source of accurate information that the organization or business can send their customers to and feel confident they are getting good service.
- One organization identified the importance of events and event managers having access to good information.
- One organization identified kiosks with maps in the downtown location could be helpful.
- Most would like to see as long a season as possible and year round service is preferred.

Model

- SAEDS believes that either their organization or Shuswap Tourism are the most logical delivery options and has indicated that they are interested in taking on the role
- No strong opinion from any other stakeholder on who the operator should be although one organization stated they would like to see consolidation of services rather than another stand-alone organization

Implication for Salmon Arm Visitor Services Strategy:

Continuing to provide some type of Bricks and Mortar visitor services was the overwhelming response from the stakeholders and must be considered in the overall strategy.

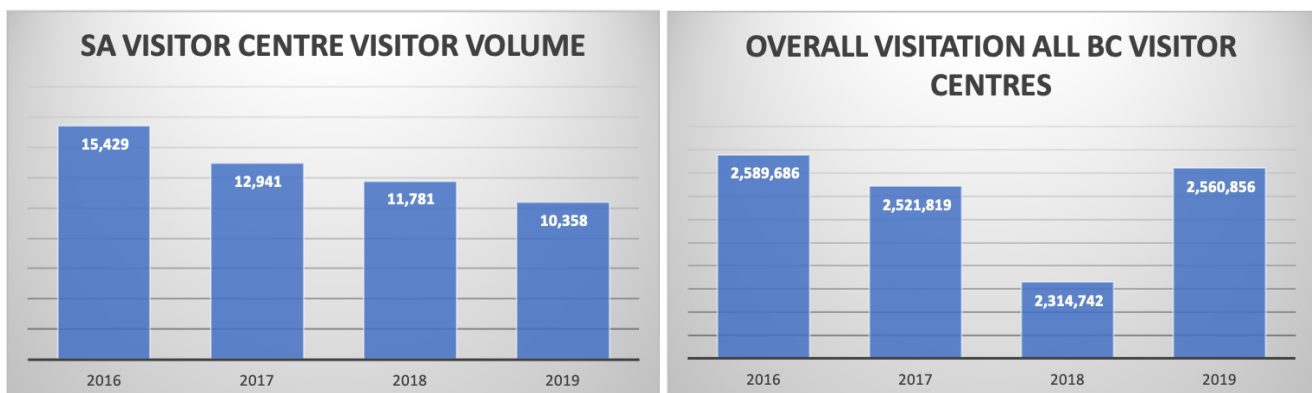
3.5 Visitor Services in Salmon Arm

3.5.1 Salmon Arm Visitor Centre

The Salmon Arm Visitor Centre has been operated on contract by the Chamber of Commerce. Other than one year of mobile outreach, services provided have been limited to walk-in clients. In 2019 \$10,000 from the MRDT Funding Program was provided to the Salmon Arm Chamber to test mobile and roaming visitor services. A tent and two cruiser bikes were purchased, and staff did some outreach both within the City and outlying areas including Herald Provincial Park.

As a member of the Network, Salmon Arm Chamber ensured all Visitor Services staff were trained. This included full orientation to unique visitor services operations, community training and awareness and completion of the Tourism Visitor Information Counsellor (TVIC) training.

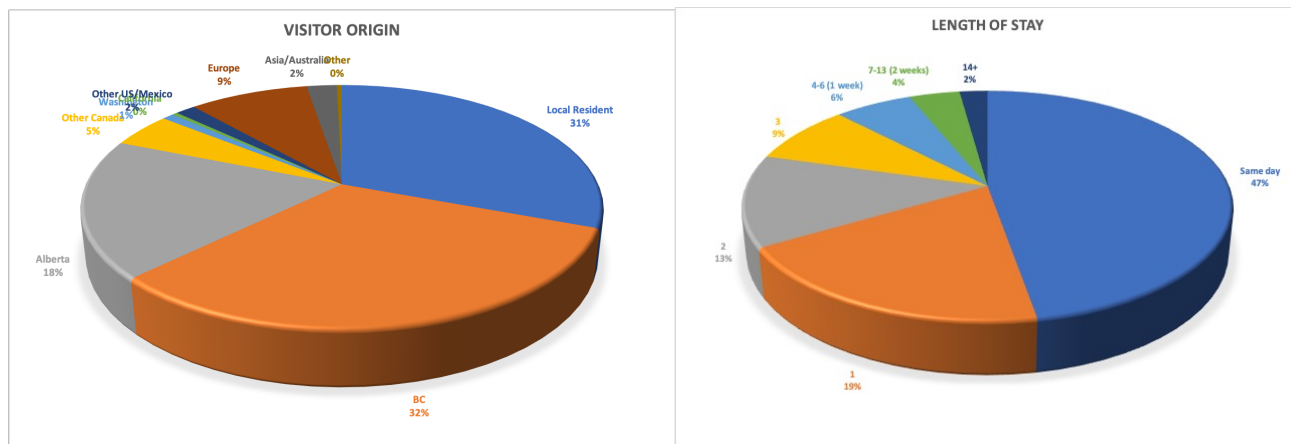
The Salmon Arm Visitor Centre has experienced annual volume decline over the past several years with the most significant decline taking place in 2017 at 16% and the overall decline for the past 4 years at 33%. Of note, the overall visitation from the over 100 visitor centres in the Network over the same four years experienced a decline of only 1.1%. While visitor data collection has a number of idiosyncrasies (for example centres opening and closing) which contribute to some accuracy limitations, this comparison may indicate that the visitor use of the centre in Salmon Arm has declined higher than the average.



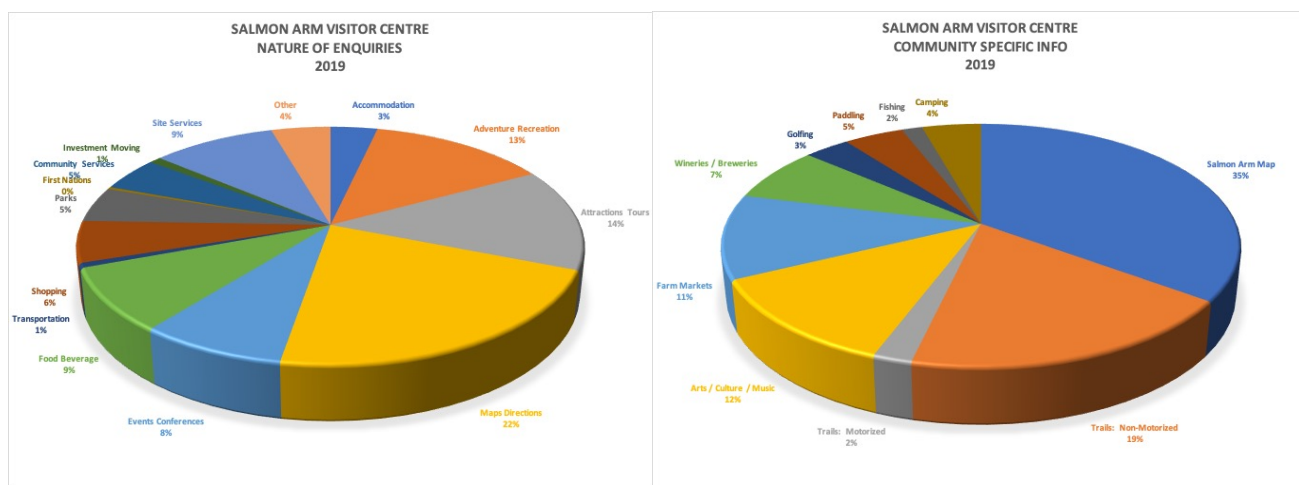
Source: Destination BC Visitor Services Statistics Program

Note from DBC re 2018 decline: The largest contributing factor to the drop in 2018 visitation at bricks and mortar visitor centres was the permanent closure (Jan 8, 2018) of the BCVC @ Merritt which typically recorded over 100,000 visits per year. Furthermore, the impacts of the wildfire and smoke resulted in a number of temporary Visitor Centre closures and far fewer people travelling through the Province.

The two largest markets using the Salmon Arm Visitor Centre were BC Residents 33% and Local Residents 31% with Albertans 18%. The majority of visitors were either in Salmon Arm for the day or overnight. It is unclear how the large volume of Salmon Arm resident visitors was captured but the data suggests they may be identified as Same Day Visitors.



The Salmon Arm Visitor Centre collected data on the nature of enquiries which is aggregated up to the regional and provincial level. They also had the opportunity to customize a collected data set specific to the community. In the general collection, maps and directions were the highest type of enquiry at 33% while Attractions and Tours were next at 14% and Adventure Recreation at 13%. What was most interesting that within the Community Specific data set, maps were again the top request at 35% but non-motorized trails represented almost 20% of requests.



As part of a one-on-one interview with the Chamber of Commerce, it was confirmed that the Visitor Centre was able to operate within contracted services budget of \$137,400 (2019). This equates to a cost per enquiry of \$13.27 per visitor.

Implication for Salmon Arm Visitor Services Strategy:

Despite the visitation decline, over 10,000 visitors used the services of the bricks and mortar centre which is the most of any visitor centre in the region and attention needs to be given as to how this market segment will be serviced.

When thinking about the digital component of this strategy, attention should be given to how best respond to the most popular types of requests. How to translate the interest in maps to digital is one consideration and the fact that almost 20% of inquiries to the centre were for non-motorized trails is another item that will need to be addressed.

3.6 Assets and Information Distribution

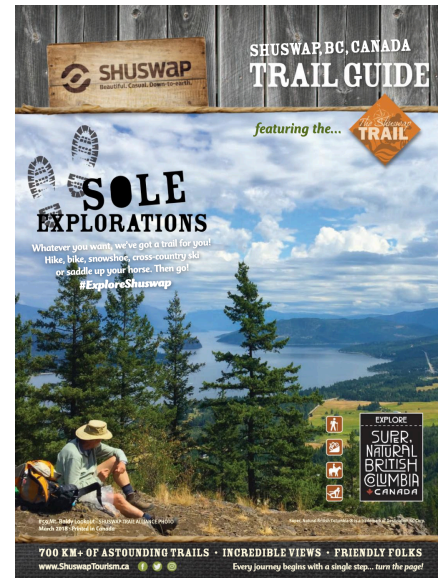
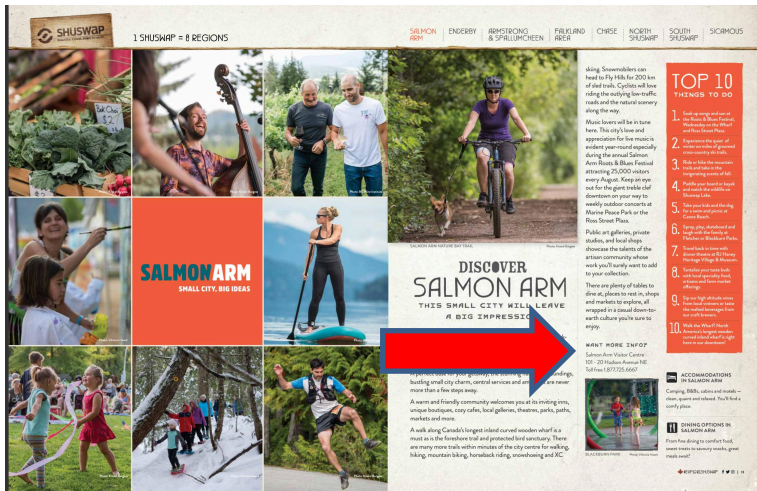
3.6.1 Publications

Salmon Arm Visitor Centre offered visitor information to walk-in visitors utilizing printed material. As part of their contract, they produced and distributed the Salmon Arm Tear Off Map. This map was used in the centre and also distributed to the tourism businesses and associated groups.

Despite the growing trend to online planning, the Visitor Centre did distribute a large amount of print material partly because of the centre footprint they were able to have a larger selection encompassing many businesses and destinations throughout the tourism region and not just Salmon Arm or the Shuswap.

Salmon Arm does not produce an official Visitor Guide. In addition to the tear off map, the Shuswap Tourism Vacation Planner is their primary information tool. Two pages are dedicated to Salmon Arm in the Guide as well as businesses and activities are featured throughout the 64-page guide. For 2021, Shuswap Tourism announced at the Advisory Meeting that due to the impact of Covid there are 15,000 2020 guides in storage, and they would be re-purposing the Guide for 2021.

Shuswap Tourism also produces a Trail Guide featuring information through the seven regions including 105 Trails. Trails within the Salmon Arm area are included in five pages of this 32-page guide and was one of the main publications used at the visitor centre and also distributed by Shuswap Tourism throughout the region. This guide was last produced in 2019. Anecdotal insights from Shuswap Tourism indicate that users would prefer trail specific information rather than an entire Guide.



Source: Shuswap Tourism website

Guide	Printed	Distributed
2019 Vacation Guide	30,000	24,000
Shuswap Trail Guide (Printed in March 2018)	30,000	20,000
2020 Vacation Guide	25,000	11,000
Shuswap Cycle Guide (Printed 2019)	5,000	5,000
Mountain Biking Maps - Shuswap Trail Alliance (Printed in July 2019)	5,000	5,000
Shuswap Taste Trail 2020 (Printed in August 2020)	2,500	1,500
Shuswap Lake Maps (Printed in July 2019)	2,500	2,500
Shuswap Wineries Guide (Printed January 2020)	2,500	1,500
Shuswap Golf Guide (Printed January 2020)	2,500	1,500
Merry Melodies Rack Card (Printed July 2019)	1,500	1,500

Source: Shuswap Tourism

Implication for Salmon Arm Visitor Services Strategy:
 It can be assumed that being included in the broader offering provided Salmon Arm greater exposure to anyone visiting the Shuswap area and is a cost-effective way of producing print material which becomes out of date and a less valued resource for visitors. What is most important is that the information is consistent and call to action (for further info) within the guides is clear and consistent. Repurposing the Vacation Planner for 2021 means the For More Info Section for Salmon Arm will be incorrect and any businesses who are no longer operating or any new businesses will not be represented. A short term solution will need to be considered. If the anecdotal information about the trail guide is substantiated, this could mean a greater reliance on the online trail information.

3.6.2 Website

Salmon Arm does not have its own tourism website and is included in the broader Shuswap Tourism website www.shuswaptourism.ca. Shuswap Tourism underwent a significant web design overhaul and released the new

design and data in February 2020. According to their report “the new Shuswap is now significantly more mobile friendly, includes newly refreshed Shuswap Tourism brand elements and also follows current website design/layout trends. It also has an updated event calendar and a much more comprehensive business listings database. This new format and organization take current consumer website usage trends and programming requirements across commonly used web browsers and mobile devices into account to ensure content is easy to find and displays correctly and consistently.”

Conducting a key word search using “visit Salmon Arm” returned the Shuswap Tourism link as the top result:



Search is behaving as it should and can be built upon.

The Salmon Arm landing page follows the consistent design of all the seven other regions; a home page with high level inspiration and information data including subcategories of Accommodation, Area Map, Food & Drink and Top Ten Things to Do.

- ARMSTRONG & SPALLUMCHEEN
- CHASE
- ENDERBY
- FALKLAND & AREA
- NORTH SHUSWAP
- SALMON ARM
- ACCOMMODATION
- AREA MAP
- FOOD & DRINK
- TOP 10 THINGS TO DO
- SICAMOUS & EAGLE VALLEY
- SOUTH SHUSWAP

SALMON ARM

Shuswap Lake has four arms–Shuswap, Seymour, Anstey and Salmon–where you’ll find us.. The largest community in the region which includes Gleneden and Silver Creek is the commercial hub of the Shuswap located on the Trans Canada Highway. Sure, we hustle and bustle to accommodate our regional guests but we play well too. We’re home to North America’s longest curved in-land wooden wharf, the renown Roots and Blues festival, Canoe Beach, hundreds of kilometres of trails and one of only three bird sanctuaries in BC. We’ve got our share of family fun, plenty of tables to dine at, places to rest in, shops and markets to explore, all wrapped in a casual down to earth culture you’re sure to enjoy.

WANT MORE INFO?

City of Salmon Arm
 500 2 Avenue NE
 Salmon Arm, BC
 250.803.4036 or visitorinfo@samlonarm.ca

The majority of Salmon Arm tourism businesses are represented on the Shuswap Tourism Website. Many of the businesses are featured in multiple categories with the largest exposure is food and beverage with 46 listings within the Food and Drink category and 34 businesses receiving further exposure within the newest program Taste Trails. Salmon Arm businesses are exposed 211 times. A detailed list of exposures can be found in the Appendix 6.5. (exposure = number of times the same product is served up for different pages or section).

Traffic to the Salmon Arm pages on the Shuswap Tourism website for 2020 to date are as follows:

Page	Total Page Views (Jan 1,2020 - Nov.24.2020)	% of Total Page Views
Salmon Arm Visitor Landing Page	2,413	1.11%
Salmon Arm Top 10 Things to Do	2,399	1.10%
Salmon Arm Accommodations	1,154	0.53%
Salmon Arm Food & Drink	1,060	0.49%
Salmon Arm Area Map	899	0.41%
Shuswap Tourism Webiste Total Page Views	217,441	

Salmon Arm is featured in a Blog Post posted August 14, 2020 entitled Singularly Salmon Arm highlighting some activities and businesses however there are no hyperlinks to any of the businesses which unfortunately reduces the value proposition. <https://shuswaptourism.ca/2020/08/14/singularly-salmon-arm/>. This page has received 27 views since posting but it was also part of a digital campaign where the posting reached 1,068 in Instagram and 578 on Facebook.

The information provided about each tourism business is well presented and rather than having businesses manage a detailed listing, a link to the business website is prominently displayed where it is presumed the most up to date and accurate information resides. As an in-destination tool, this approach is logical and tourism businesses are most responsible for their information where they have the most control.

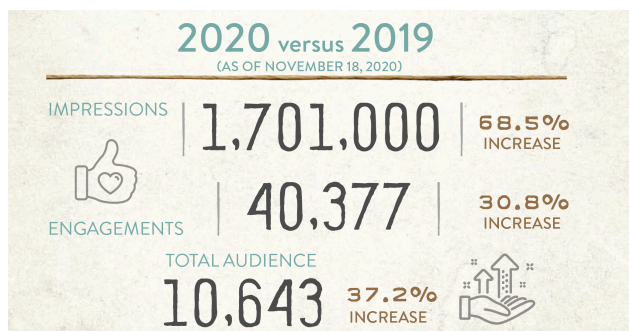
This section would not be complete without some observation about trail information. The Shuswap Trail system is a marquee product in the Shuswap. At the visitor centre questions about trails represented almost 20% of enquiries. Trail information is limited on the Shuswap Tourism website using the same formula of clicking through to the “business”. The Shuswap Tourism website had 1,335 page views on their hiking page and 1,144 page views on their mountain biking page but unfortunately click through data was not available. With the Shuswap Trails website being grossly out of date and considered high risk by the Alliance, this poses a potential challenge when providing visitor information.

Implication for Salmon Arm Visitor Services Strategy: The City does not own, hold or provide input into the website used to promote Salmon Arm. **This could be considered a significant risk.** A shift to a more comprehensive Visitor Services **digital** strategy will mean the City will need to rely on Shuswap Tourism’s strategic direction and priorities, capacity and support to ensure that Salmon Arm is accurately and fairly represented and that Salmon Arm tourism businesses are getting the maximum potential from this investment. The availability and accuracy of Salmon Arm data must be available 24/7 365 days per year in order to feed a visitor services strategy that serves information to visitors where and when they want it. The update to the website provides a strong foundation for improved strategy to build greater visitor engagement and search engine optimization is working to further support online visitor services. There is an opportunity to provide additional Salmon Arm content, however, if the relationship does not continue, the cost to building a new website and develop content to support would be in excess of \$100,000.

3.6.3 Social Media

Shuswap Tourism

Shuswap Tourism has predominantly executed Salmon Arm’s social media engagement with visitors. Their recent report outlined some of their campaign results.



2019-2020 social media activity has resulted in significant increased in all measured areas. See Appendix 6.6 for the full report.

Looking at Social Media engagement from a visitor services perspective, Shuswap Tourism was asked to identify how many messages they received that required a response keeping in mind that their campaigns are not designed to elicit enquiries and their call to action is their website.

From January 2020 to November 24th Shuswap Tourism received and responded to:

Facebook Messenger	381
Instagram Messenger	489
Twitter Messages	166

There is no data available about the nature or value of the engagement however given the majority of the time is during Covid it can be assumed that a portion of messages could be Covid related and anecdotally they report that they received a large volume of enquiries about the Salmon Run.

Shuswap Tourism has not activated the chat messenger feature on their Facebook platform.

The following provides a snapshot of the various social media connection points that visitors currently have available to them and the volume of followers. Each is managed independently by each organization with a wide variety of activity from multiple times a week to rarely.

The page with the highest number of followers is Shuswap Tourism with the Shuswap Trails Alliance second. While followers is not a great measurement of engagement, it gives an idea of the size of the touch point. During their contracted period, the Chamber of Commerce created Facebook and Instagram pages for the Visitor Centre however they have since closed the Facebook page account.

	FOLLOWERS		
	Facebook	Instagram	Twitter
City of Salmon Arm	2,682	n/a	1,578
Salmon Arm Chamber of Commerce	659	102	n/a
Downtown Salmon Arm	3,701	1,345	566
Salmon Arm Economic Development	1,582	807	1,001
Tourism Shuswap	5,344	3,944	1,704
Salmon Arm Visitor Centre	n/a	748	n/a
South Shuswap	989	356	56
North Shuswap	701	413	n/a
Sicamous (Explore for IG)	934	437	480
Chase (Experience for IG)	826	452	n/a
Enderby	1,502	98	1,508
Armstrong	1,770	1,934	1,366
Shuswap Trails	4,301	1,155	last pst 2013
Salmon Arm Arts Centre	1,614	975	516

Review Sites

Salmon Arm also has a presence on online trip planning and review sites Trip Advisor and Google.

Trip Advisor includes Travel Forums where visitors share information and inspiration. There are 38 different topics attributed to Salmon Arm with less than 15 replies within in topic or question. Examples of questions posted are *“I’m driving from New Westminster to Salmon Arm, what sites of interest are there along the way that you would see are a must see.”*, *“There was a story back in April about an Algae bloom in the lake, so maybe it is still there?”* and *“Any pubs and clubs in Salmon Arm near Hilltop motel?”*.

Google My Business (GMB) which is a free tool for business owners to manage their online presence across the Google platform, including Google Search, Local Search, and Google Maps. Google developed GMB to make it easier for online searchers to get the business information they need quickly and conveniently.

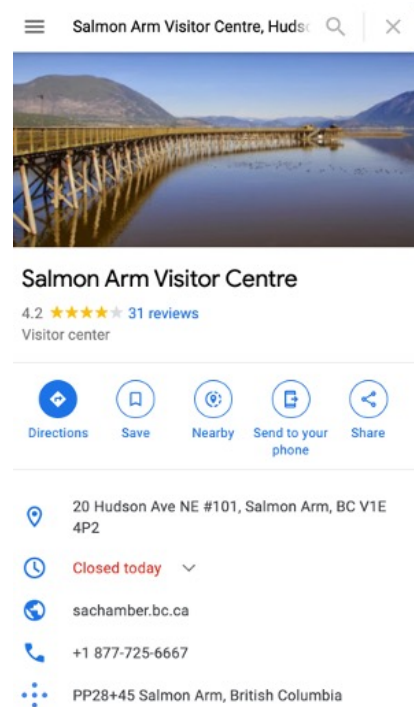
Shuswap Tourism recently sponsored a Google My Business webinar hosted by Destination BC. Business interest was lower than expected however completely understandable given current climate.

Salmon Arm Visitor Centre has 31 reviews (average 4 out of 5 stars), has been claimed as a business and still directs visitors to the Chamber of Commerce contact info and building.

Of note, research shows that over 90% of customers are looking for specific information about businesses when using search engines. This includes business hours, contact details, and location information.⁷

Images and Video

All images and video used in print, website and social media are owned by Shuswap Tourism.



⁷ Destination BC Attract Customers online with Google My Business

Implication for Salmon Arm Visitor Services Strategy: The City does not own any tourism related social media pages or platforms. **Considerable effort and investment would be required to develop a social media profile** and as demonstrated by the follower volume of the surrounding tourism organizations; it is unlikely that Salmon Arm would be successful in developing a viable social media presence in the short term. *Note: In 2020, South Shuswap Chamber invests the equivalent of \$2000 per month on social media (contractor, tools, content) with a net audience growth on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter of 820 followers and a total audience of 1,339 followers.*

3.6.4 Training

The Network program requires that all staff providing visitor services successfully complete TVIC training and local specific training. The TVIC course is available online and the specific training is curated by the sponsoring organization. Additional training not required but strongly suggested including:

- SuperHost, Foundations of Service Quality
- SuperHost, Service for All and,
- SuperHost Destination Ambassador (can be used to replace local specific training).

Ambassador training was mentioned a number of times during the Stakeholder consultations and was identified in the MRDT 2020 and 2021 Tactical Plan. Providing tourism businesses with the skills and tools to promote Salmon Arm is an excellent way to extend business engagement and supports an integrated and seamless end to end visitor experience.

Destination Ambassador is a program developed by Destination BC and now owned and delivered by the provincial tourism HR organization Go2HR. It covers key topics that make for memorable visitor experiences, including:

- The role of local ambassadors in the visitor experience
- The importance of tourism and how it benefits your local community
- Different visitor profiles and reasons they visit your area
- Products and services your community has to offer visitors
- Where to access information and how to provide helpful service to others⁸

The sponsor organization for SuperHost training in the Shuswap is the South Shuswap Chamber of Commerce. Executive Director Karen Brown is the certified facilitator in all three programs.

Additional training or skill sets essential but not mandated by the program include:

- Outreach engagement – sometimes thought of as sales or cold call training, imperative for a successful mobile outreach program
- Social media engagement – understanding of platforms, protocols and general use as well as metrics and management
- Digital Marketing – general knowledge
- Website – operations – ability to work within the digital footprint for updating, analytics and reporting

Industry training in 2020 from MRDT funds include online advertising and business listings support (e.g. Google My Business offered by Destination BC, Yelp and Trip Advisor). Further training for industry including e-commerce has been identified through MRDT for 2021.

⁸ <https://www.destinationbc.ca/learning-centre/superhost-destination-ambassador/>

Implication for Salmon Arm Visitor Services Strategy: A broader Visitor Services strategy will require both attention to the standard training requirements as well as attention to new skill set required. Clarity is required around the Ambassador Program tactic identified in the MRDT 2017-2022 MRDT 5 Year Business Plan and 2020 and 2021 Tactical Plan to understand execution.

3.7 Best Practices

There are a number of tourism destination marketing organizations in British Columbia who are leaders in their field and have been successful in the transition from static visitor services to a multi-channel approach. As part of the situation analysis, one on one interviews were conducted with four organizations selected specifically to gain further understanding about specific strategies that may best match the Salmon Arm solution.

3.7.1 Tourism Kamloops Mobile Visitor Operations

Tourism Kamloops has been engaged in mobile visitor services for a number of years and have been contemplating the value of their bricks and mortar location when evaluated against the declining traffic, cost to operate and the difficulty in locating in one prime spot (Kamloops spread). When visitor centres were closed in March due to Covid, Tourism Kamloops took advantage of the opportunity to ramp up and test their mobile offering and kept the centre closed throughout the summer. While they will continue to keep their corporate offices in the visitor centre, they have removed all signing and marketing for the centre and will be going “mobile only” in future.

Key takeaways from Tourism Kamloops BOLD Street Team Mobile Experience:

- Measure the value and the cost – the decision to close was predominantly based on their Value and Cost per Enquiry; costs were approximately \$125 per enquiry and high volume of locals using the centre for non-influential enquiries
- Leased a Jeep which was on brand and then wrapped it, purchased two mountain bikes and a trailer to pull when needing to transport tents, bikes and other tools
- Operated on peak days Wednesday to Saturday
- Two locations per day. Mix between an attraction and a trail head. Choosing retail locations provided best value for meaningful interactions
- Offered opportunity for partners to book the BOLD Street Team at their events
- Supported with three seasonal staff, when not on the Street they were in office responding to digital enquiries
- Staff used WIFI iPad to access information
- Easily downloaded time sensitive pdfs were created weekly that staff could share across the iPad platform to visitors’ devices
- Biggest challenge was insurance and the cost of underage drivers. Not insuring any of the season staff so core had to drive them around.
- Posted daily through social media where the mobile unit would be, sent daily updates to all the stakeholders, especially the accommodators who were nervous about the solution. Communication was key.
- In future will look at partnering with the Downtown Ambassadors to expand the program.
- <https://www.kamloopsthisweek.com/news/tourism-kamloops-hopes-mobile-move-will-bring-more-bang-for-its-buck-1.24160761>

Source: Tourism Kamloops, Monica Dickinson, Director, Industry Relations and Communications



3.7.2 Tourism Chilliwack – Mobile Visitor Services

The Chilliwack Visitor Centre is on the edge of the city just off Highway 1. While there is high volume traffic on the highway the visitor centre volume is similar to Salmon Arm with 15 thousand visitors served in 2019 which was a 22% decline over 2018. When Chilliwack was forced to close their VC in March, they quickly engaged in a mobile strategy that would allow them to open slowly and safely. This was also an opportunity to test programming they had been thinking about but had not executed. Also similar to the Shuswap, Chilliwack positions itself as an outdoor oasis accessible from the urban centre and their revised branding introduced in 2018 reflects that. They knew that their mobile solution also needed to reflect their brand and as a result they entered into a partnership to lease an RV from a Fraser Valley RV Rental company whose business predominantly international, had been decimated. “Winston” was branded with Chilliwack outdoor visuals and was launched on the July long weekend. Winston travelled throughout Chilliwack to trailheads and events. Just over 2600 visitors were served over the two month period and two students funded 100% from the Canada Employment Program provided the service Thursday through Saturday.

Key takeaways from Tourism Chilliwack “Winston” RV Mobile Experience:

- Winston was a real morale booster for staff. Allowed them to be engaged, get out and meet people and they had a staff contest to name him.
- Winston’s personality was critical to his success from a business partner engagement perspective. Businesses were keen to invite “Winston” to their place of business and “Where’s Winston?” became a bit of a community theme.
- The RV was a great mobile solution as it provided weather protection and great storage.
- As it was a rental, they negotiated the insurance rider to allow drivers 21 (usually 25) to drive without an expensive premium. Tourism Chilliwack’s liability insurance covered Winston and the drivers (no further details provided but available upon request)
- Cost for the lease for the two months was \$5,000 plus the cost of the branding wrap.
- Staff used WIFI iPad to access information and were also responsible to post and respond on their social media platforms

- Tourism Chilliwack was first out of the gate with branded merchandise and has a wide selection that could be purchased from Winston, to date in 2020 they have sold \$34,000 worth of merchandise.
- <https://www.theprogress.com/news/tourism-chilliwack-rolls-out-mobile-visitors-centre-in-an-rv-called-winston/>



3.7.3 Tourism Kelowna – Virtual Assistance (Live Chat)

Virtual Assistance or Live Chat, as it is frequently called, is a cost-effective tool growing in popularity to increase customer engagement, predominately in on-line retail space. Live chat applications are designed to provide immediate online assistance to multiple users efficiently through “chat boxes”. Businesses see this solution as an excellent alternative or addition to more expensive call centre services or bricks and mortar customer service outlets as multiple conversations can take place with just one agent providing the service.

A number of DMO’s internationally, nationally and locally have identified its potential to assist visitors with trip planning and to actively provide more detailed support. Live chat can be considered virtual “face to face” visitor counselling. Tourism Kelowna has been using Live Chat software to provide virtual assistance since 2017.

Key takeaways from Tourism Kelowna Live Chat Experience:

- Most sessions are with visitors in the pre-planning stage although visitors have also been using it while in destination to get very specific information
- The quality of the chats is very high, the level of detail in the questions and interest creates a lot of opportunity to sell the destination and provide a positive first impression
- Similar to telephone counselling but easier due to being able to share and send links of information to support the conversation
- While visitor services staff were the main “chatters”, all staff at Tourism Kelowna were trained on the system and how to respond to support in peak periods or when the visitor services staff were engaged in face to face counselling and unavailable to chat
- Started out simple putting the chat option only on the Contact Us page, then transitioned to every page
- Conducted 582 chats in 2019, to-date for 2020 they have conducted 5,397 chats as a consequence of 1) closure of the VC for 2 months due to Covid and then re-opening with reduced hours 2) increasing the chat function to every page

- LiveChat has a not for profit solution that is free and provides unlimited seats. Prior to discovering the NFP solution they paid \$39.95 per seat per month.
- Will likely remove the “Contact Us” form from their website as Live Chat is a better and more instantaneous solution

Some additional visitor services intel includes:

- no longer print their vacation planner due to budget concerns (guide is cost recovery and they anticipate advertising to drop)
- continue to produce a tear off map
- partnering with an on-line passport program Bandwango <https://bandwango.com/>
- will continue their multi-pronged mobile program which includes tents, bikes and a wrapped van and found best solution was to rent from Budget (very small sponsorship included)

Source: Tourism Kelowna, Chris Lewis, Director of Visitor Experience

3.7.4 Tourism Vernon – Impact of MRDT Funding

On November 27th Tourism Vernon announced that they will not be opening their Visitor Centre for 2021 rather, they will execute a visitor services mobile and digital strategy. They cited a projected budget cut of approximately 40% (MRDT funding). Previously Tourism Vernon contracted out the visitor centre to a third-party company and managed the contract and other marketing initiatives in house with two full time staff and marketing contracts with an agency. Tourism Vernon owns their digital assets. Tourism Vernon has built up their social assets to 10.9k followers on Instagram and 14,600 on Facebook. Their projected budget for activation is \$65k and will go towards a new app, a virtual map and an on-location visitor services team.

<https://www.vernonmorningstar.com/news/tourism-vernon-could-see-40-cut-to-budget-due-to-covid-19/>

3.7.5 Regional Approach – Sunshine Coast Tourism

In July 2019, issued its Visitor Services Strategy in response to the priority identified in the Sunshine Coast Destination Development Plan siting the fragmented approach that information was being delivered from the various communities on the Sunshine Coast. Three themes and eleven strategies were identified to support a collaborate and cohesive approach to regional visitor services. These strategies have similarities to individual community approaches but extend the opportunity to a regional focus. Given that Shuswap Tourism plays such a large role, this approach is worthy of consideration, especially over the longer term.

Working as one amazing visitor services team

1. Find the best approach to coordinated visitor centre operations to improve services and reduce duplication of effort
2. Ensure the ongoing collection, analysis and sharing of visitor services intelligence and performance metrics
3. Create consistent key messaging
4. Develop better partnerships between visitor services and the tourism industry at large

Improving engagement through visitor services touchpoints

5. Help visitors better understand the Sunshine Coast
6. Develop a seamless visitor services experience
7. Create more impactful visitor centres
8. Implement Live Chat pilot project for the entire Sunshine Coast

Elevating Visitor Experiences

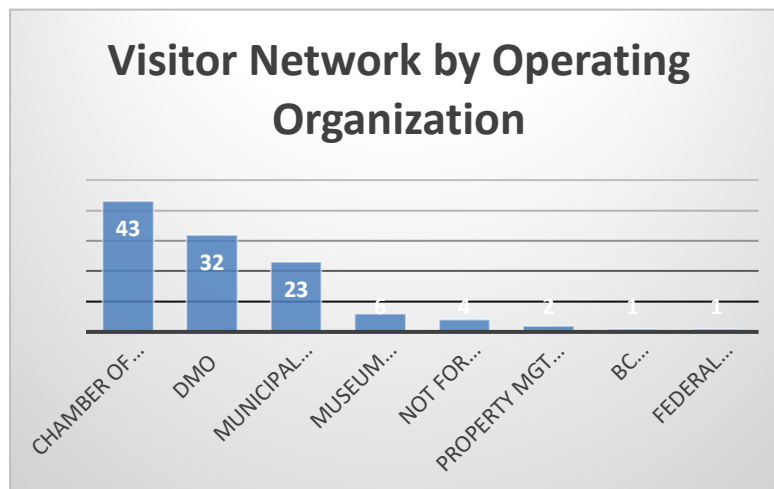
9. Implement the visitor services actions of the Destination Development Strategy
10. Help tourism experiences get market ready

11. Use visitor services to improve the experience visitors have with transportation to and within the Sunshine Coast

3.8 Visitor Services Operating Models

3.8.1 Network Operating Models

Within the Network there are a variety of operating models with Chamber of Commerce and Destination Marketing Organizations being the most common.



Source: Destination BC Visitor Services Unit

3.8.2 Visitor Services in the Shuswap

Shuswap Tourism is responsible for destination marketing and community organizations are responsible for visitor services. This is a loosely held concept to which there is no documentation but rather an expectation. Each community organization is funded differently, delivers visitor services differently and all but North Shuswap belong to the Destination BC Network Program.

Visitor Centre Name	Operated By	Description of Services	2019 Visitation VC & Mobile
Armstrong	Tourism Armstrong	Downtown Visitor Centre and roving	8,979 VC 12,260 Mobile
Chase	Chase & District Chamber of Commerce	Visitor Centre on outskirts of town	1,685 VC
Enderby	Enderby Chamber of Commerce	Visitor Centre off main hwy near Shuswap River	10,513 VC
Sicamous	Sicamous Chamber of Commerce	Visitor Centre located on Main St	6,182 VC 3,939 Mobile
South Shuswap	South Shuswap Chamber of Commerce	Blue Roof Self Serve Kiosks throughout area	n/a
North Shuswap	North Shuswap Chamber of Commerce	Self Serve Kiosks through area	n/a

3.8.3 Regional Visitor Centres

Two regions in British Columbia operate Visitor Centres. TOTA operates the Route 97 Visitor Inspiration Centre on the Okanagan Connector east bound route. Tourism Vancouver Island (TAVI) operates the Nanaimo Visitor Centre on contract to the City of Nanaimo and is currently exploring managing the Comox Valley Visitor Centre. Anthony Everett, Executive Director TAVI advised the primary reason they have undertaken these operations is to step in where there have been contentious stakeholder issues and done their best to improve and right size the operations.

3.9 Adding Digital Visitor Services to the Mix – What Does That Look Like?

In thinking about the transformation of the Salmon Arm Visitor Centre to an omni channel visitor services presence including digital outreach it is important to understand what “going digital” actual means. Successful visitor centres embrace the many online opportunities to help visitors who prefer to find their information online.

Consideration needs to be given to the investment, time and staff training to manage:

- **Online Reviews & Location Based Listings:** Manage and respond to reviews, questions and answers for the visitor centre an also key visitor assets on TripAdvisor, Google My Business and Facebook.
- **Social Media:** Use social media as a way to share community stories, both inspiring and informing potential visitors. Potential to invest strategically in targeted ads for time sensitive offers, such as events or relevant campaigns. It’s also a key channel to keep everyone informed at times of challenging events (such as bushfires, floods or storms). Collaborate with partners to ensure consistent messaging.
- **Online Messaging + Chat:** Provide visitor information via Live Chat on destination website/pages and social media direct message channels.
- **Website:** Work with the relevant stakeholder to ensure the right content is on the website/pages or manage directly.
- **Other Websites:** Monitor other websites that have Salmon Arm content such as www.HelloBC.com. All need to be in a mobile friendly format, with live website links and/or click to call phone numbers.
- **Online Publications:** Ensure pertinent publications are easily downloadable for example, visitor guide, maps and hot sheets.

These platforms and programs require a variety of skills sets that need to be considered in recruitment and hiring.

3.10 What about 2021?

This situation analysis would not be complete without identifying the tremendous uncertainty facing the tourism industry. Revenue losses have been staggering and there is no clear indication of when or how the industry will recover. Having said that, there are a few assumptions that can be made going forward:

- Travel planning will look different; visitors will be relying on smart and safe destinations and will be looking for detailed information to assist in making their choices
- Heightened awareness of health and safety may put additional pressure on tourism businesses
- Businesses may have a greater expectation on the community and region for support as relief measure wind down

- Staycation and close-in consumers in the lower mainland and Alberta may create pent up demand
- Marketing will focus on domestic consumers; and
- International travel will not return to any level until at least 2022-23.

3.11 SWOT

Strengths, Weaknesses (identified as internal to City and visitor services), Opportunities and Threats (identified as external – for example stakeholders, other levels of decision making) are presented.

Strengths

- Elected officials recognize the value of visitor services and committed to the development of a strategy
- City staff are committed to the development and delivery of the strategy
- No commitments to infrastructure (purchase or lease) or any other tactics that may no longer be required
- The community has several marquee products to promote and act as visitor touch points making an expanded mobile and digital visitor experience potentially viable
- No transition strategy required to new model; and
- City has maintained a budget.

Weaknesses

- Economic development and/or tourism are not identified as core services in the City Corporate Plan
- City does not own any assets, digital, social, images, video or static on which to build a program
- City relies on Shuswap Tourism for access to images and information which causes a bottleneck
- Minimal strategic alignment and varying levels of detail within documented agreements between the City and partners/contractors
- Some duplication of resources exists
- Business community has not been engaged in visitor services; and
- No indigenous relationships identified.

Opportunities

- A Salmon Arm Tourism Strategy would better direct and define tourism and the cities role
- Collective stakeholders are supportive of the strategy, want to see an expanded visitor services direction and are looking for clearer roles and responsibilities
- A consolidated effort could create greater impact
- Shuswap Tourism has a solid base of social platforms to leverage
- Shuswap Tourism website has recently undergone a complete update and is foundationally and physically positioned to increase visitor engagement
- SAEDS has been proactively thinking about visitor services
- Deeper partnerships with products, for example RJ Haney, Roots and Blues, as touchpoints and partnered execution strategies
- Collaborate with new partners such as the Adams Lake and Neskonlith Bands; and
- Could be better ready for when region may see an increase in domestic visitation post pandemic.

Threats

- Direction continue to be driven by sub strategies without an overall strategy
- Without better visitor services alignment, applications and expenditures may continue to support unsustainable activities
- Future of Shuswap Tourism is unknown
- MRDT funding is unknown, future of program is unknown
- Shuswap Trails online content and data is unstable (broken according to PMP)
- Impact of Covid on industry and visitor profile is unknown.

4 Strategic Direction Decision



4.1 Visitor Services in the Shuswap is at a Crossroads

Visitor trip planning prior and in-destination has changed. More visitors are accessing a variety of channels to make travel decisions. The evidence is clear that effective and successful visitor servicing must become both omni channel and customized to the unique attributes of visitors to and interested in the destination. This strategy recognizes and can adopt this approach. Seven specific tactics have been developed to allow the City to move towards delivering a range of services through multiple distribution channels. There is however a larger question important to its execution.

4.2 What Role Does the City Wish to Play?

Interestingly, the decision is not about whether or not to include a bricks and mortar location (as perhaps was initially the thought when initiating this strategy). The decision involves what level of investment the City wants to make in tourism and what improvements in strategic alignments need to be made to get better results.

To date, the City has left tourism marketing and visitor services to its partners and contractors. Lacking an overall tourism strategy that incorporates destination marketing, destination development and visitor services, the partners/contractors have been operating from a variety of sub plans including the MRDT Business and Tactical Plans and the Shuswap Tourism Marketing Plan. While effort has been made to integrate, the roles, responsibilities and decision making have presented challenges. In some cases, tactics have been executed without the opportunity to provide input or approval and may not always be in the best interest of Salmon Arm.

To affect change, the City has the opportunity to more deeply engage and ultimately determine where the role of Destination Marketing / Management resides. Consideration of an overall tourism strategy for Salmon Arm would better inform a future visitor services strategy.

4.3 Strategic Principles

Alignment Means

Good governance
Clear roles and responsibilities
No duplication
Collaboration not competition
Partnerships

Value for Money Means

Leverage and elevate
Measure and evaluate
Inform through data driven decisions

Commitment Means

Everyone participates and is engaged
Feeling supported to ask for and give help

Flexible Means

Try, test, adapt and change
Innovate

Transparent Means

Communicate and not just the good news stories

Greater Good Means

Everyone benefits
Celebrate together

4.4 Shuswap Trails Digital Dependency

Throughout the Situation Analysis mention has been made about the state of trail information. While this issue doesn't directly relate to visitor services it could have a significant impact if not addressed.

Trails are a marquee Shuswap product and one of the main opportunities to extend stay. Every strategy, plan or program reviewed made mention of their importance and 20% of visitors to the previous visitor centre asked for trail information. The Shuswap Trail Alliance has two websites, one corporate and one for trails. While no data was available, a data subset of Trailforks users demonstrated the high volume of use and identified that 85% of users were visitors. The Shuswap Tourism website relies heavily on the Trail website for content. This spring, Shuswap Tourism intends to invest in a spring campaign featuring trails with the website as the call to action. Shuswap Tourism also identified that users are less interested in receiving the printed Trail Guide and would prefer digital access.

The Trails website is in a very poor state of repair. Originally custom built more than eight years ago, it has long outlived its capacity and functionality. It is fair to say that it is in a failing state.

The Alliance has not reflected the importance of this issue in their most recent budget submissions. There is a perception by the Trails Alliance that they need a new website (confirmed in conversation with Jen Bellhouse Dec 2020) and that the cost is greater than can be managed and so they continue to put band aids on the site. Only \$2,000 was identified in their recent MRDT application for the Trails website improvement.

Both users and technology have changed dramatically in the past eight years and there is an opportunity to take a step back and determine what the best solution for digital trails access should be however this issue has failed to make the priority list on the Shuswap Trail Alliance, MRDT or Shuswap Tourism budget plans and will continue be a risk factor unless addressed.

5 Strategy

5.1 Vision and Goals

Salmon Arm Visitor Services Vision:

Through innovative and collaborative initiatives, Salmon Arm visitor services delivers an excellent year-round visitor experience to visitors to the Shuswap making return trips and great recommendations a regular occurrence.

Salmon Arm Visitor Services Goals:

1. Improved strategic alignment to maximize spend value
2. Successfully transition from a single to omni channel visitor services model
3. Provide excellent visitor services experiences
4. Increase spend, stay and repeat visits in Salmon Arm and the Shuswap; and
5. Support shoulder season experiences.

5.2 Plan

Year One: Line Up + Try, Test, Learn and Adapt. Visitor Services Strategy 2021

Year One will focus on strategy alignment and beginning an omni channel visitor services approach. Regardless of the operating model chosen, the relationship and roles amongst the various delivery organizations will be better defined and documented and will include contractual agreements, performance measurements and communication strategies.

2021 could also be the year that the City embraces visitor services and embarks on a series of measurable tactics that will provide important learning and set the stage for the longer term. Investments in 2021 will be thoughtful and flexible, creating a firm foundation and building blocks for the future. Existing assets will be leveraged, and new assets will be strategically added. Program emphasis will be on communication and partnerships.

This approach is desirable due to the many unknown factors regarding the pandemic including resources and budget. It gives the City time to test and learn the best visitor services tactics to support the community and potentially extend learned services to the broader region. Despite the measured approach, Year One requires the biggest change in mindset.

In 2021 the Salmon Arm Visitor Services Strategy will expand to an omni channel approach and be based on “fishing where the fish are” but acknowledging that some fish have very strong annual habits and there is comfort to returning to something familiar.

Bricks & Mortar <u>The Fishing Hole</u> Engaging fish from a single location. The “fish find us” at	Mobile Outreach <u>We Go Fishing</u> Moving throughout the community during peak times and events, we go fishing to	Digital Outreach <u>We Let Out the Line</u> Supporting campaigns and digital platforms of our partner Tourism Shuswap, we send out
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the fishing hole they return to year after year.	attract and catch schools of fish we have the greatest ability to influence.	content “bait” and offer our assistance to support fish wherever they are in their “lifecycle”.
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5.3 Tactics

Seven tactics support the Strategy. Three specific tactics have been developed to deliver visitor services via three distribution channels, bricks and mortar, mobile and digital. Each has been developed based on the opportunity to learn and to maximize visitor outreach. Consideration has been given to owned assets and best use of financial resources with deliberate intention to avoid overlap.

The bricks and mortar solution is designed to use existing assets requiring minimal investment. The mobile tactic requires a greater investment but not a long term commitment and the digital tactic makes best use of services to provide support where the City does not own the asset.

Should a collaboration on a digital program with Shuswap Tourism be unsuccessful, an alternative option would require the City to invest heavily in a website and social media channels. This is not preferred but has been scoped.

Expanding visitor services further with the objective to create a seamless visitor experience, additional tactics have been developed that support business communication, training and information dissemination. Tools to support service, roles and responsibilities alignment and the human resources required to execute have been identified as individual tactics.

While Staffing an omni channel approach is the biggest investment in this plan, no financial investment has been identified to monitor and evaluate success, however this tactic is perhaps the most important in this first year of operation.

2021 MRDT Tactical Plan

Parallel to this process, the MRDT Committee was developing their 2021 Tactical Plan. Visitor services activities have been part of MRDT plans in previous years including supporting a mobile outreach program with the Chamber of Commerce in 2019 and some partial or unexecuted projects in 2020 (Covid impact). In effort to be as flexible as possible due to the parallel planning and further unknown Covid impacts, the MRDT Plan provides a list of tactics (see section 3.3.4) but no budget allocation has been assigned to specific tactics.

This Salmon Arm Visitor Services Strategy has taken a holistic look at a seamless visitor services experience and captures all recommended for delivery tactics regardless of current ownership with the knowledge that work still needs to be done to confirm which tactics move forward and who delivers them.

For budget purposes and in absence of detail, the total Visitor Services amount of \$56,700 in the MRDT 2021 Tactical Plan has been fully allocated to this plan.

The following describes each tactic, its objective, performance measures, key learnings and gross/net budget. More detailed tasks for each tactic are identified in the Salmon Arm Visitor Services Project Schedule which also includes a rough timeline.

DESCRIPTION	OBJECTIVE	PERFORMANCE MEASURES	KEY LEARNING for 2021	GROSS BUDGET
TACTIC 1 Bricks and Mortar				
Build out a small efficient Hub Visitor Centre at City Hall using existing space which will distribute a curated set of print publications and also provide headquarters for staff when needed.	Provide efficient and consistent services for local residents and businesses and for visitors who prefer more traditional support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost per enquiry • Visitor Satisfaction • Business Satisfaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visitor profile – better understanding of who needs this service • Visitor location – does it work? Improvements for future? • Publications distributed – which ones? How are they being used? • Feedback from City Hall staff 	\$6,500
TACTIC 2 Mobile Outreach				
Build out a mobile program for peak and shoulder season and events. Rent or lease a vehicle (RV preferred) to minimize risk allowing an affordable assessment of opportunity. Develop a regular schedule that maximizes visitor engagement and provides opportunity for businesses to book “site” visits.	Incrementally increase visitor engagement from historic visitor centre numbers by providing visitor services in the peak and shoulder season at strategically selected locations and events through an eye-catching branded delivery mechanism.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost per enquiry • Visitor Satisfaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visitor profile – are they visitors who don’t use visitor centres? • Location and timing– document the best places and times for the best return • “on site” value to businesses • Options for extending reach 	\$34,000
TACTIC 3 Digital Outreach – Collaboration with Shuswap Tourism				
Partner with Tourism Shuswap to leverage digital assets by championing a visitor services program that	Provide compelling and accurate information to visitors before	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of engagements • Number of click thrus to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding users based on standard digital metrics 	\$1,000

<p>provides proactive information engagement on the website and social media channels. Additional Salmon Arm specific content developed for www.shuswaptourism.ca. Tools such as Facebook Messenger and LiveChat to be activated and external tourism forums to be monitored.</p>	<p>and during their time in the Shuswap to influence coming to the destination and longer stays.</p>	<p>business on websites</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of links to businesses through chat and messenger communication • Conversion • Visitor Satisfaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building response templates to help with common enquiries • Appropriate training for team members digital skills, grammar etc. • Location and timing information – what are the most valuable times to provide the service 	
TACTIC 3A Digital Outreach Independent				
<p>Develop a new Salmon Arm website and new Salmon Arm visitor facing social media presence on Facebook, Instagram and others as identified. In order to drive engagement, Shuswap Tourism marketing may or may not support channels through campaign activity and Salmon Arm will need its own digital marketing budget and investment in social media analytics tools</p>	<p>Provide compelling and accurate information to visitors before and during their time in the Shuswap to influence coming to the destination and longer stays.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • set and meet targets for followers and engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • success in building audience 	<p>\$114,400 (minimum)</p>
TACTIC 4 Business Communication				
<p>Develop and execute Shuswap business engagement strategy that leverages current communication tools such as newspapers and radio. Create and distribute information packages Execute the SuperHost</p>	<p>Ensure front line and business community are well informed and supported</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business Satisfaction • Number of communications and responses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business feedback 	<p>\$6,000</p>

Destination Ambassador Program.				
TACTIC 5 Tools				
Develop Tools and resources to support visitor services delivery such as the Salmon Arm Tear Off Map and a weekly hot sheet of just in time activities (possibly in partnership with DTSA). Update the Marine Park Kiosk to display more detailed information and consider implementing a QR Code to link to Salmon Arm pages on the Tourism Shuswap website. Support any strategy identified to update Shuswap Trails content.	Support 24/7 information needs by develop a suite of efficient timely supporting tools to meet visitor demand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volume of resources distributed • Number of QR code downloads (and other metrics as available) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which resources are most useful, gaps that need to be filled • Value of QR code 	\$8,000
TACTIC 6 People, Programs & Partners				
This administrative tactic supports all other tactics by implementing the agreements, MOU's and tools need to clearly identify roles and responsibilities and the HR tactics needed to support the programs.	Improve organizational alignment and resource tactics appropriately	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful contract/MOU agreements • Success funding program applications • Staff retention • Staff satisfaction • Business satisfaction • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better alignment achieved? • Adjustments or changes to future agreements • Staff experience delivering multiple channel information 	\$115,346
TACTIC 7 Monitor and Evaluate Success				
Through a suite of monitoring tools and communication tactics the visitor services program will quickly adapt to changing circumstances and new opportunities.		Dashboard for all tactics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formulates quick changes to services • Formulates business model evaluation 	\$0
TOTAL GROSS BUDGET				\$170,846

PROPOSED FUNDING SOURCES				
Destination BC				\$12,500
MRDT				\$56,700
Canada Employment Program				TBA
TOTAL NET BUDGET				\$101,646
TOTAL NET BUDGET WITH TACTIC 3 A				\$214,846

Year Two and Three: Visitor Service to Visitor Experience

Building on the learning of Year One, the strategy will adjust the balance of effort amongst the three distribution channels including an assessment of the mobile outreach vehicle, the success of the digital partnership with Tourism Shuswap and the continued importance of bricks and mortar. There may be the opportunity to expand to a more regional approach and depending on recovery, there may also be an opportunity to increase support to events. The chosen Operating Model will also be assessed, and adjustments made where required.

5.4 Detailed Budget

The detailed budget (page following) is based on best estimates and where possible, external validation. The MRDT Visitor Services budget has been captured in revenues as per the 2021 budget released December 7 2021. Actual details on MRDT tactics have yet to be confirmed and may alter the budget. Notes and assumptions accompany budget details. An excel copy is also provided as an attachment.

SALMON ARM VISITOR SERVICES BUDGET 2021		
Revenue		Notes & Assumptions
MRDT	\$ 56,700	<i>as per 2021 Tactical Plan</i>
Destination BC	\$ 12,500	<i>guaranteed for 2021</i>
Employment Programs		
TOTAL	\$ 69,200	
Expenses		
TACTICS		
1. Bricks and Mortar		
City Hall retrofit including signing	\$ 3,000	<i>minimal requirements</i>
Laptop	\$ 1,500	
Highway signs 4x500	\$ 2,000	<i>if City required to pay</i>
Subtotal	\$ 6,500	
2. Mobile Outreach		
RV Rental May-Oct	\$ 25,000	<i>pricing based on full price 6 month rental from Fraser Valley RV Rental 20' RV</i>
RV Wrap & Removal	\$ 3,000	<i>budget reflects Tourism Chilliwack costs</i>
Insurance, Gas & Maintenance	\$ 3,000	<i>assumed maintenance at SA yard</i>
Ipad, Wireless Printer & CellPhones	\$ 3,000	
Subtotal	\$ 34,000	
3. Digital Outreach		
Technical Support	\$ 1,000	<i>assumes TS covers digital costs i.e. hosting and LiveChat software is free</i>
Subtotal	\$ 1,000	
3.A Digital Outreach		
Basic New Website Development, hosting and support	\$ 50,000	<i>assumes city IT to host and support</i>
Digital Marketing Budget	\$ 12,000	<i>assumes 50% of South Shuswap Chamber budget as staff already accounted</i>
Content Development (video, photo, storytelling)	\$ 50,000	<i>assumes no existing content available may obtain some Salmon Arm from ST dependent on right</i>
Social Media Monitoring Software	\$ 1,200	<i>assumes entry level Sprout Social at \$99 per month</i>
Technical Support	\$ 1,000	
Subtotal	\$ 114,200	
4. Business Communication		
Ambassador Program	\$ 5,000	<i>assumes MRDT tactic & 100 participants \$ 50 per, 5 sessions 20 per session</i>
Advertising	\$ 1,000	
Subtotal	\$ 6,000	
5. Tools		
Visitor Services graphic design (for all applications)	\$ 2,000	
Flat sheet production and printing	\$ 1,000	
Kiosk content development and production	\$ 5,000	<i>assumes MRDT tactic</i>
Subtotal	\$ 8,000	
6. People, Programs, Partners		
Training	\$ 1,000	<i>incremental to address any skill set gaps</i>
Branded Clothing	\$ -	<i>sponsored by Shuswap clothing vendors</i>
Full Time Coordinator	\$ 60,000	<i>either City employee or contract, assumes wages and benefits</i>
Four Summer Staff		<i>40 hrs per week, \$18 per hour 4% holiday pay, EI 3% CPP, 5%, Stats</i>
May - October (22 weeks)	\$ 17,582	
Mid June - Mid Sept (13 weeks)	\$ 10,390	
July - Sept (11 weeks)	\$ 8,791	
July - Sept (11 weeks)	\$ 8,791	
July - Sept (11 weeks)	\$ 8,791	
Subtotal	\$ 115,346	
7. Monitor & Evaluate Success		
	\$ -	
Subtotal	\$ -	
TOTAL	\$ 170,846	
NET	\$ 101,646	
NET 3.A	\$ 214,846	

5.5 Timeline

The following is a high-level summary supporting tactic execution with assumptions:

- strategy will be adopted mid-January and tasks will begin immediately
- staged approach to launching each distribution channel
- bricks and mortar work will need to be done prior to the Coordinator coming on board
- negotiation with Shuswap Tourism re Tactic 3 is successful
- suitable mobile vehicle can be sourced
- successful in sourcing seasonal staff.

Tactic	Date Range	Notes
Tactic 1 Bricks and Mortar	mid January to mid February	1st open
Tactic 2 Mobile Outreach	mid February to mid May	3 rd open
Tactic 3 Digital Outreach	mid February to mid March	2 nd open
Tactic 4 Business Communication	mid March – mid May	Ready for mobile at latest
Tactic 5 Tools	April	Ready for mobile at latest
Tactic 6 People, Programs Partners	mid January to mid May	Hire Coordinator 2nd priority
Tactic 7 Monitor and Evaluate Success	Ongoing	Agreements 1st priority

A DRAFT detailed Gantt chart with tasks supporting tactics is provided as an Appendix. Confirmation of strategy, tactics and budget including MRDT visitor services tactics will require adjustments and more finite details. For now, blocks of time have been allocated to each tactic.

5.6 Operating Model

As mentioned in 3.8.1, within the Visitor Network there are a variety of operating models with Chambers of Commerce (43), Destination Marketing/Management Organizations (32) and Municipal Authorities (23) predominant. Contractual relationships differ (e.g. Chamber contracted by City) but what is most consistent is that the full suite of tourism programs (destination marketing, destination management and visitor services) reside within one organization. It has been noted that the Salmon Arm model was highly unique in that three organizations were independently delivering tourism services and that an Economic Development Agency is administering MRDT.

There are four operating model options for Salmon Arm Visitor Services Delivery:

1. Directly manage
2. Contract visitor services to Salmon Arm Economic Development
3. Contract services to Shuswap Tourism
4. Do nothing

Options 1,2,3 to be supported by summer students/co-op for summer program, drama program etc.

OPTIONS	PROS	CONS	CONSIDERATIONS
Option 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creates a dedicated tourism function • Demonstrates commitment to tourism • Provides opportunity for learning • Provides greater engagement opportunity between City and tourism stakeholders • Bricks & Mortar channel is easily executed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City does not currently consider tourism management a core function 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a reasonable interim solution while other variables such as the future of Shuswap Tourism is determined
Option 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent with current model to outsource all non-core services • Existing tourism relationship as SAEDS is administering MRDT program • SAEDS has relationship with industry and stakeholders • Consolidates delivery of two programs (MRDT + Visitor Services) • Indicate they have capacity • Have expressed interest to take on role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No visitor services experience and limited tourism experience (limited to events) • Capacity resource identified involves Events MRDT tactic delivery which may affect ability to deliver • MRDT visitor services tactics identified in 5 year strategy have yet to be delivered 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SAEDS effectively becomes DMO • Accommodators potentially will have a larger influence in visitor strategy • Requires SAEDS to rebalance their strategy (core purpose, mission, goals, objectives etc) • Majority of tourism budget will reside with SAEDS • SAEDS would have three fee for service contracts with the City
Option 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historically strong at destination marketing • Own digital assets and may be able to leverage tactic 3 quickly • Greatest regional leveraging power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Least control • Limited relationship with industry and stakeholders • Capacity issues • Reporting relationship would require significant change • No visitor services experience and limited tourism experie • Not structured to support an individual community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role of Shuswap Tourism is unclear and likelihood of taking on a greater role for one stakeholder is unlikely

Option 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial savings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fragmented services will continue • Tourism program opportunities lost • Visitors not served • Industry not served 	

RECOMMENDED OPTION

Option 1 or 2 are both viable. Option 3 and 4 are not.

Both Option 1 and 2 models rely on new relationships with existing partners.

Because the City owns no digital assets, a collaboration with Shuswap Tourism on the digital program tactic is required and poses the biggest financial risk. An alternative and unpalatable option would see the city needing to build its own website and social media channels.

Should the City decide to contract visitor services to SAEDS a third service agreement clearly outlining the deliverables and how they are managed against the visitor services contract and MRDT funds specifically would be required.

Option 1 is favoured as it gives the City time to test and learn the best visitor services tactics to support the community and potentially extend learned services to the broader region.

Option 2 is favoured if the City chooses not to more deeply engage in tourism.

6 Appendix

Due to the file size and length of some the appendices, a link to Dropbox have been created for the following files.

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/onis6ucwa094bmv/AADVslA47oFV_FNhIfOHCGLfa?dl=0

- 6.1 Destination BC Visitor Experience Strategy**
- 6.2 2020 Visitor Services Network Program Requirements**
- 6.3 Salmon Arm Chamber of Commerce Visitor Services Contract**
- 6.4 Shuswap Trail Alliance Trailforks Data**
- 6.5 Shuswap Tourism Website – Salmon Arm Business Exposure**
- 6.6 Shuswap Tourism 2019-2020 Review**

6.7 Implication Matrix

Section	Implication	Addressed
3.1 Trip Planning/Visitor Behaviour and the Impact on Visitor Services	An integrated omni channel visitor services strategy requires collaboration, cooperation and communication between all the stakeholders. This is an important opportunity that was supported by stakeholders interviewed.	Tactic 6
3.2 STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT		
3.21 Strategic Alignment	The DBC Visitor Experience Strategy provides an important and useful direction (See Appendix 6.1 for Full Strategy) that evolves the visitor services concept to visitor experience and seamless integration.	All
3.22 Visitor Centre Network Program	The Visitor Centre Network is a valuable resource and consideration should be given to ensure Salmon Arm remains in the program. Adhering to Terms and Conditions and the provision of reporting are two criteria for membership. (See Appendix 6.2 for T&C)	Tactic 1,2,3 & 6
3.23 City of Salmon Arm	Some consideration needs to be given to how the City wants to lead and engage going forward and may need to consider where tourism fits in terms of core and or supported services.	Strategic Decision
3.24 Other Important Strategic Alignments	The tourism industry is complex and within the Shuswap there are multiple layers of decision making, which make strategic alignment both a challenge and an opportunity. Time dedicated to understanding, monitoring and making strategic shifts as necessary will benefit the longer-term component of this strategy, reduce potential duplication and support a broader ability to successfully promote and serve visitors to Salmon Arm.	Tactic 6
3.3 TOURISM IN SALMON ARM		
3.31 Visitor Profile	Understanding visitor data, interests and patterns will better enable the opportunity to identify visitor services offerings. For example, Given the second largest length of stay category is 4-7 nights and July peaks with repeat visitation, this provides a sweet spot to influence visitor activity	Tactic 1,2,3 and 7
3.33 Destination Marketing – Shuswap Tourism	In absence of a strategic plan and staff to deliver, Shuswap Tourism has been focusing on strategies and tactics from its marketing plan which does not include visitor services or visitor engagement making strategic plan alignment difficult and the opportunity to expand their role to include visitor services unlikely.	Tactic 3 and 6

	Decisions about the promotion of Salmon Arm are not within Salmon Arm’s control and there is no accountability for the funding that City of Salmon Arm provides to Shuswap Tourism.	
	Decisions about the promotion of Salmon Arm are not within Salmon Arm’s control and there is no accountability for the funding that City of Salmon Arm provides.	
3.34 MRDT SAEDS	In absence of a tourism and visitor services strategy for Salmon Arm and/or the region, SAEDS has proactively moved a visitor services agenda forward. Tactics identified have been developed through the MRDT process and may require some further refinement and consideration.	Tactic 1,2,3 and 6
3.35 Salmon Arm Chamber of Commerce	Any future contract for visitor services should be reviewed annually and include clear direction, performance targets and key performance indicators.	Tactic 6
3.4 Stakeholder Feedback	Continuing to provide some type of Bricks and Mortar visitor services was the overwhelming response from the stakeholders and must be considered in the overall strategy.	Tactic 1
3.5.1 Salmon Arm Visitor Centre	<p>Despite the visitation decline, over 10,000 visitors used the services of the bricks and mortar centre which is the most of any visitor centre in the region and attention needs to be given as to how this market segment will be serviced.</p> <p>When thinking about the digital component of this strategy, attention should be given to how best respond to the most popular types of requests. How to translate the interest in maps to digital is one consideration and the fact that almost 20% of inquiries to the centre were for non-motorized trails is another item that will need to be addressed.</p>	Tactic 1 and 5
3.6 ASSETS AND INFORMATION DISTRIBUTION		
3.6.1 Publications	<p>It can be assumed that being included in the broader offering provided Salmon Arm greater exposure to anyone visiting the Shuswap area and is a cost-effective way of producing print material which becomes out of date and a less valued resource for visitors. What is most important is that the information is consistent and call to action (for further info) within the guides is clear and consistent. Repurposing the Vacation Planner for 2021 means the For More Info Section for Salmon Arm will be incorrect and any businesses who are no longer operating or any new businesses will not be represented. A short term solution will need to be considered.</p> <p>If the anecdotal information about the trail guide is substantiated, this could mean a greater reliance on the online trail information.</p>	Tactic 4

3.6.2 Website	<p>The City does not own, hold or provide input into the website used to promote Salmon Arm. This could be considered a significant risk. A shift to a more comprehensive Visitor Services digital strategy will mean the City will need to rely on Shuswap Tourism’s strategic direction and priorities, capacity and support to ensure that Salmon Arm is accurately and fairly represented and that Salmon Arm tourism businesses are getting the maximum potential from this investment. The availability and accuracy of Salmon Arm data must be available 24/7 365 days per year in order to feed a visitor services strategy that serves information to visitors where and when they want it. The update to the website provides a strong foundation for improved strategy to build greater visitor engagement and search engine optimization is working to further support online visitor services. There is an opportunity to provide additional Salmon Arm content however if the relationship does not continue, the cost to building a new website and develop content to support would be in excess of \$100,000.</p>	Tactic 3 and 6
3.6.3 Social Media	<p>The City does not own any tourism related social media pages or platforms. Considerable effort and investment would be required to build a social media profile and as demonstrated by the follower volume of the surrounding tourism organizations; it is unlikely that Salmon Arm would be successful in developing a viable social media presence in the short term. <i>Note: In 2020, South Shuswap Chamber invests the equivalent of \$2000 per month on social media (contractor, tools, content) with a net audience growth on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter of 820 followers and a total audience of 1,339 followers</i></p>	Tactic 3 and 6
3.6.4 Training	<p>A broader Visitor Services strategy will require both attention to the standard training requirements as well as attention to new skill set required. Clarity is required around the Ambassador Program tactic identified in the MRDT 2017-2022 MRDT 5 Year Business Plan and 2020 and 2021 Tactical Plan to understand execution.</p>	Tactic 5